

REFLECTIONS

The "Reflections" column features human interest stories about life-changing experiences with patients or other nursing school experiences. Send your query letter to nsna@nsna.org att: Managing editor.

Bringing Your Own Flavor to Nursing

By David Horner, NSNA Secretary/Treasurer

After working hard in our studies at nursing school, passing several of the same subjects, learning through clinical experience, and preparing for the standardized NCLEX exams, we all hope to be nurses that make a difference. As students, many of us ask ourselves, what can I bring to the nursing profession? An obvious answer might be that we should bring an open mind with a willingness to continue to learn so that we provide competent care. We must also know when to seek the support of experienced nurses or mentors when we need help or assistance. A less obvious answer is that we should each bring our own uniqueness.

I was in my second semester at Golden West College (GWC) in Huntington Beach and felt as though I did not know very much at the time. One day, I was called into a patient's room and thought that a nurse wanted me to help reposition a patient. Instead, I was requested to assist the patient alone. I thought that this was strange since I was a student and this was not even one of my assigned clients. As it turns out, this gentleman felt that he would be more comfortable getting into his street clothes with my assistance by managing his Foley catheter. I put him at ease and I was able to assist. This may seem simple. But we should not underestimate the value of merely providing care in a way that only we are able to at any given time.

On another day, I was taking care of an elderly patient and upon assessment, I could see that my client was in need of oral care. This client had a tracheostomy and was physically unable to suction his own mouth. He was unable to speak and, while he could hear me, he only understood Vietnamese. When I attempted to communicate through calm hand gestures I learned why he was in need of oral suctioning; he bit down and did not allow me to suction his mouth. I had to step back and realize that, this time around, I was not the right person for the job.



David Horner with Breakthrough to Nursing® Director Kenya Haney at the MidYear Conference Opening Session in Reno, NV

I recruited the help of my classmate Bach-Bich Phi who knew the language and culture. When we returned to my patient's room, I now had someone with whom my patient could feel comfortable. Bic, as we called her at GWC, explained to the patient what we were planning to accomplish and kept him calm as we moistened, loosened and suctioned the secretions from his mouth. Bic brought her language and cultural awareness with her. Even though we were taught about cultural awareness in nursing school I could not have hoped to perform the suctioning necessary without Bic's help.

While we all have to learn the standardized information necessary to become nurses, I urge students to never forget who you are. Understand the value of making friends with people who are different from you. Be willing to share your uniqueness to the benefit of your patients and fellow nursing staff. Start today, by encouraging classmates in pre-requisite courses and in nursing classes to hang in there; they may have unique positive qualities to bring their own flavor to the bedside and assist you and your colleagues. ☺