Sorting Things Out

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If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough.
-Albert Einstein

Holiday music plays in the background as I scan my Cancer Center clinic schedule for the day. Most of the names are familiar. There will be three or four new patients that I have never met, a few that are coming to the office for postoperative wound checks, a few that are returning for routine cancer survivor visits, and a few that have noticed alarming new symptoms. Over the course of the day, about 20 people will pass through the office. Their medical problems will vary but each one hopes to hear good news.

Preparing for the day, I review scans and laboratory tests. Indeed, some of the reports will allow me to share happy moments with patients.

"*The biopsy showed only scar tissue; there is no cancer!*"

"*The new scan shows that everything has gone completely back to normal.*"

"*Surgery was completely successful; we removed all of the cancer and you need no more treatment*"

"*You have been cancer-free long enough that we do not need to schedule any more appointments.*"

These are wonderful moments!

Other reports, however, carry ominous warnings. I anticipate these discussions. Although there is no one "right" way to share bad news, I try to remember: Be honest. Be gentle. Preserve hope. Listen. Answer questions. Don't hurry.

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