

As a Practitioner, Treat Nurses as Good Instructors

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When I was an intern, senior physicians often advised me to learn from nurses. They said that nurses are the front line health care professionals, and the first ones to interact with patients; they know first-hand medical needs of the patients, Furthermore, nurses are the first ones to contact patients' family members. These and many more clinical experiences could not be found in textbooks or the internet. Therefore, if young physicians could get along well with the experienced nurses, they could handle patients and their families much easier.

Learned from the lessons of the seniors, I devoted more time interacting with nurses as a resident doctor. During that period of time, I met a girl specialized in neurosurgery nursing. We were happily married later. In our family,



she always makes better decisions in dealing with children and many household chores. She is the ‘Teacher’ of the family. Even until now, we often discuss patient care and exchange lessons learned in our jobs. These kinds of exchanges not only give me the appreciation towards the nursing profession, it also reminds me to support, encourage and praise our nurses. In many occasions, the nurses even surprised me with their innovative thinking.

As I moved up to become an attending physician, I established a habit of consulting my nursing staff before I step into the hospital ward. I would discuss the condition of my patient with the nurses and listen to their opinions and ask for their plan and suggestions. Also, I would chat with the family members of the patients, telling them to relax.

Couple years ago, I was in Boston (USA) for advanced study of neurosurgery for two years. One day, in the middle of the night, I experienced acute abdominal pain. The emergency room doctor diagnosed my condition as acute appendicitis that requires immediate surgery.

When I returned to the hospital room after the surgery, my wife kept telling me that she was so nervous while waiting, in the middle of the night, to hear the result of my operation. She was helplessly enduring every long passing minute. When the surgeon, accompanied by a nurse, finally appeared and informed her that the operation was successful and everything was fine. She suddenly realized how important it is for the physician and nurse to directly communicate with the patient’s family.

The next morning, a nurse came to ask me about my medical history. Suddenly, she changed the subject and asked me if this was the first time I stayed in a foreign land. She asked me if I was under a lot of pressure this first two months in Boston. I was surprised that she was so concerned about my mental condition. As a medical doctor, I have never realized that pressure and stress are closely related to a patient’s physical condition. To be honest, that was the first time staying in a foreign country. In addition, self-expectation of my advanced study was very high. Therefore, I was under tremendous pressure during the first two months in Boston. I was so relaxed for the way this nurse chatted with me, I felt like she is a Bodhisattva, or an angel. This experience reinforced my thinking that nurses are not only teachers of medical education but also teachers of mental health education. Like a miracle, since that talk with the nurse, I started to adopt the local life style.

The senior physicians in the hospital always remind the young doctors to learn from their patients. This is because the patients provide their pain and sufferings to the doctors to gain experience. Nursing, of course, is an important link in the medical profession. From my own experience in my education and my daily lives, I found that if we can “treat nurses as good instructors”, listen to their opinions, and accept their suggestions then we can build a perfect medical team to serve our patients and their families. I think this attitude is the key to internationalize the Tzu Chi Medical Mission to serve more patients.

Dr. Tsai Sheng-Tzung shares his personal experience – nurses are teachers of medical practitioners, are important link of medical profession. Photo shows senior nurses of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital demonstrate their clinical skill to the intern physicians.

