Dying’s not so bad

BY MELISSA EELKEMA

This week in medical school I learned that dying’s not so bad.

This week in the hospital I had two patients I wished would die.

When I recognized that wish, I felt a deep sadness and slight nausea.

In my defense, I wanted them to die for their sake.

The first: Delirious, septic, calling out in pain. Worsening despite full treatment. Standing in her room made my throat constrict with pity. Please, just let her go.

The second: Comatose, severe stroke, poor prognosis. The family wants him alive no matter what. But I don’t think they understand the “what.” Emptiness filled his room. Please, just let him go.

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Sometimes death is desirable.

Sometimes Hope is the enemy of Peace.

Melissa Eelkema is a fourth-year medical student at the University of Minnesota. She wrote this after a difficult week on inpatient service. “Two of my patients had very poor prognoses yet remained full code. My experience caring for them had a profound effect on how I see life, death and the treatments we choose for our patients.”