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Clinical Exemplars

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Clinical Exemplar

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In Just One Day

The alarm goes off at 3:30 AM. My cat woke me up several times during the night. Yesterday my boyfriend's mother made a cruel remark which hurt my feelings. Last night I told him he was not a romantic man. I have not slept well. As I drive through my subdivision at 4:00 AM I see everyone's lights are out. They are still sleeping and I'm already on my way to work. There is a dense fog. I am not in a good mood.

I work in a Urology/General Surgery Pre-operative area in a premier hospital in the Texas Medical Center. I am the first person to arrive. There are already two ladies standing at the waiting room. Why they are here before the unit is open? I haven't even unlocked the doors nor had my coffee. I am irritated.

When I bring the patient back to Pre-op I realize that she and I are the same age. She looks younger. I decide it's because she does not have the stress of being a nurse. While admitting her I learn my patient has been recently diagnosed with multiple myeloma. Two years earlier, she received a renal transplant from her twin sister. Now she is in the process of being evaluated for a rising creatinine and possible rejection. Her sister is worried about the kidney but grateful for every day she has spared her sibling from dialysis. My patient tells me how much she enjoys her new job managing an apartment complex. It's the best job she's ever had because now she doesn't have to worry about paying her rent.



I return to the waiting room to greet my next patient. There are two young ladies with two little girls. When one of the ladies sees me she begins to cry. "Do you remember me? You took care of me three years ago when I had breast cancer. My sister is here for surgery today." My new patient is the single parent of the two little girls. Her breast cancer is already metastasized. She has come for a porta-cath insertion for chemotherapy. When the two little girls come into Pre-op to see their mother they are frightened. I ask, "Do you think you may want to be a nurse some day?" They both shake their heads, "No."

My next pre-op patient is 52 years old and arrives in a motorized scooter.

She has had Multiple Sclerosis for five years. Her husband died last year and she has moved to Houston to be near her daughter who is now pregnant with her fifth child. She has no control of her bladder function. My patient is happy to get this surgery behind her since she will be free of “diaper rash” and less dependent upon her daughter. She is also excited because her personalized handicapped minivan will be arriving in a few weeks.

I receive a hospitalized patient who is brought into Pre-op for emergency surgery for bladder hemorrhaging. She has had multiple complications following major heart surgery. Her body is covered in a rash and the skin on her upper chest is excoriated and peeling near the area where she recently had a pacemaker inserted. She is all alone. As I am preparing her for surgery she states, “I hate people who are healthy and able to walk around and do things.” I try to be as compassionate and understanding to her as I can. On the way to the OR she asks: “Will you be with me in surgery?” When I tell her no, she cries. She tells me she loves me for being kind to her.

A young teenager is my next patient who has come for a stent removal following a kidney-pancreas transplant. He has been a brittle diabetic since age two and has had more hospital admissions and procedures than most 90 year olds. His eyes are glassy and his heart rate is 130. I take his temperature and it is 103.6. His surgery is cancelled and we start performing an array of tests to determine the cause of the fever. He is admitted to the hospital instead of having the procedure. I tell him I’m sorry. With pathetic-looking eyes he says, “It’s okay Madame Nurse. Thank you, Madame Nurse.”

My next patient is 32 year old. This will be her 18th surgery following complications from a botched hysterectomy at another hospital. At one point she spent two and a half months in the ICU and three months in rehabilitation. She has a colostomy and an ugly scar in her neck from a tracheotomy. She tells me her friends think she should have plastic surgery on the scar. Smiling, she says, “I want to keep it as a symbol to show others how blessed I am for what God has done for me. I am a living miracle.”

A gentleman with a Foley catheter in place arrives for prostate surgery. He is alone. When I introduce myself he begins to cry. I try to reassure him about the surgery. But it’s not the surgery he is worried about. In fact, he tells me he would prefer to die in the OR. His wife of 32 years had recently succumbed to Swine Flu. This is the first time since her death he needs her. He becomes almost inconsolable. On the way to surgery, he apologizes for his behavior.

As I am leaving the hospital, the elevator door opens. There is an ICU bed surrounded by four staff members. In the bed is a beautiful woman who appears in her 20's. She is comatose and not breathing on her own. There are four young distraught appearing women standing behind her bed. I get off the elevator to make room for the patient and those who accompany her. One of the ladies courteously thanks me.

This is not an isolated day but, quite often, a typical day.

As I walk to my car I reflect upon my day. This is not an isolated day but, quite often, a typical day. I think about each one of my patients and their families. In the midst of what each one was going through everyone was gracious and appreciative. Early this morning I was feeling sorry for myself and the one who was irritable. This afternoon, I realize about how blessed I am to be there mentally and physically for those who need me.

As I arrive to the safety of my home, my cat is at the door to greet me. We take a nap together. When I wake up I call the hospital to check on my teenager. I tell the nurse to let him know that "Madame Nurse" from Pre-op was asking about him. I call my boyfriend to apologize. I tell him he is fortunate to have an elderly mother in good health. Then I ask, "How would you like to have a romantic dinner tonight?"

