

The Soft Power of “Sputum” Department

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In a world filled with the warmth of humanity, we always hope for endless support and care when faced with illness in the family. In clinical reality, however, this is often a luxury we can only wish for. I often witness loneliness in hospital wards: patients lying alone, accompanied by foreign caregivers scrolling through their phones, while the easterly wind gently blows outside, echoing the isolation. Busy doctors can spend only a few moments by the bedside during daily rounds, whereas nurses, with their patience and warmth, become the guardians of the patients during their long eight-hour shifts.

Our director often reminds us to “treat our colleagues well,” because experienced doctors understand that it’s the nurses who help make each day run smoothly. In clinical practice, cases of fish bones stuck in throats are common. Although a small fishbone, it causes significant pain and discomfort. Doctors usually hold an endoscope in one hand and forceps in the other, but many times it is the nurse who courageously holds the patient’s tongue, allowing us to resolve the issue. In the otolaryngology department, I jokingly refer to it as the “Sputum Department” because we often change nasogastric and tracheostomy tubes, and perform



suctioning. These tedious yet crucial tasks are handled with expertise by our nursing team, whose support ensures successful treatment.

I still remember the night when I was a new resident. A patient had a severe nosebleed. I was fumbling, holding an endoscope in my left hand and a hemostatic tool in my right, trying to locate the bleeding source while dodging the spurting blood. The patient's family helplessly watched as I struggled. In that critical moment, a nurse appeared like a savior. Her assistance allowed



me to quickly regain control and successfully manage the emergency. In that moment, I felt a deep sense of gratitude for the brilliant, lifesaving support from that nurse on 9B. Her presence was crucial.

A year and a half ago, during the shadow of the pandemic, the world seemed enveloped in a fog of uncertainty. In the days without vaccines, people were terrified of the virus. I worked in a dedicated care unit for a month, and I still remember how I would only enter the isolation rooms fully geared up in

the morning and afternoon to change dressings and perform rapid testing. Meanwhile, nurses had to go in and out multiple times. They wore heavy isolation gowns, cumbersome headgear, and face shields. Each time they came out, they were breathless and drenched in sweat, reflecting the laborious effort. What impressed me deeply was that many of these nurses were mothers. They told me that during their time caring for patients in the specialized COVID unit, they couldn't dare go home and hug their children for fear of passing on the virus. They made sure to shower before entering their homes each day. Their families urged them to resign, but their sense of responsibility kept them at their posts. Their resilience was like the tip of an iceberg, hiding immense strength and tenderness.

Every step the nurse takes in the ward, every greeting ("Good morning, sir!"), and every gentle bandage change brings a bit of familiarity and courage to the patients, helping them face their illness without feeling alone. Nursing work often goes beyond the call of duty. Nurses not only have to deal with the complaints of family members and the demands of patients, but sometimes they also face unjust criticism. Whether it's being sprayed while suctioning, scolded while drawing blood, or criticized while changing diapers, nurses often face unfair treatment. Sometimes, I wonder, if I had a daughter, I wouldn't want her to endure such hardships. But I also know that the role of nurses in the medical team is indispensable. They are not only the primary caregivers but also the emotional comforters.

I don't like to overemphasize the greatness of healthcare professionals, but we can never overlook the team's contributions. During a patient's journey to recovery, what we can do is to provide tangible and intimate care. With our white coats and uniforms, a warm greeting or a gentle pat on the back can nourish a patient's soul, much like a fine wine aged over time. This is a lesson I learned from Tzu Chi and one of the warmest memories I cherish as a healthcare professional.

Today, as I walk into the procedure room and see the neatly arranged nasal speculums and forceps, I smile. It's the meticulous work of the nurses, signaling another smooth night ahead. By the time I leave, dusk has already fallen over Highway 74. That scenery always reminds me that no matter how tired we are today, tomorrow we will still stand strong in our white coats and uniforms, continuing this worthwhile work.