

## Balwinder

**Balwinder and her sister Gurpreet care for their mother who is currently in hospital. They are preparing for the Sikh New Year, Vaisakhi**

We're going to need a catering trolley from the hospital to take in all this food that Gurpreet's making. I've told her it'll be too much, but she won't listen. 'The food there is terrible Balwinder; we must keep her strength up'. And of course, she wants everything to be perfect tomorrow. 'It's probably our last Vaisakhi together.

Ajeet arrives tonight from Berlin, with his wife; which will delight Mum who tells us over and over that we're not to worry him; that our brother is a very busy man, and that the women can look after things on their own thank you very much. I should be looking forward to it, all of us being together, but I've hardly slept all week. Why is it me, the youngest, that's been put in this position?

The hospital said they'd provide someone to help Mum understand what the doctor was saying, but no-one ever seemed to be there for her when it was really needed. And now she's decided that she only wants her children to tell her what the Doctor has said. That she doesn't want strangers that might turn up every now and again being told things about her that she doesn't want anybody else to know. And I'm the one that's ended up having to translate everything for Mum, to try and make sense of all this medical information, while Gurpreet buries herself in her chapattis and saagwaala.

And she's in worse shape than we thought. Four days ago a doctor told me we should make a decision about something called a DNACPR order. And quickly. I've written it down very carefully. Do Not Attempt Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation. I should have said something to Gurpreet straight away, and rung Ajeet as soon as I got home. But I was just so shocked. And then I thought I should wait until after Vaishaki to tell them. I don't know why, I was flustered, I didn't know the right thing to do. And to make it worse I've lied to the doctors; telling them that I've explained everything, and that Mum understood and wanted to talk about it when we were all together. And we would tell them our decision then, straight away. Which of course I don't want us to do. Not tomorrow. Not ever.

Why has nobody ever mentioned this thing before? About having to sign my Mum's death warrant. Why has our family doctor never mentioned anything about this, about these decisions? Always telling us not to worry, everything is in good hands. No help at all which is no surprise really; we've been stuck with him ever since he became Dad's badminton partner and of course Mum wouldn't think of having anyone else once Dad died. But why has nobody else stepped up? Why has nobody warned me about this?

Gurpreet and Ajeet still think we might be able to bring Mum home, to this house. Maybe I did too until now. But it's not suitable; anyone can see that. My brother is bound to start throwing his weight around; he's never had a good word to say about the hospital since Mum was offered a halal dinner and is always asking if there are still male nurses helping her. But she keeps telling me that everyone is so nice to her, that everyone is so helpful. That we shouldn't worry so much.

But now I have to talk to her about this other thing; so of course I'm worried.

Hopefully, the doctors won't have mentioned anything about it to her. Hopefully, they'll understand that tomorrow is the Sikh New Year, and they'll have the sense not to talk to us about this horrible decision. So I just need to put it out of my mind for now, let Gurpreet take the lead for once, and do as she says. Try and embrace the day.

I'll tell Gurpreet and Ajeet afterwards. We'll come back here, and I'll tell them that however much Mum may have rallied for Vaishaki, and I pray she will, that she won't be coming home. That she is dying, and we have decisions to make, and we must sit by her bed and ask her about this order before Ajeet goes back to Germany. And that he should probably stay here for the time being.

Yes. That is what is going to happen. And tonight, I am going to sleep. And tomorrow I am going to dress up as brightly as possible and maybe sing a Shabad. And when we look at the piles of food that are left, I will help to share it out to everyone, just like we always do at this time of year. That's it. It must be shared out. All of it.