

2010

ASPAN

Clinical Exemplar

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Snowstorm

The weather report warned of an early morning snowstorm with several inches in accumulation throughout the day. My husband told me he could get me to work, but he did not think he would be able to pick me up so I packed some warm clothes and extra food in case I was stranded. It always amazes me how many people drive to our surgery center for their elective surgery when there is a weather emergency. The weathermen actually got the forecast right and it had snowed all day. One of the nightshift nurses could not make it to work and I was stuck at work because I could not make it home. After working my 10 hour dayshift, they sent me to the hotel next door to rest a few hours so I could stay up all night and help the other nurse on duty. We had two patients. I was assigned the young man that had ankle surgery and my coworker was assigned the older gentleman that had eye surgery. He needed to keep a patch over his operative eye all night and he stayed with us because he was blind in the other eye. It was time for Vicki's break so she checked on Howard and gave me a quick update and informed me he was resting quietly. She said his wife was asleep in the recliner next to him and he shouldn't need anything. Boy, those are famous last words in a healthcare setting. Since there are just two nurses and one security guard in the building at night, we really cannot leave or take a real break. We usually find a nice empty recliner and put our feet up for an hour.

About ten minutes later Howard's door opened and he walked out to the desk. When I asked him if he needed anything he said, "I'm having chest pain." I cannot recall any of my patients at the surgery center ever complaining of chest

Those words will get any nurse's heart racing. Those words immediately helped him back to bed, asked him to point where the pain was, and to rate the pain on a scale from 1-10. He pointed to his chest and left shoulder and let me know the pain was a "10." I asked him to describe the pain as I began checking his vital signs and placing him on oxygen. He stated it felt like pressure while he rubbed his chest. I'm thinking, he is telling me "classic" symptoms of a

MI. Vital signs- B/P 236/118, hr 84, resp 28, O2 sat 98%. He was pale and had a pasty appearance. I placed him on nasal O2 and now I was really concerned. I called to Vicki that I needed help as I went around the corner to get the EKG machine.

By this time his wife was awake and wondering what was happening. I reassured her that we would take care of Howard, but we needed to call the doctor and 911 so the paramedics to get him to an emergency room. While I did an EKG Vicki went to get the usual medications we learn about in ACLS, (morphine, nitro, and aspirin.) His EKG looked exactly the same when compared to the one they did before surgery. He told me the sublingual nitro helped “a little”, but his blood pressure was still elevated. Vicki was paging the surgeon/anesthesiologist and calling 911 while I restarted the IV and gave morphine and an aspirin.

We explained to Howard that the paramedics would be here as soon as possible to take him to the emergency room. His wife was very anxious about driving to Clarian North because they were not from this area. I drew a map and told her she could follow the ambulance since they would be just driving a mile north from our building. There was about 2 feet of snow on the ground and at 2am no cars were on the road, just the snowplows.

When the medics appeared we gave them a report and made all the necessary copies of records while they assessed Howard prior to transport. His blood pressure and chest pain were getting better and he apologized for all the trouble he caused.

I was proud of the way we handled ourselves. We were able to take care of Howard and his wife and transport him to the emergency room in less than 45 minutes. Our teamwork was smooth and efficient. We used our knowledge and experience to complete the necessary tasks while comforting the patient and his wife. Occasionally we would take a second to evaluate to ensure we did not forget anything else that could be done for Howard. Teasing me Vicki later told me that I was the one that caused all the trouble and that I was not invited back to work on the night shift. I did feel a little guilty that we had to call those Carmel Firefighters to transport our patient in the middle of a snowstorm, but I reminded myself we had too.

