

Spirituality in Practice

Jennifer L. Posso

Cheryl Phenicie School of Nursing, Alliance University

NUR 301: Worldview Perspectives

Dr. Elenice Lima

31 March 2023

Before I started nursing school, I worked at a medical office. The doctor I worked with was well known and wrote a textbook used by many medical students in the US. He was intelligent and humble. He would pray with patients and would pray for them when he received pathology reports back with bad news. I saw him cry a few times. When I left the office to start my nursing school journey, I asked him for advice and he told me “always remember that you are treating a person, not the disease and that will make you one of the best in your field.” I always carried this with me but it was not until my medical surgical 1 clinical experience that it made an impact in my spiritual life.

I had the privilege of taking care of the same patient for 5 weeks. The first time I met him he was A&O x1 to person. I introduced myself to him, he looked into my eyes and smiled. His gaze made me wonder who he was and what his life was like before becoming ill. He had several complications - heart failure, history of multiple strokes, and dementia, amongst other things. He was taking over 15 medications daily and was no longer considered to be acutely ill, thus, they were seeking clinical placement for him. Little by little, I got to know more of him. His niece came to visit him multiple times a day, she fed, bathed him, and spoke to him as if he was fully oriented. I could see the eyes of a hopeful person looking at her uncle and the wish that he could get better despite the medical reality his team had been trying to implement in her. I looked at her and I saw myself.

During this clinical experience, my uncle was in hospice at my mother’s house. He was battling stage 4 stomach cancer. I saw him on his bed with his health often declining but I was always hopeful for a miracle, too. I will never forget the call from the hospice team, hearing the voices of them telling my uncle that he was no longer a candidate for chemo, that there was nothing they could do but make him comfortable. I remember his voice asking them “how long

will I live for?” and getting frustrated with the answer of weeks to a few months - he responded, “but you aren’t God.” I found myself knowing what was to come but still holding on to this hope because it felt as if when I let that go, I would lose my faith of trusting God in the process of it all.

Coming from the outside perspective now of this patient, seeing his niece full of hope and filling herself with anger when the doctors told her that there is nothing else to do for him and her responding to them that they must do something different and that he will not leave the hospital. She was frustrated and would stare at her uncle. I thought to myself - when does it feel right enough to let go and trust? Where is the fine line between fighting for someone but also not allowing your heart to get in the way of your brain and what you know? His niece was a medical provider, and she wasn’t able to find that line. This shows us how far along our thoughts get clouded when we are dealing with a loved one and how much we rely on others to provide the best quality care. This showed me how much more important as a nurse it would be for me to fill that role. I firsthand saw how the education mattered for me to provide the best type of care to this patient but I also felt how it was equally important to be there spiritually.

During the fourth week, I noticed that the patient looked different. He was now A&O x 0. He only responded to painful stimuli. He had dark circles under his eyes, he looked restless, and I noticed he barely finished his breakfast, which was not his norm. I expressed my concern to my clinical instructor, and she agreed. She spoke to his nurse. His nurse was a floater and wasn’t familiar with the patient - she said that due to his dementia, this is what was to be expected. Something in me didn’t sit right. I didn’t question her, as she was a knowledgeable nurse, but I also continued to stare into his eyes, who were now blank. I am not sure what his religion was, but I took his hand and prayed for him alone and silently in the room - I did not want to risk

getting in trouble. He held me tightly as I did this and it felt like he felt what I had prayed for. The week after, was my last week at clinical. During that week, they had been running multiple tests on him. He was febrile and they suspected that he was septic. He had a Stage 3 pressure ulcer that they were swabbing. The doctors explained that they were talking to the patient's family about making him DNI/ DNR. The way they spoke of him, seemed like they had lost all hope, and maybe they were right based on their medical judgment. But I also overheard them say that he just continued taking up space and raising his medical bill. This experience made me look at the reality that working in medicine isn't just about helping people and many times that is not what's in the best interest. The reality is that medicine is also a business, insurances are also in for the business. This was much more reason to pray for his patient. That our divine healer is the one who takes care of him and that he also guides those in his care to do what is in the best interest of the patient.

This experience had spiritual meaning in my life. As a Christian going to a Christian school, i thought that it just meant that I will be the one being filled with Christ to go in with that spirit in taking care of my patients. However, it also means that we can transfer our love for Jesus into our patients, and believe that he will take care of our patients because he is the divine healer. I left that clinical day sad because I didn't know what would happen next. Every week since the week I began to take care of him, I was always relieved to see him still threw when I came back. But, the next week, I wouldn't be there so I did not know what would happen. I took one last walk into the unit. I looked at him from outside his door and just felt in my heart that whatever happened, it would happen in Jesus' hands. This made an impact on my nursing care because I was able to feel what it was like to take care of someone on both an educational and spiritual level. Sometimes I questioned myself if I was too emotional because of my uncle,

however, I would have loved for a nurse to go in and pray for him while he was under their care. For him to feel they want him to get better too in every aspect of his health. I am thankful to have known what I could of this patient and for making me feel so passionate. I am thankful for the experiences that I have had to encounter that will make me the nurse that I always hoped would have been there for my uncle.