



operating room. As an internist, I derive secret pleasure from watching my surgery colleagues deal with invasive surrogate decision-makers. Within this culture clash, the encounter seems entirely foreign to both parties.

Patient's son: "How are you going to do the tracheostomy?"

Eminent surgeon: "We create an opening here, and connect the ventilator directly..."

Son: "I know that, I mean how *exactly* are you going to do it? Where do you cut?"

Surgeon: "Uh, well, we make a small incision in the neck..."

Son: "Aren't there important things in the way, like the carotids?"

Surgeon: "Uh, actually..."

Son: "Will it scar?"

Surgeon: "Excuse me? You mean around the tube?"

Son: "I don't think my mother would want a scar on her neck."

Later, eminent surgeon looks at me with bug eyes. Then, regaining his composure, he says, "Call me when you guys know what you want," and storms off.

Meaning. It's what we lose when we have too much choice. Your mother's death becomes a series of arbitrary and meaningless and ultimately petty preferences, and your mother has been so far removed from "your mother's death," it hardly hurts your anymore. Dying of cancer becomes a series of procedural questions: Are you getting plain old radiation or are you "pummelling cancer with protons"?

Trust. A doctor who is not trusted is Web-MD. As the facts of medical science become widely available in the information age, trust, more than knowledge, is what makes "my doctor."

Choice. Choices without purpose is rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*, a phrase used no fewer than a dozen times during my last month working in the ICU, and one that seems inadequate to capture the myriad ways we distract ourselves from the grief of watching a loved one die.

À la carte. A menu of items priced and ordered separately is in contrast to a table d'hôte, a set menu at a fixed price. Death, like life, is best experienced with family, with friends and with trust — table d'hôte.

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**Editor's note:** The people depicted in this article are composites of several patients over time and various places.

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**Satire**

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**Satire**

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CMAJ's call for entertaining Holiday Review fare generated some very amusing submissions, resulting in some very difficult judging decisions. Thank you to our esteemed panel of judges, Erin Driscoll, Kelly Clarke, Rajendra Kale, Diane Kelsall and Wayne Kondro, and to our talented designer Carole Lalonde.

We hope our efforts give you an hour or so of entertaining reading over the holidays.

**Barbara Sibbald BJ**

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