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CLINICAL EXEMPLAR

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THE PACU CREW:

THE FORGOTTEN FEW

If you have ever had the opportunity to have conscious sedation or general anesthesia you know it can be an uncertain and even frightening experience.

You are putting all your trust into people you probably do not know and relying on their expertise to safely care for you during your surgery or procedure.

You may also have little if any memory of the PACU nurse that took care of you following your procedure.

Surprisingly, though, patients sometimes have said to me, “I think you took care of me last time I had surgery.” They might say, “I remember your voice or I remember your smile.”

I have worked in the PACU for 34 years. I have watched surgical procedures evolve from very invasive to minimally invasive. I have watched as anesthesia becomes more refined, allowing patients to awaken more quickly with less side effects.

So maybe the PACU nurses aren’t as forgotten as we once were.

Adirondack Health’s mission, “We honor a mission of excellence, healing and compassion close to home,” is definitely exemplified every day in the PACU. I have worked with and currently work with colleagues who truly believe in the mission of Adirondack Health.

In the critical care environment of the PACU these values are essential for safe patient outcomes.

Excellence is demonstrated through the care given to our patients every day. Critical knowledge and skills are needed by the PACU staff to care for patients with a variety of health conditions. Some are young and healthy and some have multiple underlying health issues.

Healing is demonstrated through the treatments given, as well as the emotional support that is provided for the patients as they are waking up from anesthesia.

Compassion and empathy are probably one of the most important attributes for the PACU professionals. For the patients this could be the most important thing they might remember. It certainly can be confusing and sometimes frightening to awaken from anesthesia.

Even if the patient will not remember us hours after or even days after, in the moments waking up they need that compassion to feel reassured that all is well.

When I first worked in the PACU patients did not usually remember their recovery room stay. Even today the PACU staff isn't often recognized by name.

And while they most likely will not remember our names, they may remember the fact that "everyone is so nice in here."

And even though they may not remember us individually, many will remember the compassion and empathy that they were shown in the PACU.

While sometimes we may be "The Forgotten Few," we are still at the frontline of our mission of excellence, healing and compassion close to home.

