

Leaving Earth by Dr Tan Su Ming

Yesterday on the way home after work, I dropped by the home of a patient. This 70-year-old chap had been diagnosed with lung cancer 15 months ago and had opted for no treatment. His daughter finally called me yesterday to say that her dad had been visited by the hospice doctor, and the family was told to prepare for him to go anytime.

When I reached his home, I was led to his bedroom where he lay propped up in bed. He was in agony. His breathing was laboured and his bones hurt where the cancer had eaten into it, but his wife said he refused the morphine, as it fogged his mind.

“Do you know who has come to visit you?” his wife asked him.

He looked at me and nodded to acknowledge my presence but was unable to speak. I sat next to his bed and stroked his forearm.

“I’ve come to say ‘Hello’,” when actually, I think I meant to say, “I’ve come to say ‘Goodbye’.”

My visit was extremely short, as more relatives streamed into the tiny room, probably because they had been told that he would not last the night.

I got up to make way. So, as I looked at him for a final time, I said, “Good bye, Ah Pek.”

That’s all I felt I could say really, as everything else seemed trite. It was like going to the airport to see someone off on his or her journey, except that he wasn’t coming back, and I was never going to see him again; not on this earth at least.

I got a call from his daughter when I stepped into the office today. He left his earthly life at 8 this morning.

Having known him, I’m glad I got to say goodbye to him, before he embarked on his journey to a new place. **SMA**