

2011

Clinical Exemplar

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THE LITTLE BOY WHO WOULDN'T LET ANYONE TOUCH HIM.

At lunch that day, two of the nurses from our pre-op area were talking about the “out of control” 8 year old boy they had admitted. They said he refused to have the blood pressure cuff put on, refused to have his temperature taken, and in fact he refused to let any of the nursing or medical staff touch him. They said he was crying and screaming, and began kicking when anyone tried to get near him. You could tell by their tone they were very frustrated by his behavior. They said they were really lucky, that he did take the Versed lollipop, or he still wouldn't be in the OR.

Later that day I received “little boy who wouldn't let anyone touch him” from the OR to the PACU. His VP Shunt had been revised. I wondered how much of his irritability was due to increased in pressure in his brain before the shunt revision.

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Upon arrival to the PACU he was still sedated, and very stable. His blood pressure cuff was on. He had an IV in place and a SpO2 monitor on. I invited mom in to sit by his bed, so she would be there when he woke up.

When he woke up he began crying loudly, wanting the BP cuff off and the IV out. He was still fairly sleepy, so he didn't put up a big fight; it was mostly quite a loud verbal outburst.

A crying child in our combination Adult/Child PACU always brings help running. Several people approached him with offers of a Popsicle, a touch, a joke, a "there, there" but he wasn't buying any of it. All of the people coming at him just made him more irritable. I finally had to ask several well meaning people to, "Please just let him be. I think all of the stimulation is making things harder for him."

I asked him if he hurt. He continued to cry and tell me to take off the IV, the cuff, etc. His mother said, "He really can't tell you how he feels." She said it softly and with a resigned look on her face. The charge nurse put a warm blanket over him, that seemed to sooth him, and he went back to sleep.



As I watched him, and his mother, I was taken back to my childhood, when I was the little girl who wouldn't let anyone touch her. I can remember collapsing into tears anytime anyone in a medical office would come near me. Shots were a major under taking, with me crying and not being able to sit still. I remember one doctor telling my mother not to bring me back to his office, because he couldn't put up with my behavior. I don't remember how I felt, when I was doing all of this, but I can only imagine I was afraid, and that the only way I knew how to do afraid was by screaming and crying.

I turned to the boy's mother and said, "I was just like him, when I was a kid. Nobody in a doctor's office or hospital could come near me, I became frantic and out of control." She looked at me, and she told me, that this was his eleventh shunt revision. She looked sad.

For the rest of his stay, I did my best to keep things quiet and low key. I also made sure the well meaning staff stayed away, when he was crying instead of approaching him with questions and offers and jokes. I set some very matter of fact limits with him, but I did it in a very quiet way, telling him he had to have his blood pressure cuff, IV, and SpO2 monitor on. And, when he looked like he was in pain I gave him an appropriate dose of Fentanyl IV. We didn't have a perfect time, but we had just a few bursts of crying and complaining. When it was time to go, he was awake, and relatively calm. His IV was still in place and his BP cuff was still on his arm.

I used the exact same approach the nurse used with me, when I about 8, and having my tonsils out. I know I was frightened. This time I was not just in a doctor's office, but I was in a hospital. The nurse approached me in a quiet soft manner. She told me gently what she was going to do, and how it would feel. When it was time to give me the dreaded shot, she told me how it would feel like a little "sting" and then be over. Normally I would have become very upset and begin crying when I was about to get a shot. But, with her I wasn't frightened at all, and everything happened just like she said it would. Her manner was so reassuring and honest to a frightened little girl.



I think she is why I am a nurse today.

