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## How to measure the cost-efficiency of time?

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## HOW DOES ONE MEASURE THE COST- EFFICIENCY OF TIME?

A piece of my mind

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## How does one measure the cost-efficiency of time?

“Treatment with *this drug* leads to 6-month survival rate 50% and a 12-month survival rate of 20%. Just best supportive care is associated with a 6-month survival rate of about 30%. The cost of *this drug* is *patients'-family's-annual-income* per month.”

As I stood on one side of a quaint, run-down outpatient clinic room, entirely insignificant to the emotionally burdensome conversation taking place before me, I heard a caring, enduring Oncologist explain these words to a patient and their family. The patient was suffering from a kind of cancer and was at a stage beyond cure. This encounter was taking place in an enormously large-volume tertiary care cancer centre catering in big part to the less financially-able, a brief but powerful moment of empathy and objective directness amidst the relentlessly rapid bustle of clinical encounters that could never be quick enough to meet the demands of an overflowing waitlist.

I watched the look on the faces of the patient and their family as they absorbed the information of the potential therapeutic option. A brave, grafting group of people working hours-on-end just to make ends meet and afford the medical cost of tests, imaging and cancer care. The look on their faces was of sullen inquisition. They had stretched each and every one of themselves to meet the demands of this all-consuming malady in addition to the basic necessities of a dignified existence, a roof over their head, clothes over their body and food. They were now faced with what seems to me as an impossibly difficult question to answer. Dig deep into finances beyond their means hence potentially affecting the future of their family to give their family member a fighting chance to see and experience another 3-6 months.

I can't imagine how difficult this decision is for a child, for their parent or a parent, for their child. The patient might have a diminished quality of life while receiving further treatment but they'd live, they'd breath, they'd see and experience the world for all those many months and their family would, with them. They'd have conversations, experience highs and lows, make memories. How does one even compare emotions, feelings and memories to financial security and essential material belongings? How can we even objectively evaluate money vs days alive? It's brutally difficult and emotionally crippling. I struggled to even think about a group of people I'm seeing for the first time, having to make these decisions. The courage a cancer patient and their family muster on a daily basis to just smile and go about their day as normal, is probably from the depths of their personality that they didn't know existed. It's inspiring.

I stood there and watched, an insignificance in one room inside a centre built on excellence in research and science, as a family received a challenge without an empiric answer. At that moment, that hour, that night when I went home and even now, I keep thinking about the tragedy of how subjectively trivial life can be. How the randomness of the clan that people are born into, where they're born and the journey of their lives from very differing starting points can so greatly affect affordability for cancer care and access to curative, progression-slowng and palliative care. How that directly impacts the days that patients have a fighting chance of surviving and the quality of life during those days and the unquantifiable that come with that time.

I keep thinking about how this very scenario; with empathetic directness, tragedy and bravery, repeated itself so many times a day with different faces and different stories.

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