

Spirituality in Clinical Practice: Manuscript

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The Spiritual Healthcare Role as a Nursing Student in Clinical Experience

One of my most memorable clinical experiences that had an impact in my spiritual life was during this past semester in the medical-surgical unit. My first impression as we entered the unit was a patient having vocal outbursts, but were non communicative. The vocal outbursts were clearly due to a neurological cause. Personally, I was extremely intimidated – I still felt completely inexperienced compared to the nursing students that were around me. Nevertheless, my clinical instructor assigned me to a patient, and I was ready to embrace the new environment. It was to my surprise that my patient for the day was the individual who was having vocal outbursts. Millions of thoughts were racing through my head on how I could provide the best care for this patient.

The patient, D.H. was a middle aged man, diagnosed with early onset dementia. D.H. initially was admitted due to a mechanical fall, but was mainly left at the hospital because D.H.'s partner decided that they could no longer take care of D.H. anymore. The patient is awaiting placement, but it has now been about four months since D.H. has been stagnant in the medical surgical unit. After the P.C.A. briefed us on D.H., we began our A.M. care for the patient, and fed the patient breakfast. The patient generally needed assistance with transfer from bed to chair, and was extremely stiff with their movements.

I braced myself before walking into the room, and my nerves were all over the place. Personally, I wasn't sure what my expectations were. When I took the first step into the patient's room, D.H. greeted us with the biggest smile. With that pure smile, all my worries melted away. As I began to talk to the patient, I came to understand that those vocal outbursts were just

expressions of naive excitement, and their way of communicating despite it being verbally incoherent. I spent the next few weeks taking care of D.H.

Personally, it took me a while to process the spiritual aspect in my clinical practice with this patient. It was definitely a new type of processing and discernment that I had to adapt to. Above the physical health of the patient, I could almost see this spiritual desperation of their spirit. In addition to desperation to being with people, there was definitely frustration related to wrestling with abandonment and loneliness. It was a lot of silent prayer for the patient, and also showing the love of Christ through my nursing care. Although it was momentary and was just there for the day, I wanted to stay by their side and show that their voice was worthy of being heard, and worthy of life. On the other hand, I was deeply angry due to insurance being a tremendous barrier to one's well being. It was personally not the first time I have seen insurance being a barrier to a person's access to healthcare – and D.H.'s situation hit home. It was evident that D.H. needed specialized dementia care home, and needed stimulation other than 12 hours of the day sitting on a chair, and walking around the halls.

Every experience, whether intentionally spiritual or not – I believe any and every part always has spiritual meaning to my life. The Lord carefully crafted and planned every moment, interaction, relationship, time, etc. in the perfect way, and it is essentially up to us to be able to see that part. I was able to celebrate the little things of the patient, and joyfully perform the menial tasks that others may not necessarily want to do. Every little aspect of progression for the patient forms into a testimony of the Lord's power. In addition, it is apparent and physically seen how the sin of pain and sickness impacts not only the patient – but family, friends, caretakers,

etc. It is a privilege to be in a position of licensure/practice to assist and be a helping part of that aspect.

This nursing journey had definitely brought transformation in myself spiritually. I initially chose nursing for its stability. I honestly did not have much of a general direction of what I wanted to do, or what my purpose was. I just knew I was good at the sciences and didn't know what to do from there. I also chose nursing because I knew I didn't want to spend time being in medical school. There were many times where I contemplated changing majors, or paths. However, as I got clinical experience and learned topics pertaining to application, and transferred to a school that recognized and emphasized the spiritual aspect of nursing – I believe God gave me a new reformed/transformed purpose to serve His people.

This spiritual aspect and transformation definitely impacts the way I treat my patients. In nursing they always say to treat your patients as if they were family, but it's difficult to stay true to that calling and step into that with patients that don't look/feel like your family members or patients who are particularly difficult. But within the kingdom culture, I feel like my spiritual vision has transformed to truly understand what mentors are saying when they say to treat others like they're your family. It is entirely exciting to look forward to how much more I will grow spiritually as a nurse in the future.