

2010

Clinical Exemplar

Kelley Kelly RN, BSN, CAPA

KAYLA

We were called in on a Saturday for an emergency case - not unusual for us, but this was a 10 year old female with a detached retina. We were told she had an “oppositional disorder,” that included tantrums. Yipes! Pediatrics is not my forte and a predisposed uncooperative little girl was kind of scary. Our surgeon was not sure she would agree to show up for the surgery. In the back of my mind, I recalled that most children that have a detached retina have had some kind of trauma.

I kept checking the waiting room secretly hoping she might not be there. The third time I checked I saw a little group of five stepping off the elevator. Kayla had arrived with her foster mother and three foster brothers. We made eye contact and I asked her if she was here to see Dr. M. She said yes and I lead the entire group into one of our assessment rooms with a television. She appeared sweet and harmless, but I know looks can be deceiving. I introduced myself and let her know that Dr. M had ordered eye drops for both her eyes before he could evaluate her. One of my least favorite medicines to give is eye drops to children since these dilating drops usually sting because the ph is so acidic. She surprised me by tilting her head back and telling me, “I had those last night in the emergency room.” I was elated. I was prepared for a frustrating assessment but she was cooperative and calm. While instilling the drops, I noticed she had a small cut with a bruise and swelling around her right eye.

That was too precious; I decided I liked this girl.

Since Kayla was with a foster mother, I wasn't sure how accurate a health history I would be able to complete. I think it is important to include the children in the assessment questions. They know some of the answers, and I want them to feel they are involved in the process. It opens up valuable dialogue. I know I always appreciate it when health care providers actually speak to my child and not just me. She informed me that she had surgery in her left eye at a different place, and when

she has surgery they do not start her IV (pointing and her wrist,) until she goes to sleep back in the operating room! That was too precious; I decided I liked this girl. I reassured her that we would not start her IV in assessment. I told Kayla I would introduce her to the anesthesiologist later and he would start her IV after she went to sleep. She nodded in acknowledgement while she smiled and relaxed her shoulders.

I completed the assessment the best I could. Kayla told me all she knew about her history and since she had only been with the foster mother for 2 months, she was only able to add a little more. The three boys were very quiet and sitting as still as possible. When I asked Kayla how she got that bruise, she pointed to the littlest one and said, “he hit me with a rock!” He looked to the ground as he sank lower in the chair. I thought to myself “Now I know what kind of eye trauma occurred.” A few minutes later the foster father showed up to take the boys home and they all looked relieved to get out of this place.

The family dynamics of this little group were fascinating to me. We were able to talk to Kayla and the foster mother for quite awhile before Kayla went to surgery. This also created a nice bond between the foster mother, Kayla and me. I learned a lot about being a foster mother and the emotional ups and downs that go with the commitment to provide a safe home for the children. I informed the anesthesiologist that Kayla had been very cooperative so far. He went ahead and ordered versed po. Kayla also told us that she would change into our hospital gown, but she decided, “I’m not going to surgery!” I was thinking she has been so brave and answered all my questions so intelligently, my heart just went out to her. She was in an unfamiliar place about to have surgery without her biological parents at her side, how scared and alone she must feel. We needed to step in and provide emotional support as we completed our tasks.

After she took the liquid versed she told us, “the medicine in the Chicago Hospital tasted better.” I love kids they just say what they think so honest. We laughed and apologized for the bitterness. She also let us know the other hospital had given her apple juice and popsicles after surgery. We assured her that we had those here and we would have them ready for her in the recovery room.



At our surgery center we ask all of our patients to take off their jewelry and give it their family to keep. Kayla had a ring. When we asked her about the ring she let us know, “my mommy gave me this ring, it’s the only thing I have from her and she is in prison.” Wow, I was not prepared for that statement. What a different world she is experiencing. The other nurse and I looked at each other and nodded. In that one second we had silently decided to put a piece of tape around the ring and tell Kayla the tape was to keep the ring from coming off during surgery. We just could not ask her to take it off.

Kayla's surgery was longer than usual since her eye was really damaged. She woke up slowly and was able to have the juice she had requested. After an hour and a half she was awake and stable enough to go home. We helped get her dressed while the foster mom went to get the van. Knowing I only had a few more minutes with this child, I told her how proud I was of her. I let her know that she had helped me by following instructions and being so nice. I was thinking that I needed to tell her positive things and praise her. Who knows how often she hears good things from adults or anyone. After we put her seatbelt on she rolled over and fell back asleep. I hope she remembers what I told her.

For some reason I worried about her the rest of the weekend. So young and her vision may be impaired the rest of her life. The ophthalmologists see their patients the following day after surgery, so I was anxious to speak with the surgeon to find out how her post operative visit had gone. He assured me that she has a good prognosis. I was happy to hear that, but I will continue to wonder about Kayla. I had such a great childhood - both parents were always around and I had such caring brothers and sisters. I was so fortunate. It saddens me that so many children are exposed to such a negative world. I am glad that I was able to spend time with Kayla. Even though it was only one afternoon, I hope that we touched her life in a positive way and made her emergency surgery a pleasant memory. Isn't interesting how a negative report about a patient can cause so much anxiety? I started preparing for the worst case scenario and then in walks a delightful little girl and I have a wonderful experience that reaffirms why I am a nurse.

