

In Death Not Divided

In an Intensive Care Unit

Sixty-year-old Farhad was worried that his 52-year-old wife, Shireen (not their real names), was frequently ill. This Yemeni couple had been married for 35 years and had seen each other through life's thick and thin. Shireen's health had deteriorated gradually, with repeated admissions to the hospital. Now she was in the intensive care unit (ICU) of our hospital. She had emphysema, right-sided pneumothorax, and a fresh respiratory tract infection. Farhad, on the other hand, was tall, stocky, and healthy. Visiting his wife twice daily became his routine. We would repeatedly give him a poor prognosis for his wife's illness, and he would laugh it away, saying that he would accompany her during her death, too.

Shireen needed continuous oxygen and constant medical attention, so she was kept in the hospital for about 3 months. During that time, Farhad came to our outpatient clinic saying that he had noted an increase in his abdominal girth in the previous few weeks. Ultrasonography revealed a mass in the right lobe of the liver with ascites. The ascitic fluid was hemorrhagic with malignant cells, and the α -fetoprotein level was extremely high. He was referred to a tertiary care center, where the diagnosis was confirmed to be poorly differentiated

hepatocellular carcinoma. He returned to the hospital and was admitted to the same ICU where his wife had been admitted previously. These dramatic events took place within a period of 4 weeks. Meanwhile, Shireen was in the female medical ward and in stable condition. She was anxious to know why her husband had not come to see her during this period. We told her that he had gone to Yemen to take care of some things there; she took the news with a grain of salt.

Farhad developed very deep jaundice, massive ascites, grade IV hepatic encephalopathy, and severe coagulopathy. After 4 days in the ICU, he died. His wife suddenly became extremely restless at that very moment. We made sure that nobody told her about the admission and the sad demise of her husband. However, we had no control over such a strong bond between husband and wife. Shireen went into respiratory arrest and was transferred to the ICU, where she died 6 hours later on the same bed as her husband had.

Even death could not separate them!

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