

A Primary Care Problem

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The triage note said:
43 year old man
Chief complaint:
Back pain, four months

In the Emergency Department
Back pain, four months is met with
'What are we supposed to do? This is a
Primary care problem.'

I went to see him
A pleasant homeless man
Covered in the smell of poverty that persists
Even after a change of clothes
"Doc, my back hurts. Can you help me?"

I examined and found no 'red flag' signs
To suggest an 'emergency'
Only subjective back pain
Probably muscle strain

My resident and attending agreed
And we planned for discharge after a CT scan
Just to be sure since he had poor follow-up
"But really, this is a primary care problem"

Critical finding
The report blared
Widespread lytic lesions from T4-L5
Malignancy versus metastasis

"It may be cancer spread to your back"
I tried to explain
"We have to admit you to find out"
I tried to explain

He nodded
"Well that is something"
Yet did not understand
"But, doc, my back hurts. Can you help me?"