

The Moments That Drive Your Journey

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Nurses provide patients and their families with equal respect, care, and advocacy. However, there are moments with special patients that sink right into our hearts and keep us going. You know the ones! Those little moments you reflect on when the work feels overwhelming or when you don't think you can possibly make it through another crazy 12-hour hospital shift. Maybe a patient made your day and thanked you for going the extra mile. Or maybe they gave you a coloring book page they colored especially for you. Maybe the moment was so brief that no onlooker or passerby would realize it could ever mean something to you, but it did.

I am a sucker for kids in the first place, so I'm particularly vulnerable to these moments while working in pediatric oncology. A favorite moment I'd like to share involves a five-year-old who had a very aggressive leukemia. She went through numerous rounds of chemotherapy on different protocols and months of hospitalization at a time, but I rarely saw her without a smile on her face. In fact, she was usually singing songs from *Frozen* at the top of lungs and could be heard at the nurses' station. Sometimes I joined her, and sometimes I helped her with her *Frozen* sticker book or made funny faces with her and her sister. This little trooper was not from the United States and only spoke French, but, in my experience, language never seems to keep kids from bonding with the nursing staff or crawling into our hearts. Any patient education, of course, had to be done with an interpreter present, but I loved walking into her room at shift change and greeting her with the only French I knew, "Bonjour, ma amie!" It was just a small saying, but I

always hoped it gave her some sense of familiarity.

Patients of all ages and sizes have their own ways of dealing with cancer and its myriad of ugly challenges. My young patient had an adorable habit of insisting that someone—her mom or her nurse—rub her little bald head before she went to sleep every night. A comfort measure of sorts. Yes, she surely had the staff wrapped around her fingers.

One night, before she fell asleep, she smiled brightly and motioned for me to come closer. I thought, "What is she up to now? What is this princess going to sucker me into doing for her next?" But what she actually did was give me the biggest hug possible. She pulled me so close that we were literally cheek to cheek. I will never forget that moment or the feeling of my heart turning to complete mush! She gave me that amazing feeling that I am doing the work that I am meant to be doing.

I later realized another reason why it felt so significant to me. It was a very sweet gesture, but it was also meaningful because our work in nursing requires that we work physically close with our patients. We invade their spaces routinely with vitals and assessments and nasogastric tubes (really, the list goes on and on), but when the patients are the ones initiating or inviting you to share their space, even for such a small time, it can really mean the world.

Working in oncology is a blessing. If you are working in a research hospital, you are witnessing science evolve and probably doing your own part in administering experimental drugs. New ideas and collaboration with multiple different specialties are the foundation of everyday work life. We also get to be a part of some beautiful success stories.

However, oncology nursing is not without its headaches and heartaches. A team member calls in sick, and we run

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shorthanded for a shift. Or we end up at more codes than we'd ever expected to happen that day. Or sometimes our patients leave us all together for a greater glory. Sometimes they leave us as quickly as they come to us.

I wish I could conclude this story by telling you my courageous patient made it through treatment. It is with a heavy heart that I inform you, this beautiful, bubbly girl did not survive leukemia. However, I am very honored to be able to write about her and humbled to have known a spirit so sweet and so strong. She is one of my daily reminders to push on and keep being happy in whatever circumstance I find myself in life.

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