



PLEASE LISTEN TO ME, DEAR HEAD NURSE

# Patients Moved Me to Become a Better Nurse



Words could not describe the emotional impact and impression I experienced during my nursing internship at the hospice ward. After graduation, my first choice was to work at the hospice ward when I interviewed at the Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital. However, I was assigned to the oncology department where I was adapting to the clinical load while trying to find my way back to the hospice ward that I had always longed for. It was not until recently that I discovered that life could be taken from any room at the hospital. It is up to me to be prepared to provide for palliative care.

### **Hard Work Was Futile; I Only Wanted to Escape Reality**

About half a year working there, I was caring for an elderly woman suffering from end stage lymphoma. I watched her, as someone who could joke and laugh with the nursing staff, as her condition took a sudden turn for the worse, despite my diligent care in attending to her medication, new regiment, and blood infusions. I felt like a robot repeating the same chores daily and watched the patient slowly withered away before my eyes. I hated going to work, started to doubt my professional abilities and was so emotional that I wanted to quit.

I ran into the head nurse's office and informed Head Nurse Hsu Chi-Chen (now Nursing Dept. supervisor), "Head Nurse, I don't think I can continue to care for this patient! I feel so stressed. I would like to have someone else care for her instead." Head Nurse Hsu Chi-Chen told me that I should not let this defeat me. The more challenging the case is, the more I would learn from it. She also asked then senior nurse Chiang Feng-Yin (now Head Nurse) to be my mentor.

### **Understand the Inevitable, Carry Out the Nursing Responsibilities**

Senior Nurse Feng-Yin would discuss the patient's health status with me. She also volunteered to stay behind after work to help me research disease progression and how best to care for patients suffering from such illness. She literally and figuratively held my hands while I do my rounds. Because of that, I finally felt that I was more than a robot. I came to peace with the fact that there would be times when the medical treatment was not enough, and life would still come to an end. Under her guidance, I learned how to carry out my responsibilities professionally. When I heard praises from the patient's family, it further boosted my confidence.

The morning when the elderly patient passed away, I was agitated. It was Senior Nurse Feng-Yin who practiced palliative care to guide the family members on how to



complete the “Four Expressions of Life” - Express your Appreciation, Express your Love, Express your Repentance and Bid your Farewell. She showed me how to care for the patient cadaver with respect so that there was no regret about life versus death. I frequently reflect upon this experience in the middle of the night and wished that I could have done more for the patient at the time. Finally, I decided that it was time to enrich myself professionally.

### **Enrichment in Palliative Care; Appreciation of Support**

I have seen other senior nurses taking classes to accrue nursing credits and enhance their knowledge. I wanted to follow their footsteps. After two years working at the ward, I approached Head Nurse Hsu, “Head Nurse, I was thinking about my development in the future. When I was caring for patients in oncology, I felt that I wanted to do more for them. I felt I didn’t have enough experience...” I brought up my concerns and suggested the idea to enroll palliative care classes for continuing education. I was surprised that Head Nurse Hsu agreed to my idea without hesitation and even recommended some additional resources.

Then the first thing that came to my mind was to invite Senior Nurse Feng-Yin to classes. I figured if I have her as a partner, I would have less trouble passing the courses. To be certified as a palliative nurse, one must enroll beginning, intermediate and advanced classes and intern for five days at an outside hospital. In addition, forty extra credits must be accrued before one can qualify for the interview. I am grateful to Senior Nurse Feng-Yin for changing her vacation schedule so that we can be in the same classes and internship together.

### **Touched the Inner Most Soft Spot; Accepting the Beauty of Nursing**

After a series of courses, I encountered a lady who was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. From the minute she was hospitalized, she had been hopeless, anxious, and scared of death with the uncertainty about death. In our first interaction, she hugged me and cried. I knew that it was time to “activate” my nursing skills. I established a good rapport with her and convinced her to cooperate with medical treatment. The most memorable incident was the brief lucid moment before her death. She held my hands and thanked me for taking care of her during her last moments. That struck a chord in my heart and I vowed that I would be a nurse for the rest of my life! Soon, she passed away. This time, I was no longer depressed. I walked the family members through the final four expressions of life, showed them



**Although newcomer Chang Pei-Yu (middle) demonstrates high interest in palliative care, she is unable to face death. Under the mentorship and guidance of Senior Nurse Chiang Feng-Yin (left) and others, she can now handle clinical work and is capable of training new nurses.**

how to care for her body so that the patient can complete her life journey with dignity. It was not as hard as I thought it would be if I was willing to take the first step.

I have been working at the hospital for almost five years. I have been able to apply relevant palliative care and techniques when I encounter terminally ill patients in the hospice ward. I am now able to mentor new nurses or interns with proper values



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so that they are prepared for their jobs. Through my interaction with them, I also learned valuable lessons and attained a sense of accomplishment. I become more confident and content with work. Senior Nurse Feng-Yin, now Head Nurse Feng-Yin, I want you to know: "Thank you for letting me grow with you and helping me understand that palliative care is not just waiting for death. Palliative care can also be practiced at places such as the oncology ward. Even general hospital ward patients would benefit from the clinical practice of palliative care. This means that I should improve myself regularly. Thank you for taking the classes with me so that we could grow our knowledge together. Let's hope we can pass the certified palliative nursing exam so we can both work at 9B ward together."

