



Following in Our Footsteps

Nursing is a profession that is worthy of our children

BY GENEVIÈVE M. CLAVREUL, RN, PH.D.

SO OFTEN WE READ SURVEYS, news articles, and other opinion pieces that cite how nurses are warning their children not to follow in their footsteps. The surveys contend that today's nursing environment is so caustic that no parent would want his or her child to pursue nursing as a career.

It is my belief that those who would convince their children that nursing is not a worthwhile and fulfilling profession are nurses who are themselves burned-out and in need of retirement from the profession, or who should reposition themselves into a secondary career.

Do not take this sentiment to mean that I see nursing through rose-colored glasses. Anyone who has read my

column will know that I am often the first to point out the deficiencies that define our profession. But I am also one to offer solutions and examples of the best our profession has to offer.

Nursing has always offered me more joy than sadness, more challenges than hardships, and more positives than negatives. When my oldest daughter contemplated nursing school, I suggested that she make sure she was choosing the profession for her sake and not mine, and that it might be wise to pursue her education in a university where her mother wasn't one of the instructors. Ultimately, she realized that nursing wasn't her passion, and chose to pursue a different educational

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path. On the other hand, there is my oldest son, an Army medic serving in Iraq. When he comes home from his second tour, I hope he makes good on his promise to challenge the state board (which is allowed in his home state) and go for RN licensure, as I believe he would be an asset to our profession.

It is often easy for nurses who think they have reached the end of what they can tolerate to become discouraged. There can be times that it seems as though our profession is more a curse than a blessing. However, in nursing, it is inevitable that fate reminds us of the unique role we play, not only in the lives of our patients, but in the lives of their families, and our own families as well.

Many of my readers may know by now that I am the mother of four grown children. It was during their childhood that I spent most of my hours working as either a bedside nurse or in nursing management. My children often regale friends with stories of how having a nurse for a mom was sometimes a challenge, since they couldn't fake being sick like so many of their other school friends.

But their friends also didn't have a parent who could read an x-ray and see a broken wrist when the intern thought there was only a sprain, or take out stitches without ever having to go back to the doctor's office, or baste the perfect Thanksgiving turkey by using a large gauge needle and syringe to inject the juices deep into the turkey meat (long before Martha Stewart came on the scene). How many parents can do that?

I often amazed many a parent or family member at how my nursing knowledge and skills transcended my nursing career. For example, the skills I learned in the ER saved more than one of my children's beloved stuffed animals from the trash heap. I once saved my oldest son's (the ex-Green Beret now medic) treasured Curious George from certain amputation of his "banana holding arm" when I brought home a plaster of Paris casting kit (no fiberglass back then), and with a deft hand, fashioned a stuffed monkey-appropriate cast.

Nursing is a skill that comes in handy at the oddest moments. It was during my husband's last post transfer that we were once again moving our family of seven, which included my mother and two dogs, halfway

across the country, this time from Texas to Georgia. During this trip, tragedy struck in the form of discovering our English bulldog, Muggsie, struggling for breath in her travel crate.

It was Labor Day in Oklahoma City, and we were strangers in town. We didn't even know where to start to look for an animal hospital. Don't forget that the closest thing to cell phones back then was the CB radio. "Do something, honey," my husband pleaded. His request was echoed by my mother and the children.

Not sure what I could do to help, I took Muggsie out of her kennel, loosened her collar, opened her muzzle, and using a Canadian CPR mask, began to give her mask to mouth resuscitation. Though we lost Muggsie that day, my family never forgot how I used my skills to try and save her life. Suddenly, I was Super Mom, and I was placed firmly atop a pedestal.

There are times in all of our nursing careers when we might wonder, why did I choose this? Most of us will experience a lousy manager, an unpleasant coworker, or work in a hospital with a less than perfect environment, and be forced to endure an especially nasty patient.

Let me be clear, could our profession use a face lift or some significant changes? Yes, without a doubt. Nursing suffers from a deplorable lack of skilled management and from a dearth of leaders who don't work in the 'real world.' All too often it seems as though decisions that affect nursing seem to be made by everyone but those involved in the act of nursing.

Nonetheless, nursing, as the saying goes, is not just a job, it is an adventure. I feel that all the curveballs and hurdles that nursing may serve up pale in comparison to those moments that remind us what a unique and special career we have chosen. It is because of the best in nursing that I am inspired to be an outspoken advocate for my chosen profession. It is also why I hope our children follow in our footsteps. **W/N**



Genevieve M. Clavreul is a healthcare management consultant. She is an RN and has experience as a director of nursing and as a teacher of nursing management. She can be reached at: Solutions Outside the Box; PO Box 867, Pasadena, CA, 91102-867; gmc@solutionsoutsidethebox.net (626) 844-7812.

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