Through the generosity of Charles R. Millikan, D. Min., vice president for Spiritual Care and Values Integration, an annual award competition was established at Houston Methodist Hospital among the resident staff. To enter the writing competition, residents must submit a poem or essay of 1,000 words or less on the topic, "On Being a Doctor." A committee of seven was selected from Houston Methodist Hospital Education Institute to establish the judging criteria and select the winning entries. The following is the first-place winning entry for 2016; the second- and third-place winning entries will be published in the next two issues of this journal.

LIGHTING THE WAY

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I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Perhaps it was the way the light shone through the window. It was that soft morning light that soothed like a gentle caress sharing its warmth. It sidled its way across the dust-covered windowpane, scurried across the room, and seemed to come to rest on the two persons I had fixed my gaze upon. Even though it was rather dim in the room that early fall morning, I could still make out the signs of age: the well-worn wrinkles, the roughened hands, the thinning hair. He had with him a leather bag that carried his stethoscope, a light, and various other tools. The bag, like the doctor, was aged but had a particular quality and character that can only come through years of experience. The patina was rich and weathered with a golden brown hue. The light danced on the surface playfully as he placed it near the patient's bedside. I was struck by his countenance. It was somber yet hopeful, like the promise of a new day. His pale blue eyes seemed to carry a heavy burden as he gazed at the patient.

Earlier that day, we had learned of his fate. The report was just a few simple words on a plain sheet of white paper. As they often do, words carry a power that extends beyond their simple nature. "What does it say?" asked the nurse. "It's not good... he has cancer," I replied. "But he's so young, and has a family. How are you going to break the news?" she countered. I could not find the words to answer her. I thought, "If I'm paralyzed for words now,

how could I possibly tell this patient." My fears and feelings of inadequacy were fleeting, however, because I knew the oncologist I worked under would want to do it himself.

As he sat next to the patient, the doctor placed a hand on his shoulder. What could be said? What could be done? The maelstrom of emotion that engulfed me belied my outer façade—calm and cool. As he spoke, the patient's face said it all. But the doctor still supported him like a captain navigating treacherous waters, hoping to weather the storm for his crew. "We are going to be there for you throughout this whole thing." The doctor was a stanchion of hope in this grievous situation.

I have replayed this interaction many times in my head. And although the exact discourse has become hazy, the central message is crystal clear. The most important thing is to be there, to give hope when there is none. There is no doubt that human existence can be dark, desperately lonely, and filled with despair. However, as physicians, we can serve our patients by supporting them and helping them through difficult times. In these moments, there are often few places for patients to look for guidance and to give them strength in their journey. Physicians can help light the way and give hope through service and commitment to patient care. There is no doubt that the work of a doctor is challenging mentally, physically, and emotionally. But like a candle, it expends itself to light the way for others.