

CLINICAL CONNECTION

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Caring begins within

CMS and numerous speakers discuss patient centered care, the patient experience and the importance of both. Most, if not all care providers believe that patients should be at the center of all that we do, and that each patient deserves an outstanding experience while they entrust their precious lives to us. Who could possibly disagree with that hypothesis? Certainly those of us who chose the noble health care professions understand that what we do is a calling and not just a job. Oftentimes, however, our laser focus is on “getting things done” versus the person-side of providing care due to conflicting demands placed upon careers. This writer is as guilty as the next of not personalizing care.

A personal story comes to mind when thinking about this topic. As a young nurse, both chronologically and as a relatively new nurse in the Emergency Department of a major medical center, one of the patients I was assigned to was a man with an active GI bleed. At that time, the major treatment for a GI bleed was to lavage the patient with ice water using a 50 cc syringe to clear. Thankfully, there are newer treatment methodologies. Two adjuncts to this story are that I preferred working the evening shift, and my mother worked in the same medical center in another department, and would stop to see me every time our schedules coincided. On this particular evening while I was lavaging this patient, I heard my mother’s characteristic walk coming down the hall, and her voice asking the charge nurse where I was. Once she got her answer, all I kept thinking was oh no, here we go! I heard the walk, and then the curtain around the bed was pulled back, and there she was. By the way, my mother is not a



nurse. She spoke to the patient, and asked me to come out of the room. My explanation of being a little busy did not suffice, and she asked the patient if he would give her a minute with me. Poor man, what could he say with an N/G tube in but okay. Once outside of the room, my mother said to me, "Why weren't you talking to that man when you're doing what you're doing? He's a person who is probably frightened. Did you even tell him why you were doing what you are doing?" I will never forget those words and that lesson.

My hope is that this story resonates with you as the reader, and that you share my story with those who may be more concerned with "getting things done" instead of seeing the person on a gurney or in a bed as a person who is likely frightened and uncertain about what is happening to them. And don't forget family members because they need the same care as the patient; sometimes they need more.

"In life you can never be too kind or too fair; everyone you meet is carrying a heavy load. When you go through your day expressing kindness and courtesy to all you meet, you leave behind a feeling of warmth and good cheer, and you help alleviate the burdens everyone is struggling with."

— *Brian Tracy* —

Recently, a letter was written by a husband to the NY Times who articulated the importance of what care providers do to ease the angst that a loved one is going through when a crisis occurs. This is another example of the importance of caring that I would like to share with you. You may want a tissue handy when reading his letter.

A Letter to the Doctors and Nurses Who Cared for My Wife

The New York Times [Voices](#)
By PETER DeMARCO OCT. 6, 2016

After his 34-year-old wife suffered a devastating asthma attack and later died, the Boston writer Peter DeMarco wrote the following letter to the intensive care unit staff of CHA Cambridge Hospital who cared for her and helped him cope.



As I begin to tell my friends and family about the seven days you treated my wife, Laura Levis, in what turned out to be the last days of her young life, they stop me at about the 15th name that I recall. The list includes the doctors, nurses, respiratory specialists, social workers, even cleaning staff members who cared for her.

“How do you remember any of their names?” they ask.

How could I not, I respond.

Every single one of you treated Laura with such professionalism, and kindness, and dignity as she lay unconscious. When she needed shots, you apologized that it was going to hurt a little, whether or not she could hear. When you listened to her heart and lungs through your stethoscopes, and her gown began to slip, you pulled it up to respectfully cover her. You spread a blanket, not only when her body temperature needed regulating, but also when the room was just a little cold, and you thought she'd sleep more comfortably that way.

You cared so greatly for her parents, helping them climb into the room's awkward recliner, fetching them fresh water almost by the hour, and by answering every one of their medical questions with incredible patience. My father-in-law, a doctor himself as you learned, felt he was involved in her care. I can't tell you how important that was to him.

Then, there was how you treated me. How would I have found the strength to have made it through that week without you?

How many times did you walk into the room to find me sobbing, my head down, resting on her hand, and quietly go about your task, as if willing yourselves invisible? How many times did you help me set up the recliner as close as possible to her bedside, crawling into the mess of wires and tubes around her bed in order to swing her forward just a few feet?

How many times did you check in on me to see whether I needed anything, from food to drink, fresh clothes to a hot shower, or to see whether I needed a better explanation of a medical procedure, or just someone to talk to?

How many times did you hug me and console me when I fell to pieces, or ask about Laura's life and the person she was, taking the time to look at her photos or read the things I'd written about her? How many times did you deliver bad news with compassionate words, and sadness in your eyes?

When I needed to use a computer for an emergency email, you made it happen. When I smuggled in a very special visitor, our tuxedo cat, Cola, for one final lick of Laura's face, you "didn't see a thing."

And one special evening, you gave me full control to usher into the I.C.U. more than 50 people in Laura's life, from friends to co-workers to college alums to family members. It was an outpouring of love that included guitar playing and opera singing and dancing and new revelations to me about just how deeply my wife touched people. It was the last great night of our marriage together, for both of us, and it wouldn't have happened without your support.

There is another moment — actually, a single hour — that I will never forget.

On the final day, as we waited for Laura's organ donor surgery, all I wanted was to be alone with her. But family and friends kept coming to say their goodbyes, and the clock ticked away. About 4 p.m., finally, everyone had gone, and I was emotionally and physically exhausted, in need of a nap. So I asked her nurses, Donna and Jen, if they could help me set up the recliner, which was so uncomfortable, but all I had, next to Laura again. They had a better idea.

They asked me to leave the room for a moment, and when I returned, they had shifted Laura to the right side of her bed, leaving just enough room for me to crawl in with her one last time. I asked if they could give us one hour without a single interruption, and they nodded, closing the curtains and the doors, and shutting off the lights.

I nestled my body against hers. She looked so beautiful, and I told her so, stroking her hair and face. Pulling her gown down slightly, I kissed her breasts, and laid my head on her chest, feeling it rise and fall with each breath, her heartbeat in my ear. It was

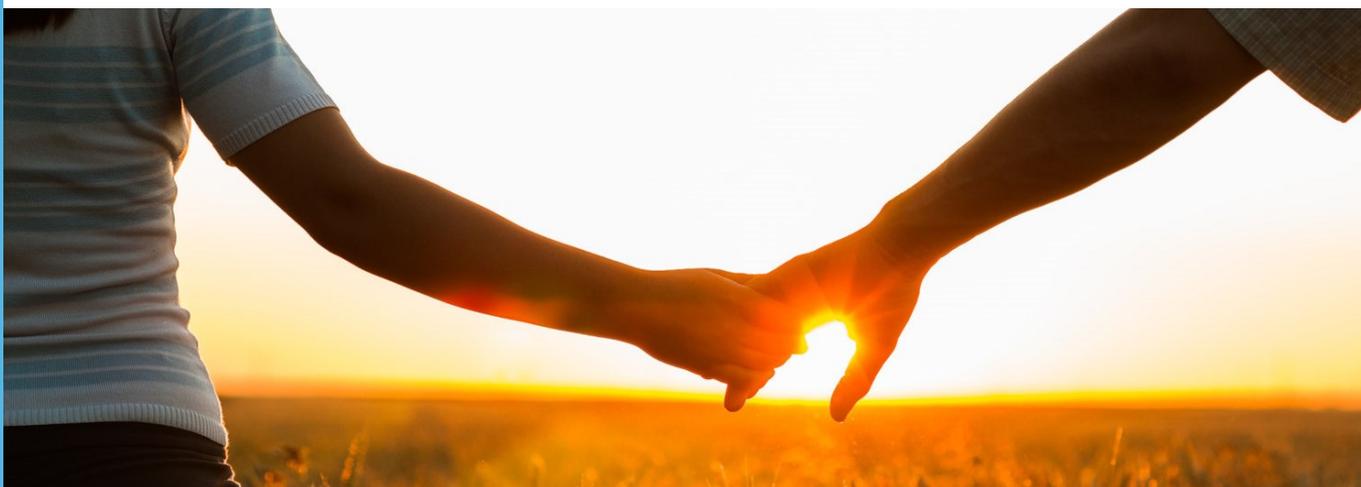
our last tender moment as a husband and a wife, and it was more natural and pure and comforting than anything I've ever felt. And then I fell asleep.

I will remember that last hour together for the rest of my life. It was a gift beyond gifts, and I have Donna and Jen to thank for it.

Really, I have all of you to thank for it.

With my eternal gratitude and love,

Peter DeMarco



MESSAGE

Finding the balance between caring, relationship building and technical competency can be challenging when providing care, however patients and families expect care providers to know how to start an IV and regulate a pump and change a dressing or transfer them to a chair without injury. What makes a patient experience optimal is finding out about the person's life, calling them by their desired name and not honey or sweetie, and showing the compassion that brought us to whatever aspect of care provision that we are involved with. There is clear evidence that those caring behaviors are what people remember, and what will cause them to return to your organization time and again because "those people really care about me."





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