Showing Nurses The Respect They Deserve

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When I was in high school, my summer job involved waitressing at a local restaurant in my hometown in Wisconsin. While I admit, waitressing was *not* my forte—I was not all that good at it, nor was I fond of it—the job taught me a bit about dealing with people, especially people who are being waited on, or, in some sense, “cared for.”

For the most part, my customers were gracious and courteous. As long as I refilled their drinks when their glasses were emptied and ensured their food made it to the table hot and in a timely fashion, everyone was happy. Most customers understood that they were not my only table—especially when they saw me scurrying around to wait on five or six other groups—and appreciated that I would get to them as fast and as soon as I could.

Still, there were occasional customers who would come in and make me want to scream or cry—or both. They would be impatient, rude and some times just plain mean, even when everything about their service went well. They would then, of course, proceed to leave me the most minuscule tip possible. Even my 17-year-old self could tell that the root of these folks’ problem was often a lack of respect for me as their server.

Now that I’ve graduated out of the my waitressing days (thank goodness) into my current career as an editor, one of my favorite parts of the job is reading blogs written by health care professionals—surgeons, other doctors and nurses, mostly. I enjoy them because the blogs are not only often entertaining, but they also help me do my job better. They offer insight into what these professionals are thinking and feeling. They discuss relationships and experiences with patients (often after

changing names to maintain confidentiality). They describe cases gone well—and those gone not so well.

In particular, the blogs written by and about the roles of nurses in patients' care have drawn me in lately. I would never put waitressing in the same category as nursing (the level of responsibility differs drastically) but as I read these blogs I can't help but notice a similarity in the job experience of a nurse and that of my time as a waitress. That similarity is respect—or, at times, the lack of it.

In a blog post by "Dr. Grumpy," he discusses the vital role nurses play in the care of patients: "I started out in medicine in the mid-80s, volunteering at an ER," he writes. "And the biggest shock to me was learning how much of what happens in a hospital is nurse territory. Doctors will see you anywhere from 5 to 30 minutes a day, depending on how sick you are. And the rest is the nurses."

In another one of my favorite blogs, *Head Nurse*, the writer tells us about her discussion with a guy at the grocery store, and as a patient, he was unaware of the role the nurse played in this care: "We talked today about the time he spent in the hospital a few months ago," she writes. "'Those doctors saved my life, you know,' he said. I didn't want to tell him this, but it was probably the nurses in the ICU here at Littletown General that saved his life. I know the doctors who cared for him, and I know that they're not around that much. It's a dirty little secret of nursing: those handmaidens and helpmeets who take a subordinate role to the great Medical Deity are the ones directing your care."

Nurses are responsible for nearly every step of a patient's care. Without them, patients (and doctors, not to mention) wouldn't survive day to day in a hospital. Yet, their role in caring for patients and all they have to deal with in an average shift is often downplayed.

"They're the ones making sure you get your pills and checking that your vital signs aren't dropping," Dr. Grumpy writes. "They make sure you don't fall down and break something. If you start vomiting, doctors will run out of the room and the nurses will rush in. They change your wound dressings and start your IV line. They'll bring you a warm blanket. And clean disgusting things off you. Even if you're drunk. Or delirious. Or mean. And through all of this they try be friendly and positive. Even though you aren't their only sick patient."

He goes on to tell a story about a patient who talks to and treats a nurse disrespectfully, and as she continues to care for him, she politely tells him not to talk to her that way.

As Dr. Grumpy says, in no other job (including waitressing, might I add) would that be allowed to go on, but nurses handle it because they're tough. They have to be in order to do the job that they do. And for that, they deserve the utmost respect.

Are there times nurses are underappreciated? Can you point me to some great blogs written by doctors and nurses? Do you write on yourself? E-mail me at amanda.mcgowan@advantagemedia.com [1]

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