

Still

What patients think can be very different from what they tell us, sometimes with dangerous consequences.

Kristel Leung, BSc

It's much quieter in here than the busy waiting room. You can't even hear the cars rushing by, except for the occasional honk. I've been to the clinic before, but quite a while ago. This chair I am sitting on didn't have that tear in the cushion last time, and there are some new posters on the wall. I really shouldn't be worried, but

this fluttering in my stomach just won't go away.

It'll just be like any other visit. I just want to make sure everything is okay.

Suddenly, the pain begins again, clawing out from within my torso. It's been happening a lot more recently. Focus on something, just anything! Like the pillow, the garbage can, the pictures ... is that a heart? I don't know what hearts look like in real life, but the poster says that's what it is.

A loud knock and the door swings open. Through the exchange of greetings, I ride the last wave of pain, and bring my focus back to the moment. "What brings you in today?" I start talking, pointing at my chest where it usually hurts. The doctor nods, and begins to scribble in the folder laid out in front of him. I can see notes from my last visit at the top of the page: "Weight management discussed." Does he know that I haven't been following his prescribed diet? He gave me a ton of pamphlets and posters during my last visit. What if he asks if I read them? He'll be disappointed if I tell him the truth.

"Does the pain radiate?" Like how heat travels? Sometimes. All I know is

Ms Leung is a medical student at the University of British Columbia, in the class of 2016.

This article has been peer reviewed.

that it hurts. "Could you describe the pain? Burning? Sharp?" I would go with burning, like fire. "When do you feel the pain?" It comes and goes. I'm so busy all the time, I only really notice it after eating, or when I'm lying down. "When was the first time this happened?" I can't really remember; around the time of that banquet in March? "What are you eating?" Oh, many things. There's been a lot of birthday celebrations recently that I've had to attend, so a lot of big dinners. I see him write "Eating large meals," and a wave of guilt and resentment hits me. These questions sound like a script for a telephone answering system... "Press 1 if you have burning pain." I just want to press the right number to get my diagnosis!

My mind wanders as he scribbles my answers in the folder. Could these questions be relevant? Maybe the big dinner wasn't the first time the pain occurred. Was it that time I went skiing for the first time in early January and I crashed into some fellow? I felt light-headed on that day. I can't remember whether it hurt then ... the ER doc said the accident was most likely due to the fact that I didn't eat enough of my usual breakfast on that day, and told me I was fine.

The doctor stands up, calling my attention back to the present as he motions to the bed. He places his stethoscope on my chest, telling me to breath. He follows this with pokes and



BCACC
BC Association of Clinical Counsellors

Helping Your Patients Get Their Lives Back

More than 2600 Registered Clinical Counsellors are Enhancing Mental Health All Across BC. Call us toll free 1-800-909-6303 or visit us at bc-counsellors.org

RCC
REGULATED CLINICAL COUNSELLORS

prods, asking, “Does this place hurt?” No. “Here? How about here?” No and no. He also peers in my mouth with his penlight. How does looking in my mouth help?

“It seems like you might be having recurrent cases of heartburn,” he says as I sit back down in the chair. But it’s my chest that’s hurting, what does that have to do with my stomach? “Your esophagus is right in that vicinity, and your stomach refluxes its contents back up along there, so you feel that burning. You said you get it especially after big meals? I suggest trying to eat smaller meals, and take some antacids. Don’t lie down after eating a meal for a few hours, because it makes it worse.” He smiles and tells me that heartburn is very common. I guess I didn’t really have anything to worry about.

He closes the folder, and opens the door as I pick up my stuff to leave. Thank goodness he didn’t ask how the diet is going or whether I read the pamphlets. “Come back if you feel like it’s not getting any better,” he says with a smile, and then he’s gone. With a sigh of relief, I collect my jacket. I can hear him knocking on the next door, walking in and introducing himself to the next patient. I’m out the door in five minutes, getting into the car. Is the nearest pharmacy on 60th Street or 100th? Maybe the grocery store sells antacids. As I turn out of the parking lot, someone honks, startling me. Suddenly, something seizes my chest and crushes it. As the dashboard fades in front of me, I slump against the horn. The loud, continuous blast of sound fills the parking lot as I try to battle the haziness closing in on me, and I think to myself: I hope the doctor can still hear me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my peers for their feedback and support, and would like to give special thanks to Dr Eric Cadesky, my Creative Writing Mentorship leader.



KEY CONTACTS:
Directory of senior staff

Mr Allan Seckel
Executive Director & CEO
604 638-2888
aseckel@bcma.bc.ca

Ms Christiane AhPin
Chief Operating Officer
604 638-2852
cahpin@bcma.bc.ca

Ms Marisa Adair
Executive Director of Communications and Public Affairs
604 638-2809
madair@bcma.bc.ca

Mr Jim Aikman
Executive Director of Economics and Policy Analysis
604 638-2893
jaikman@bcma.bc.ca

Dr Sam Bugis
Executive Director of Physician and External Affairs
604 638-8750
sbugis@bcma.bc.ca

Mr Paul Straszak
Executive Director of Negotiations
604 638-2869
pstraszak@bcma.bc.ca

Dr Jonathon Agnew
Executive Director of Practice Support and Quality
604 638-2833
jagnew@bcma.bc.ca

Mr Rob Hulyk
Director of Physician and External Affairs
604 638-2883
rhulyk@bcma.bc.ca

Ms Sandie Braid
Director of Insurance
604 638-2817
sbraid@bcma.bc.ca

Ms Cathy Cordell
General Counsel
604 638-2822
ccordell@bcma.bc.ca

Mr Peter Denny
Director of Systems
604 638-2897
pdenny@bcma.bc.ca

Ms Amanda Bernabe
Director of Human Resources
604 638-2812
abernabe@bcma.bc.ca

Ms Anne Keeble
Director of Finance
604 638-2821
akeeble@bcma.bc.ca

Mr Tod MacPherson
Director of Negotiations
604 638-2885
tmacpherson@bcma.bc.ca

Ms Deborah Viccars
Director of Policy
604 638-7865
dviccars@bcma.bc.ca



tony.perler@vbce.ca | 604.685.1016



THE MOST TRUSTED NAME IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE
EASY, FAST, EFFICIENT AND THE BEST EXCHANGE RATES

Ask for **TONY PERLER**, your foreign exchange specialist for medical professionals
Funding foreign accounts • Sending money overseas • Buying property in the US

