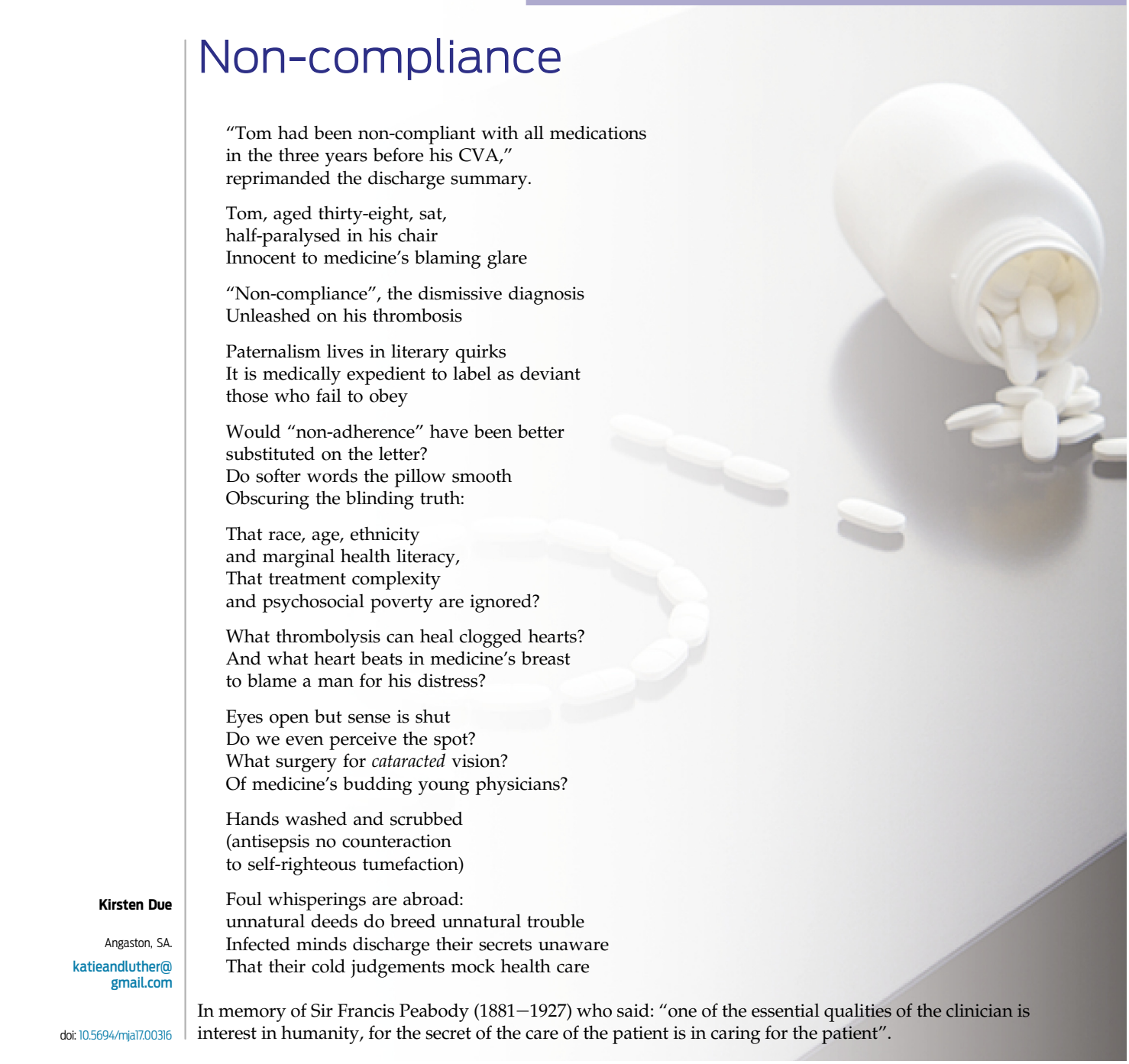
Non-compliance



"Tom had been non-compliant with all medications
in the three years before his CVA,"
reprimanded the discharge summary.

Tom, aged thirty-eight, sat,
half-paralysed in his chair
Innocent to medicine's blaming glare

"Non-compliance", the dismissive diagnosis
Unleashed on his thrombosis

Paternalism lives in literary quirks
It is medically expedient to label as deviant
those who fail to obey

Would "non-adherence" have been better
substituted on the letter?
Do softer words the pillow smooth
Obscuring the blinding truth:

That race, age, ethnicity
and marginal health literacy,
That treatment complexity
and psychosocial poverty are ignored?

What thrombolysis can heal clogged hearts?
And what heart beats in medicine's breast
to blame a man for his distress?

Eyes open but sense is shut
Do we even perceive the spot?
What surgery for *cataracted* vision?
Of medicine's budding young physicians?

Hands washed and scrubbed
(antisepsis no counteraction
to self-righteous tumefaction)

Foul whisperings are abroad:
unnatural deeds do breed unnatural trouble
Infected minds discharge their secrets unaware
That their cold judgements mock health care

In memory of Sir Francis Peabody (1881–1927) who said: "one of the essential qualities of the clinician is interest in humanity, for the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient".

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