

A 60th Birthday with a Pot of Porridge

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“Ah-chang (head nurse)...” When some colleagues are stuck and needing help, usually I hear this flighty words for help.

Not surprisingly, the younger nurse asked, “Ah-chang, we have trouble giving injection to a patient. We tried several times and couldn’t do it. Can you help us?”

When I got there, I realized that the young nurse needed help with a patient whose hands and legs were cuffed, and tattoos are all over his body. At the moment, the guy saw the stripe on my nurse hat and said, “I see you are the head nurse, I am sure you are the best and I hope you can do the injection successfully.”

Although I had done many veins injections, finding veins on his arm full of tattoos was difficult. I felt very nervous, because he looked frightening with two police officers next to him. Luckily, only one try, I was able to put the needle through. Because of this, we developed a heartwarming story afterward.

After this shot, during the routine morning rounds, this fellow was very warm and friendly. As soon as I stepped into the room, he would be the loudest one to greet me.

The day before the next intravenous needle, the big brother repeated his request, “Ah-chang, are you working tomorrow? I will have to trouble you again.” When I was attending the needling task, occasionally I would see the





attending physicians asking him if he had any more questions. He always asked the same question, “Can I leave the hospital on the 12th?” It’s like a recording that played daily.

Again when I was helping this brother with intravenous needle, the attending physician was making a round. I couldn’t help and asked, “Why do you want to leave the hospital on the 12th?” Because that date was his birthday. The big brother said helplessly, “I have had lung cancer for 13 years. I finally made it to 60 years old. I don’t want to spend my birthday in the hospital. Even if I can’t leave the hospital on that day, I would leave the hospital on my own and return to the hospital the next day....”

It’s a tradition that 60 years is an important cycle. It’s one perfect circle in life and a new start. A cancer patient has to go through so many therapies to reach this day. No wonder he wished to leave the hospital on that day. After discussion with the attending physician, the big brother finally was able to leave the hospital the day before his birthday. Since he was still serving jail time, even if he left the hospital he would go back to jail. How would he celebrate his long anticipated birthday?

Therefore, I decided to hold a birthday party for this big brother.

When he heard this news, he was very happy like my kindergarten daughter who was expecting her birthday. Although he didn’t say anything, his face showed his pleasant feeling. When we discussed the flavor of the cake, the big brother who had went through so much showed the anticipated and bashful expression and said, “Any flavor is fine!”



Finally, the day of his discharge, we bought a super big cake with his favorite soft drink. During the morning round, we noticed that he had already changed clothes, with spirit and energy waiting for us. We helped him with a special birthday hat and sang a happy birthday song to him. He ate 2 big pieces of cakes and shared his happy spirit with other patients. From his facial expression, we could feel his satisfaction and happiness.

After the big brother left the hospital, he also left the jail. One day, he came back for follow-up, he came to our nurse station to say hello. He also brought the porridge cooked by him to thank us. He just wanted to thank us for celebrating his birthday. I still remember the white porridge; it contains his appreciation and gratitude. It's such a warm feeling.

I really wanted to thank my colleagues in my unit. When I made this suggestion, they all warmly supported the idea and willing to help out. No one complained about the work. Those who were not on duty also came to help. With this experience, not only we touched the patients' heart, we practiced professionalism with a caring heart. We are like white angels helping patients to fulfill their wishes.

I have been in nursing for 15 years. I found out the word "old" has many different meanings. It's not about age, it means old friends and comrades. These patients probably were with me since I started this career. Patients come and go, and we don't know whether we will see again because diseases run its own course.

Everyone has experienced sickness, and realizes how painful it is. To a person suffering, if only we can spend a little time to help their wishes and dreams come true, it will be the happiest memory during the journey of their life.