

# MIND TO MIND

Creative writing that explores the abstract side of our profession and our lives

*Stephen T. Harvey, M.D., Editor*

## Standing in the Doorway

Aaron N. Lackamp, M.D.

**Y**ou came with me to see my dying uncle  
so that I might say goodbye.  
Were you afraid to enter the room  
standing at the doorway looking in  
at the old man familiar from so many times before,  
with the same big hands, same glimmering eyes,  
same lifting of one brow to a familiar voice?  
He seems so different now.  
His hair is thin, white, wispy, almost gone,  
and no longer hiding the shining scalp.  
It's strange to see him, long past youthful and full of vigor,  
his arms thin, his clavicles tower above his chest.  
Were you, son, afraid to go in to see the dying man?  
You don't need to be afraid when I die.  
If you come to see me I will be there  
with a hand to be held if you hold mine,  
to hear your voice when I no longer answer.  
I will be there if you come to see me.

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You don't need to be afraid.

This poem was inspired by the experience of a physician watching his adolescent child's reaction to visiting an ailing family member dying of cancer. An aversion to witnessing death and seeing the body after death is common in children and adults. The universal fear of dying, the fear of seeing one's own mortality in those close to death, or the fear of lasting mental images of a loved one in an ailing state may irrationally interfere with our natural expressions of empathy.