

AMA Journal of Ethics®

December 2022, Volume 24, Number 12: E1181-1182

ART OF MEDICINE

Why Would Having Learned to Cope While Waiting for This Appointment Make This Pain Normal?

Julia O'Brien

Abstract

This comic investigates ethical dimensions of the experiences of patients whose pain has become normalized while waiting for clinical attention.

Figure. Detail from *Reading the Busy Calendar of a Busy Body*



(Click [here](#) to view the entire graphic narrative.)

Media
Procreate®.

Caption

This story takes place within an artist’s calendar as they self-reflect on the anxiety of seeking medical help after experiencing painful symptoms that have already become routine. Most physicians schedule appointments months in advance, requiring patients to suffer pain that remains clinically unassessed. Ironically, some patients’ capacity to cope with pain that is neither assessed nor mitigated by clinical means suggests to some clinicians that their pain is bearable; this form of iatrogenic harm is exacerbated when patients’ experiences are ongoing, anxiety generating, and discredited by the very clinicians called upon to help them. As in the comic, people whose suffering has become “both expected and taboo” often wait until their condition worsens. Many patients prepare to make the most of their visit, struggling to find the right language (ie, terminology) to be taken seriously.

Julia O’Brien is a graduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Citation

AMA J Ethics. 2022;24(12):E1181-1182.

DOI

10.1001/amajethics.2022.1181.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The author(s) had no conflicts of interest to disclose.

The viewpoints expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the AMA.

Copyright 2022 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.
ISSN 2376-6980