

**ART OF MEDICINE**

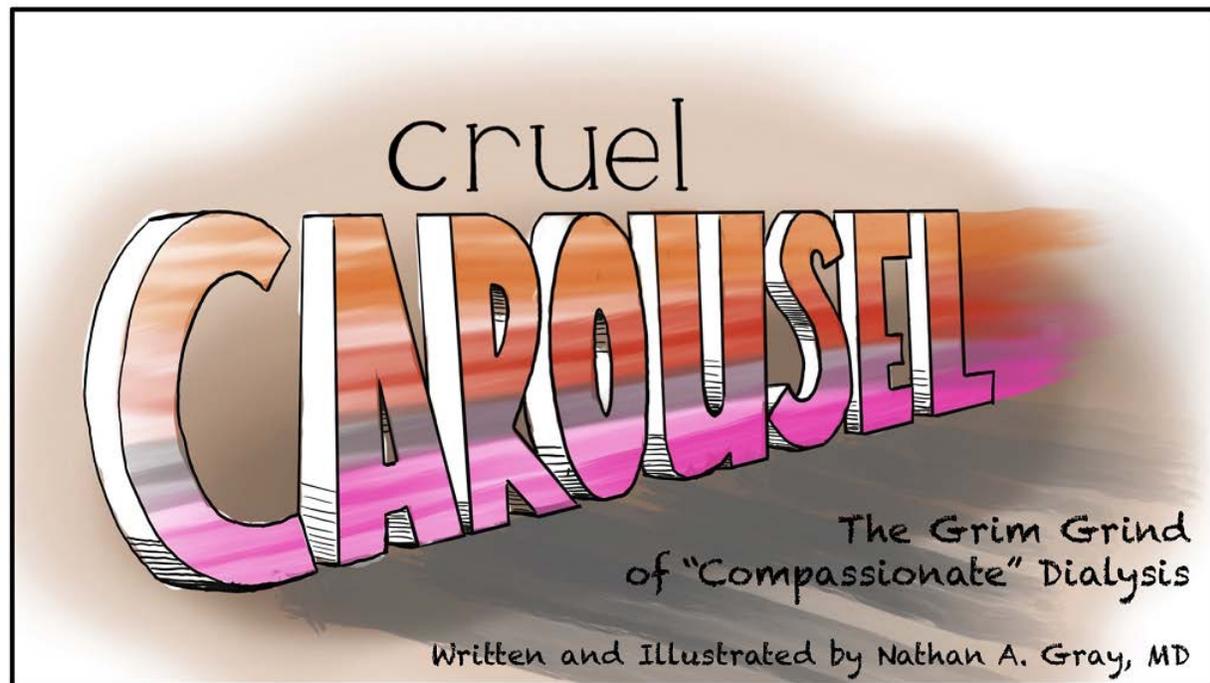
**Cruel Carousel: The Grim Grind of “Compassionate” Dialysis**

Artwork and caption by Nathan A. Gray, MD

**Abstract**

In this graphic narrative, a clinician illustrates an experience of caring for an undocumented patient suffering from end-stage renal disease (ESRD). *Cruel Carousel* tells one of the stories that most profoundly shaped the author’s own views on health care for undocumented immigrants. Graphic narrative was chosen to tell this story because words alone couldn’t capture the patient’s experience or the author’s distress about what happened to him.

**Figure.** Detail from *Cruel Carousel: The Grim Grind of “Compassionate” Dialysis*



[\(Click image to view the entire graphic narrative, and then click again to enlarge.\)](#)

**Media**

The illustrations in this piece were created using Paper version 4.1.2 and Procreate version 4.0.10 for iPad.

### **Caption**

More than 6000 undocumented immigrants living in the United States suffer from end-stage renal disease (ESRD); those who live in locations where funding is not provided for scheduled dialysis face a recurring cycle of critical illness experiences as they wait for emergency sessions of dialysis through hospitals and emergency departments. This approach to dialysis treatment results in tragic patient outcomes and distress for clinicians, who are left to provide undocumented patients with care that is dramatically different from standard dialysis delivery. Patients oscillate between being marginally well and “ill enough” to receive dialysis, while clinicians wrestle with complicity in a system that both offers and withholds life-saving therapy.

**Nathan A. Gray, MD** is a physician in palliative medicine for Duke University Health System and an assistant professor at Duke University School of Medicine in Durham, North Carolina. His interests include supportive care for those with serious illness, medical education, and disparities in health care access. When not caring for patients, Dr. Gray spends time cartooning, and his work can be found online at [inkvessel.com](http://inkvessel.com).

#### **Citation**

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#### **Conflict of Interest Disclosure**

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

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