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*“You’ve taught me the importance of being honest, of striving for what’s best for patients, and the value of forgiveness.”*

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### When sorry isn’t enough

I’m sorry that we missed the result. I’m sorry that you weren’t told. I’m sorry that you’re here now with not much time left. I’m sorry that your life is being cut short. I’m sorry your family have to face this too soon. I’m sorry that there is not much left that we can do. But, really, I’m sorry that sorry isn’t enough.

Being only at the beginning of my career as a doctor, I have had the privilege of being exposed to all realms of medicine. I’ve wandered the corridors of hospitals, spent time talking to patients on wards, sat in clinics, assisted in operations, and helped out at GP surgeries. I’ve stood with anxious parents who watched over their baby recovering from major surgery, I’ve held the hand of a confused older man who found comfort in human touch, and I’ve spent time talking to a lady about her debilitating depression and how terrified she was of returning to her family.

Throughout this time, I’ve felt part of a system that helps, that supports, that cures, that cares. I’ve always believed that, despite its flaws and frustrations, it’s something to be proud of, to cherish, and to celebrate. Until I met you.

As you told me the story of how you’d come to be here, I began to realise how the system had got it so wrong. You shouldn’t be here, too weak to sit up and too tired to hold a conversation for more than a few minutes. I felt exposed and guilty, knowing nothing I could do or say could make things better or change the outcome. It would be wrong to think that we can eliminate human error but for the most part our mistakes are made unwittingly, without malice or deceit. They can make life harder, for patients and staff, but people forgive and people forget. But this was different. The system had let you and your family down in the most fundamental way. Somewhere, something so basic had gone terribly wrong and you didn’t find out until it was too late.

You handled it with such poise and dignity. You were right to be angry but you were also accepting, knowing that bitterness and resentment would get you nowhere. You saw what was coming and I felt your fear as we spoke about your death. You had all these plans of what you wanted to do, where you wanted to go, dreams you knew

would go unfulfilled. You showed courage, compassion, and humour in what must have been your darkest hours. You bathed in the warmth of your family and friends, and, most of all, you loved and were loved.

Even though you’re gone, you’re still on my mind, reminding me that things can and do go wrong. Your strength and dignity overwhelmed me, and I have no doubt that I will continue to think of you in years to come.

You’ve taught me the importance of being honest, of striving for what’s best for patients, and the value of forgiveness. I felt that sorry wasn’t enough, but you squeezed my hand and told me that sorry would be just fine.

**Flora Olcott,**

Graduate Medical Student, University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine, Box 111 Cambridge Biomedical Campus, Cambridge CB2 0SP, UK.

**Email:** [folcott@gmail.com](mailto:folcott@gmail.com)

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