

The Smile Is a Natural Antidote

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One day on a whim, I decided to flip through my kindergarten yearbook. Underneath the box “My dream job”, I had written two words in large font - “A nurse”, I wanted to be a nurse. Now that I think about it, I remember when my kindergarten teacher asked us about our dream jobs, I had absolutely no clue and had just responded with the same thing as the person before me. I had long forgotten about my random answer, but funnily enough, I did become a nurse.

As a nurse, I find myself entwined in all sorts of stories just like those dramas on TV, experiencing emotions on every end of the spectrum: “Joy, Anger, Sadness, and Happiness.” During the good times, I feel absolutely blessed to work in a hospital. In bad times, the hospital becomes a strong magnet of negative energy. I have a love-hate relationship on this job, but I am lucky to be able to pursue this career, as it taught me many things that do not exist in textbooks.

If I don’t smile, people think I am seething with anger, so I constantly remind



myself to use my “Four Treasures”. “The smiling face”: bringing more comfort to everyone around, “the sweet mouth”: speaking positively to build meaningful relationships, “the flexible waist”: putting others ahead of oneself, “the fast limbs”: utilizing each second to the maximum. I learned these from volunteers and patients, and they have become useful tips for me when on shift and also for me when trying to bond with others.

When I was working in the neurosurgery ward, changing the medicine for patients with centipede-like incisions on their scalp was everyday business. Aunt Chen was admitted into the ward after a cerebral hemorrhage from a car accident. Fortunately, she was admitted early and could function like a normal human being after surgery. However, Aunt Chen cared quite a lot about her appearance, so she was always in a prickly mood after seeing her hair gone, a centipede-like cut on her head, and feeling the pain of the incision. After preparing my “four treasures”, I stepped in and introduced myself. With every change of medicine, I would explain patiently, “Every staple must be cleaned properly to avoid infections and help the incision heal





properly. The hair will also regrow better. The pain of the incision is inevitable, but if I cause you too much pain, you can tell me and I can be more gentle. In order for you to become beautiful again, more time spent healing will only help you.” Slowly, Aunt Chen let down her guard and began to trust us with a smile.

Aunt Chen could even start joking after a while, “You always seem like you’re performing some sort of archaeological discovery on my brain, bringing out the small swabs, then the large swabs, then the gauze. It’s

like my head is worth a large fortune or something.” This created a roar of laughter in the room.

As the proverb says, “Laughing is, and will always be, the best form of therapy.” It sounds like a magic tonic that does not exist, but laughter is definitely a natural antidote for illnesses and negativity. It can mitigate pain, solve anxiety, and improve healing without any side effects.

Now, I bring the “four treasures” to the Eastern Medicine ward. Most of the patients there are in the middle of recovering and are there to speed up recovery. Aunt Li, in particular, was recovering from a cerebral stroke. I remember her clearly because she was a “dark horse”. Why so? When Aunt Li was first admitted, she was on a nasogastric feeding tube and tracheostomy tube. Aunt Li’s husband said that in the Western ward, the doctors said that Aunt Li would not recover and could only live off of other people’s support. However, he believed that she still had a chance, so he traversed many hills to bring her to Eastern treatment.

Rehabilitation was essential for recovery from a cerebral stroke, but Aunt Li always felt a bit uneasy during the sessions. As it turned out, like many patients, she was beginning to feel hopeless about her condition. A caretaker and I began to accompany Aunt Li with every step, just like teaching a child how to eat, walk, and go to the bathroom. Next, it was teaching how to breathe without the tube, encouraging every step of the way. Although it may seem like an easy task, it was an arduous mountain to climb for Aunt Li. Every time she felt exhausted, I and the caretaker would give her a massage.

When practicing walking, Aunt Li could not muster the courage to walk without a robot at first. I smiled and said, “Rest assured, the caretaker and I will not let you fall. You can treat us like the robots and bravely take that historic first step!” Aunt Li was then able to relax and take her first steps. Slowly, Aunt Li was off all tubes and could walk down the hall with the caretaker in one hand and a cane in the other.

One day, I ran into Aunt Li video calling her daughter and parents. The bright smile on Aunt Li’s face and the joy on the family members’ faces brought an indescribable happiness. In the words of Master Cheng Yen, “Love as medicine begets more self-love and less suffering.” Isn’t eliminating the pain of the ill what everyone aspires to achieve?