

2010

# Clinical Exemplar

---

Laura Haynes, RN, CPAN



## ABOVE AND BEYOND

I have never written about a patient care situation before because I have always considered unusual situations to be “all in the day of” and part of my job description. In March of 2010 I was pleasantly surprised to be part of a group recognized with an honor for “going above and beyond”.

In early 2009, the family was returning home from a spring break trip to the beach. The son had been sick and they were on route to see his doctor at home, about another hour away. He became too sick to travel and seeing Nash Health Care Systems on the way, they decided to bring him to our emergency department. Unfortunately, they could not find the emergency department and the surgery entrance was the closest entrance they saw. It was about 0730 and we had just gotten to work and opened the PACU for the day’s schedule. The receptionist in the lobby ran in PACU and informed us there was a family out front that needed help.

I remember it was a chilly spring that year, and when I ran outside I immediately felt the cold air in my thin scrubs. The dad had already put the child in his wheelchair but was still at the car. My first thought was “this kid is sick”. He was white as snow and cold to touch. I could see he was having some respiratory distress and was not responding to his name. It appeared he had some type of cerebral palsy or muscular disease. He was very small for his age, (in his early teens his dad told us). By this time, other nurses had brought a stretcher outside and the dad transferred him over. We rushed him into PACU and put him on the monitor and called for assistance. A CRNA and one of our anesthesiologists responded. After stabilizing the child, we transferred him to the emergency department for further treatment. What a way to start your day and it wasn’t even a post operative complication!

In March, when the award was given to all the people who cared for this child and his family, the family came and personally presented it to us. The former patient was alert in his wheelchair with his sister, mom, and dad. The dad read their story to us and praised us for saving their son's life. It was very emotional for me to hear it from their viewpoint. He made us sound like heroes, and to this family we were. After listening to their version, it gave me an appreciation for nurses and the healthcare community and it also made me realize what I do as a professional and my knowledge of healthcare makes an impact on others.

*[The following text constitutes] the letter the dad read to us that was so emotional for me.*

While on vacation in the Outer Banks in April of last year, Jonathan took very sick and we decided to return home to Apex, leaving our vacation after only 3 days. All the time not realizing the severity of what was happening to Jonathan. We left Hatteras around 3:00am, with the intention of immediately taking Jonathan to his doctor as soon as we arrived back in Apex. Within a couple of hours of leaving the Outer Banks, Jonathans condition rapidly deteriorated, he was pale, barely lucid and talking incoherently. We realized of course he was getting worse by the minute, but still didn't grasp the full severity of what was happening to him, and decided to press on with our return journey, by this time thinking we'd be best taking him to Wake Med Hospital in Raleigh, en route home.

My wife Karen and I were driving separate vehicles, she called me distraught and said Jonathan had stopped breathing. It was Jonathans sister Natalie that noticed his breathing had stopped and alerted her mom right away. As anyone who's ever driven between Raleigh and the Outer Banks, the space between here and there is pretty much unpopulated, not the sort of place you want to have a major medical emergency. Call it luck, fate, destiny or intervention, but when Jonathan stopped breathing, we were directly opposite Nash County Hospital. After a ¼ mile high-speed, and I mean high-speed detour, we came to a screeching halt just outside of Nash Hospital. We didn't even get to the Emergency room, we stopped at the 1<sup>st</sup> available door and rushed into the hospital, frantic for the help that Jonathan so desperately needed. Three nurses came to our aid, and I assume called in the emergency, it's hard to recall exactly as panic, fear, anxiety and adrenalin were all in full

supply at the time. Jonathan was unconscious with virtually no signs of life, although the nurses advised he did have a faint pulse. Moments later I carried Jonathan from his wheelchair onto the stretcher and rushed into what I recall to be a post-operative recovery area, to be met with a wall of bodies rushing to Jonathans aid. He was in my mind at the time, barely alive, and in times such as this, it's difficult not to think of the worst possible outcome. It's hard to be sure what time passed upon our arrival and when we were told Jonathan had been stabilized. Clearly, Jonathan's condition required intensive care and he was air-lifted to Pitt County Memorial Hospital. We at the time still didn't know the severity of what he was experiencing, and were mentally preparing for the worst possible news. We waited with Jonathan until the helicopter crew took him on his journey to Pitt County Memorial Hospital.

The drive time from Nash to Pitt County is roughly one hour, by helicopter it's probably 15 minutes. I arrived after my one hour drive, only to be told the helicopter hadn't arrived. Needless to say, the worst possible scenario goes through your mind. Had the helicopter crashed? The helicopter safely arrived, with Jonathan, roughly 20 minutes later. The breathing tube that had been inserted became dislodged before the helicopter took off, so Jonathan had to be taken back to have it re-inserted, hence their delay.

Jonathan subsequently spent the best part of a month in ICU, the first week or so being heavily sedated. He had pneumonia, his left lung had collapsed, he had a chest tube inserted to drain the fluid that was building up, and had just about every test and procedure imaginable. Karen and I alternated staying with Jonathan, and commuted back and forth from Apex to Greenville every day, just so he was never on his own. Jonathans primary concern when had regained consciousness, was whether UNC had won the NCAA tournament. He wasn't disappointed, as was evident from his smile, partially obscured by his ventilator. Jonathan has always been a babe-magnet, the nurses in ICU were not immune to his charm, frequently bringing him his Starbucks as he gained his strength back

Jonathan has made a full recovery from his 'event' of last year. He's doing very well at Apex High School, even after missing a full month of school, managed to pass his End-of-Grade exams with ease. He plays in the Miracle League of the Triangle baseball team, and we still have trouble wresting his PS3 controller from him so mom and dad can occasionally get to watch TV.

One thing is evident to us, and is still a topic of discussion with us frequently, if it were not for the staff at Nash County and their expertise, Jonathan may not be with us today. We will be forever indebted to everyone that was involved that day, many of whom we have never met or had an opportunity to say thank-you. Thank-you.



Photos: Courtesy of the Family and reprinted with permission.