



PLEASE LISTEN TO ME, DEAR HEAD NURSE

# LEARN TO LET GO



## **Chang Yu-Fang, Surgical Intensive Care RN, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital**

In 2015, after graduation from Chung Jen Junior College of Nursing, Health Science and Management, I started working at the Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital. For a new college graduate, I was scared of the unfamiliar environment, especially when intensive care's nurse to patient ratio was 1:2 or 1:3. At the end of every shift, I felt drained and exhausted. Fortunately, with the encouragement of many senior nursing staff, I slowly adjusted. Through caring for the patients, I was also assured of my initial intent to provide help to those who need care!

### **Original Intention Carried Me Through Frustration**

Soon after I started working at the intensive care unit, I encountered an older gentleman on a ventilator who was repeatedly hitting the side of his bed. "Dong, Dong, Dong", the sound echoed through the room. I was changing the dressing of a patient across from him. "Mr., please wait for me, I will be right over", I responded quickly. Before I had a chance to tend to his needs, visiting hours began. When the patient's family found a note "The nurse ignored me", they demanded to see his nurse. Without giving me any time to explain, they scolded me and interrogated: "My husband said you ignored him!" No matter what I said after that, the family members continued to chastise!

Frustrated, I walked over to the nurse station and told the senior nurse how I was wrongfully accused: "I was doing dressing change. I did not ignore him! The patient was still angry because he thought I did not address his issue immediately. That was not what I did!"

I remember during the last year of middle school, I contemplated between high school and technical school. My Aunt, who was a nurse, advised me, "If you go to nursing school, you will have job security." Mom also agreed but dad opposed the idea. Dad was working at a police station near our house in Jia Yi New Harbor. My childhood memory of him was always directing traffic or dealing with traffic accidents. Dad did not want me to have a job with a schedule like his in which the hours are irregular and can affect personal life. Hence, he had never been supportive of my desire to become a nurse.

Little did he know that I wanted to be a nurse ever since I was in elementary school. One day, I was in fifth grade, I brought my little brother and sister to play in the park. My sister was excited to see my dad working nearby and wanted him to carry her home. When we were about to arrive at the house, dad suddenly leaned against the wall and screamed, "Hurry, call your mom!" By the time mom came to assist, dad was already unconscious from a heart attack. During his one-month hospitalization,



the nurses' kindness and love touched me. It was then I told myself that I would apply to nursing school as my first choice on my high school application. I was inspired to care for patients with severe illness and to help others like my dad.

When I was scolded by the family members of the elder patient, I felt frustrated. However, after some reflection I said to myself: "Wasn't my wish to help others? Under the circumstances, his family members only knew the information at hand. If I was his family members, I would be furious too!" A close friend also comforted me: "Do not ask for return. If you get blamed by the family members, just thank them." When I thought of the proverb "Happiness is to give without expecting return", I felt a great sense of relief.

### **Loving Care Earns Response**

In 2016, a young patient named "Xiao Bo" was admitted to the emergency room (ER) from a serious car accident. He was severely injured from the chest down to his legs, including internal bleeding. After treatment at the ER, the hospital staff finally stabilized him. Along with three other nurses, we oversaw his wounds dressing. I was in shock when I lifted the gauze and saw his exposed intestines and bones of the legs. "Isn't this something you only see in medical text books?"

At that moment, I felt so helpless. Before dressing change the four of us gingerly turned him over to clean. I held on to his head and chest to protect the wounds. During dressing change, even with some local anesthetics, we still saw Xiao Bo cringe with tears in his eye from the pain! After dressing change, I whispered to him: "I am sorry about that, but it's over now. We know you are suffering!" The pain I saw from his eyes lingered in my mind long after the procedure.

After multiple skin grafts and a gradual reduction of sedatives, Xiao Bo was becoming more alert. His family also showed signs of delight from the earlier sadness and cries. It seemed that things were turning around until I heard from other senior staff: "Although he is more aware of the surrounding, he refuses to listen to music or watch movies that his family brought him. He always stares at the ceiling and never responds to us. He even withdraws all of his savings to give to his family members." Even though we saved his life but he no longer wanted anything in life and showing signs of depression. There is a saying, "To cure one's body is to cure one's mind". So what else can I do for Xiao Bo?

Therefore, once I clocked in every day, I would visit him to say: "Hello! Good Morning. How are you feeling today?" During my break, I would visit and greet him with: "Hi, Xiao Bo, I am here! Look, the weather is gorgeous!" Unfortunately, no matter



**The Head Nurse and senior nurses reminded Chang Yu-Fang to self-adjust when experiencing death in the ICU where one may be emotionally attached.**

what I said, Xiao Bo always just stared out the window and ignored me. Occasionally, I might get him to shake his head - a sign of refusal. Many times, I was going to give up but when I thought of the pain he was going through, I was determined to show him I cared. At the end, visiting him turned into my daily chores!

One day, he needed some additional debridement procedures. A senior nursing staff informed Xiao Bo that we were going to the operating room in a bit. While lying on his bed, Xiao Bo started to shake his head violently and refused the procedure, then continued to stare at the ceiling with a sad face. I went over and touched his head gently: "Xiao Bo, don't be scared. I know you can get through this. After your procedure, you will be back at the ICU and we will be there with you together, okay?" Xiao Bo finally nodded his head and everyone let out a sigh of relief.

After Xiao Bo returned to the ICU after the operation, I asked him in the morning when I was changing his dressing: "Hi, good morning, Xiao Bo! Are you okay?" He nodded his head, gave me a smile and gestured a thumbs-up to show he was alright! "Are you saying hi to me?" He nodded his head again. "Can you make something even sillier? Like put a "victory" next to your eye!" Surprisingly, he obliged and I could hear a faint giggle through his breathing tube. This image brought tears to my eyes. For the longest time, Xiao Bo never responded to anything but now he finally turned around and responded enthusiastically. How could that not touch anyone's heart?



### **Spread Love Through Stories**

When Xiao Bo received the news that he would never walk again, he went from denial to acceptance. During his dressing change, he wrote on paper: “One week? One month? Half year?” “Senior nurse responded that the wound is quite large, may take a half year to a year before you can go home.” Hearing that, he felt hopeless and gestured me to leave!

To encourage him, I went to the store and bought some drawing papers to make a small bindery cards. I saw how excited he was when turning the pages so I teased him: “Are you so touched that you are about to cry?” He looked up with tears in his eyes and nodded. “My goodness, are you so touched that you are about to shed a gallon of tears!” We both started to crack up. Later I heard from other senior staff that Xiao Bo would not let go of those cards even during dressing changes. That meant a lot to me.

On my day off on Sunday, I would still visit Xiao Bo. He would write: “Did you not go out?” I replied, “I need to complete reports and attend some meetings at the hospital so I can’t go out to play.” Xiao Bo then pointed at him and me. “What are

you trying to say, I don't get it." He then wrote, "You are like my little sister. When I am better, let's go out together!" "Of course, but... since when did I become your little sister?" I questioned. "Was it when I gave you the pink cards?" Xiao Bo nodded with a smile.

In the intensive care unit, Xiao Bo could only stare at the clock every day. Concerned that he might develop "ICU Syndrome", I decided to make a calendar to provide him with some sense of time orientation. I bought a notebook, used my after-work hours and created a daily calendar. On each page, I included a phrase of Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si Aphorism as encouragement. I hoped that this would provide Xiao Bo some hope and anticipation for his future. Little did I know that when I delivered the calendar the next day, he would no longer be able to wake up?

After reviewing his medical report, I was shocked to discover that he suffered a stroke due to bacterial infection. Despite the effort from our medical team, they could not resuscitate him! It was difficult to accept the facts. With tears, I wrote on the calendar: "Xiao Bo, please get well soon. Didn't you say that you would take me out to play? I am here for you!" I stopped by his bedside whenever I could to pray for him!

One night during my swing shift, a senior nurse told me: "I wanted to advise that you have to be prepared. There will be many cases like this in your career. You have to learn to let go otherwise it will affect your work." After hearing that, I broke down in tears and realized that I had grown emotionally attached to Xiao Bo and treated him like my brother. I was affected by his emotional states. Looking at the message board on the wall filled with blessings and prayers from others, I was praying for a miracle.

On August 6th, when I was still sleeping, a senior staff messaged me: "Xiao Bo had left. Please don't cry. This may be a relief for him!" Still in denial, I called to verify the news and the heart-broken facts. When I arrived at the ICU, I saw that Xiao Bo's tubing had been removed. I held his cold hand, "I come to see you. Are you going to take me out? Although you can't really be my brother in this life, you must be my brother in the next life. Are you listening? You better not let me down again!" When I thought of how he waved at me to now a dead body... Xiao Bo is really gone!

The senior nurse comforted me: "I know you have gone beyond your duty for Xiao Bo. You used your own time to make him cards, a calendar, encouragement and support during his last moments. He is well loved. You are his angel!" After experiencing his death, I had a deeper level of appreciation for nursing. "Yes, I was helping him!" When my dad was in the ICU, the nurses not only cared for his physical health, they also tended to his psychological state. I shall exemplify this story to realize the spirit of "Saving life, guarding health and love", to help more people.