

2011

# Clinical Exemplar

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## GIVE ME A BOOST!

Multiple post-it notes littered the front of the chart as I pulled it from the rack. Bright neon flags screamed out “THIS IS NOT YOUR ORDINARY PATIENT” even without me reading the words. As I glanced at the notes I got a brief summation of my next patient – “Reiki<sup>1</sup> nurse to arrive at 0830”, “anesthesia to see on arrival”, and several other quick notes about Hayden. On this busy morning in the ACU, I sighed as I realized that I would not be able to move quickly with this patient. Without even cracking the binding of the chart I knew this was going to be a complex case.



Hayden was scheduled to have an All American<sup>2</sup> with a popliteal nerve block to be administered preoperatively. A review of her health history indicated that she had an extensive surgical history as well as some other mental and physical diagnoses. As I stepped into the waiting room to begin the admission process I met her mother, her father, her care companion, and a nurse who specializes in Reiki treatment. My immediate sense was that this was going to be a team effort; I would be providing the logistics and framework of the preop process while the people closest to Hayden helped to keep her calm and comfortable. She was a bright and cheery girl despite the slight sedation that was setting in from a home dose of Valium. I assumed that perhaps the IV insertion would be her biggest fear but actually she was most frightened of the block. With time as an enemy (just the initial greeting took longer than average), I hurried to get Hayden checked in and changed into a gown to allow for the Reiki treatment. We had discussed as a group that doing the treatment right away would allow for the most relief and efficacy. As she changed we discovered that our paper gowns would be a sensory issue for Hayden and were able to accommodate her with a cloth gown. As she and her mom labored through the changing process I could hear the mother quietly

negotiating, bargaining, and calming Hayden as her anxiety mounted. Meanwhile, I brought the anesthesia provider up to date on the case and asked him to obtain consent right away thereby allowing me to give the previously ordered anxiolytic. The father then talked with the doctor about Hayden's fear of the block and negotiated a plan to have the block performed in the operating room versus in the ACU.

With Hayden gowned and on the stretcher with the O.R. time approaching all too quickly, we decided to have the Reiki performed prior to IV insertion. I gathered supplies and did the remainder of the paperwork as Hayden received the treatment. In an environment that is often full of hustle and bustle, this 10 minute period of time in the far corner of the ACU was actually quite serene. Hayden's mom remained at her side for the entire process, an active partner in each part of the morning thus far.

As I stepped to the bedside to finish the admission process, I found Hayden relaxed and quietly listening to her iPod. My approach to communicating with her required a delicate balance between honoring her as a consenting adult while I relied on her mom as a resource for information and support. I had a sense that Hayden had worked hard to gain her independence and I did not want to minimize that. Yet, I could see that the stress of surgery and the medications had forced her to retreat to a more child-like state than was her norm.

The IV insertion went smoothly with Hayden declaring it was easy. During the process I witnessed her mother ease Hayden through an intestinal spasm – brought on by a recent flare up of her Crohn's disease – with the most amazing skill. She expertly used visualization and a countdown method all while demonstrating the release of the spasm with her hand going from clenched fist to open hand. Hayden felt relief – and so did I. It was at this very moment that I knew that the mother was going to be exactly what Hayden needed during her emergence from anesthesia.

*It was at this very moment that I knew that the mother was going to be exactly what Hayden needed during her wake up from anesthesia.*

With my patient ready for surgery I signed her out and proceeded to my next assignment. As I admitted and discharged several patients over the next few hours, I wondered how Hayden and her family were doing. Would she have a rough emergence from anesthesia? Was the mother weary from her duties at the bedside? With my shift ending in the early afternoon, I wasn't sure I would have the chance to see the outcome. So often in the ACU, we only get a

snapshot of the patient's day. But as luck would have it, I got a call from the PACU nurse letting me know Hayden was ready to enter phase II of recovery.

Hayden looked sedated and was crying out repetitively "I have to PEE!" Had I not cared for her preoperatively, I might have dreaded the scenario I was viewing. But, knowing that her previous experiences with emergence from anesthesia had been extremely rough, I was celebrating right along with the PACU nurse and the mom. We were witnessing a victory! Hayden was on the other side of surgery, waking up enough to move through the steps of recovery, but sedated enough to help her cope. After receiving report from the PACU nurse, I took a breath and prepared to lock arms with the mother as we coaxed Hayden through the final phase of the day's journey.

Hayden was perseverating on her need to use the bathroom and I listened as her mom used a trip to the toilet as leverage to get her daughter to become alert enough to eat a few bites of popsicle. As they jockeyed and bargained, I obtained vital signs and did a quick assessment. Hayden was stable, drowsy, but aroused enough to argue with her mom and to cry out again "I have to PEE!" I suggested that we get her to the toilet and help her feel some relief. As we negotiated the transfer, the mother was in charge of coaxing Hayden to stand, sit and urinate while I was in charge of protecting the operative foot



housed in a large splint. At this point, the mother eased into being in charge of Hayden's behavior and alertness while voicing her insecurities about caring for the foot. It worked perfectly, because I was well versed in how to care for the operative foot and less secure in how to meet Hayden's complex post anesthesia needs.

With a successful trip to the bathroom under our belts, we returned Hayden to the bay and began to discuss a discharge plan. Once again, time was not on our side. Both parents expressed that they wanted to leave with their daughter sedated in order to make the hour-long drive home and a stop at the pharmacy tolerable. As we worked through a review of discharge instructions, obtaining a script for a bedside commode, and discussing the actual plan for getting her into her house in this drowsy state, Hayden seemed to retreat further into herself. This seemed to be her way of coping with all of the sensory stimuli around her. With the smallest tug of her ear (a strategy obviously used in the past), her Dad was able to rouse her immediately, much to Hayden's distaste.

As I sat, side by side with the mom, hatching our discharge plan, I stopped for a moment. Somewhat awkwardly I stumbled with words to express how

impressed I was with how she had cared for her daughter on this day. I wondered out loud if I, as a mother too, could do what she had done. She thanked me for my clumsy compliment and said that I was the second nurse to shower her with such praise today. And while she graciously accepted my words, she endearingly turned the spotlight to Hayden. She pointed out that today we had only had the chance to see part of her daughter and because of the nature of the day we were forced to focus only on her weaknesses. She asked if I might give her my email address so that she could share with me a piece she had written for Hayden's graduation day. She went on to express that what we hadn't had a chance to see on this day was her daughter's spirit. Then, she talked with me about her experience on this day. She said that this was one of only two times in her many hospital endeavors that she felt that she was invited to be part of Hayden's team and was not treated as an "overbearing, helicopter mother".

"I have to PEEEE!" Hayden jolted us back into focusing on her. It seemed we had a perfect moment to leverage her into getting dressed. Once again, a trip to the toilet gave her mom the ultimate bargaining chip. As we assumed our roles, me in charge of the foot and mom in charge of everything else, we got Hayden dressed, to a wheelchair and back to the bathroom. Perhaps exhausted, she seemed even a bit drowsier and experienced a wave of nausea. All of a sudden I felt a pang of doubt about sending her home without her being more alert. But Hayden's mom insisted it was time to go. She was getting increasingly worried about the ride home and feared that Hayden would become fully awake. And so, I trusted in the woman who had traveled a much longer journey with Hayden than I. With a pink bucket in her lap and a cold cloth on her neck, I discharged her. My charge nurse, with a look of doubt on her face, asked me "Is she going to be ok?" and I confidently responded "Yes, she has a great team around her."

A few days later, I got home from a particularly tiring shift. There in my email box was a message from Hayden's mom.

"Hayden is doing really well after her foot surgery on Monday. It's Wednesday afternoon and she's returning to her own amazing spirit. Thank you (and everyone) again for the care and concern you gave to Hayden and to us. [Her dad] and I were talking on the way home while Hayden was zonked out about how everyone worked together for Hayden – and how wonderful it was as parents to be listened to and valued in our efforts to make this day as easy as possible for Hayden.

I really appreciated your words about our family. I said to you that on Monday you only got to see Hayden in distress – that she is so much more than her

'diagnosis'. I wanted to email this piece I wrote for Hayden's graduation from high school."

I went on to read the essay titled, "A Graduation Thank You", also known to our staff now as "Give me a Boost." Through teary eyes, I read the piece again and then reflected on my day with Hayden. In this moment, I was reminded of all of the reasons I became a nurse. In the everyday hustle of ACU nursing, it is easy to become numbed and discouraged by the demands. And yet, every so often I encounter a patient that reinvigorates me and refills my spirit. Hayden unknowingly had "given *me* a boost."

#### References

1. Reiki: An alternative medicine treatment in which healing energy is channeled from the practitioner to the patient to enhance energy, reduce stress, pain, and fatigue.
2. ALL AMERICAN: An innovative operative approach to reconstruct the flat foot deformity. The term "All American" came from the fact that the surgery involves multiple procedures, all utilized at once. The procedure, sometimes called the "Manoli-Pomeroy Procedure", involves shifting the calcaneus, then taking bone from the iliac crest to reconstruct the arch. At the same time, a tendon transfer is then utilized to reconstruct the dysfunctional posterior tibial tendon.

*Hayden was a Mercy baby from the start – and that she was back where she began for her surgery – at Mercy. Everything eased inside for me then.*

#### Additional Email Follow-Up

Hayden is doing incredibly well – she is amazing us, as usual. This morning I came in from my "garden walk" with the dogs (much more ordinary than it sounds) and caught Hayden on her knee-wheelie at the microwave making herself breakfast. She and [her dad] named her knee walker Luke – as in Luke KneeWalker.

Yes, you have my permission to reprint "A Graduation Thank You." Your request has come at a time when my world, by necessity with Hayden's surgery, has felt very small. It is heartwarming to know that my letter to Hayden's "Boosters" will be read by so many. I have sent this piece out to other friends/families with similar lives, and have heard back from people as far away as Ontario. Although my initial letter included Hayden's name, I chose to take it out of the one that I sent out to others – even with Hayden's permission to include her name. I wanted A Graduation Thank You to be about every child and his/her family and community. Please, include this on your web site. I'd welcome any feedback that comes your way.

I may have mentioned to you that Hayden is a Mercy baby. She was born at the State St. hospital almost 20 years ago. I had been working for Mercy for just about a year

and had the “patient experience” that was part of my new employee orientation – Our family was respected, valued, and honored during my stay at Mercy then, and again, last week.

I confess to a little (alright, a lot) of anxiety myself the day of Hayden’s surgery. At one point I was gazing out the windows in the waiting room and realized that Hayden was a Mercy baby from the start – and that she was back where she began for her surgery – at Mercy. Everything eased inside for me then.

Thank you – “Hayden’s Mom”

## A Graduation Thank You

Give me a boost Mommy," she says as she reaches for the water fountain, the counter, the school bus steps. "Boost me up!" she demands impatiently as she lights onto the back of a horse with hooves the size of her backpack, as she runs to the swings, as she reaches for the boat ladder after tubing across the lake.

My daughter has never been shy about asking for a boost. She learned early that some kids need a boost more than others. It was third grade when she came home from school, crying. The day had arrived that we had agonized over - the day when she realized that not every kid had occupational therapy, developmental therapy, speech therapy and meetings where all of her teachers got to talk about her.

She had always felt sorry for the kids who didn't get extra time with their very own teacher, jump-rope and silly putty in school, and stickers from the front desk lady. She had just started riding horses and didn't know that it was called therapeutic riding - she just knew that she was standing on top of a horse and no other kid was.

That day in third grade she just knew that the other kids were reading bigger books and "doing stuff with the clock" that she didn't get. She came home and stood in the upstairs hallway - hunched over, peering through dirty glasses, sobbing and saying "they think I'm stupid. Do you think I'm stupid Mommy?"

I said "no, I don't think you're stupid. I think you need a boost." I told her that different kids grow at different times and that everyone, everyone, needs a boost. I told her about my friends who boosted me up - and that some of those friends boosted me by helping me boost her. We talked about the front desk lady at school who, every time she gave her a sticker for riding a noisy crowded school bus, gave her a boost.

Our daughter went back to school the next day knowing that she was different. That some things would be harder for her than for other kids. That math and reading and sitting in a circle were probably always going to be better with a boost. "Boosting up" became secret code for us. When a new friend would come to play she would ask me to stay near in case she needed a boost. When her little sister was learning new things she would glare at me over the top of her glasses and say, "Boost her Mom!" At times she'd talk about another kid, struggling through recess, middle school dances, or the high school cafeteria and say "she just needs a boost."

We've all heard that it takes a village to raise a child. My daughter's village is full of teachers, professionals, advocates, friends, family, neighbors, and the community that she has created around herself. Each of them has with effort, grace and ease, perhaps without knowing, given her a boost.

My daughter graduated last Thursday from York High School. She graduated with a gold sash around her neck - with honors. She did not receive any awards or scholarships. She was so worried about messing up the marching or not lighting the candle that she cried in frustration. One of her teachers left a small white pen light to use instead of a candle in case she needed it, and she didn't need it. Many of us practiced marching with her so she wouldn't make a mistake, and she did. She was boosted through yet another new, terrifyingly wonderful step on her journey.



We have all boosted our children - and we have boosted each other's children. I cannot begin to name all of you who have boosted my child, but I will tell you;

If you have ever called a new neighbor and asked her gently if there is a best way to make her child feel comfortable, if you have provided a front porch, a nurses' sanctuary, a front desk chair or spot to linger, a quiet place to have lunch with a few friends, or a kitchen counter next door, then you have boosted my child.

If you have gone into work early so that you could leave to have coffee with a teenager, or given a busing job at the local restaurant to a kid with slow feet, sat in the stands at hockey games patiently answering question after question as you try to watch your own child on the ice, or made room in a circle of friends to include a young woman that you've known since you were seven, then you have boosted my child.

If you are a pre-school teacher that has pulled aside a parent to carefully mention concerns at the risk of that parent talking to your director, or a day care provider who adapted routines and sayings from occupational therapy into your school, or a family member that has listened, encouraged, read information, provided resources, cried, laughed and fretted, or answered "just one more question:"

If you have sat through PET meetings that always go over and heard yet another wish that sounded like a demand from a passionate, struggling parent, if you have helped her with questions about God, boys, makeup or dating, if you've taken her to church, or bought ingredients for a "special recipe," then you have boosted my child.

This Friday is her graduation party. It is such a celebration of her spirit and perseverance that we would invite her entire village if we could. If you can't make it or we missed you, please take this letter to heart.

Thank you. Thank you for rainy Special Olympics where you ran the track, for answering yet another email, writing in communication logs, attending a training and bringing it back, for creating yoga cards and transition plans. You have "boosted up" my daughter so much that she now boosts other kids, her family, her friends, and her community. Your delight in her spirit, your care and time, your "boost" has helped her bloom into the amazing young woman that she is.

Thank you.

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