Coping with Being New in the Hematology/Oncology Department

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In January 2010, at the beginning of my third year as an assistant physician, I changed from the department of diabetology to the department of hematology/oncology for the object of education. I did not like the idea of spending half a year in the hematology/oncology ward. In fact, I was afraid of this change. I expected critically ill patients, who were in despair, because we, the attending physicians, were unable to provide cure.

But a surprise awaited me. I met patients who were remarkably content and thankful for whatever little improvement could be gained. In the evenings I left the clinic with the feeling that the day had been spent profitably—in contrast to some days in the diabetes department, where the physician's contribution is often reduced to repeating the same suggestions over and over again. Many diabetes patients manage to control their disease well and consultations are often superfluous; on the other hand, some patients neglect their treatment and the physician's suggestions, making consultations equally pointless. In clear contrast to diabetes patients, oncology patients have sparse means to influence the course of their disease; they depend on the treating physician and are committed to the treatment—a therapy often consisting of potent poisons, which later generations will possibly shake their head at in disbelief. And yet, these patients carry the burden of their plight with remarkable endurance and accuracy.

Visiting these patients daily, I began to wonder what I myself would look like as a chemotherapy patient. Would I behave with the same dignity and the same pa-

Figure 1. Oil on wood, 2010.

tience (Fig. 1)? What was this patient's life before the cancer was detected (Fig. 2)? With time, however, I was able to return to normal life and think of other things (Fig. 3). After 9 months at the hematology/oncology department, I returned to the diabetology department with mixed feelings. In a sense I am relieved, but there is also a new awareness of the value of the work I can do here or I could do elsewhere.

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Figure 2. Oil and acrylic on wood, 2010.

Figure 3. Oil and acrylic on wood and canvas, 2010.