

Making a Difference

In my young career in nursing I have realized that the true reward and challenge of nursing is being able to help each patient in some way, and to make each one of their very different lives better. In my second semester of clinical care, on a cancer floor I cared for a patient who made me realize the importance of the role of a good nurse and the way they can touch a patient's life.

I was told my patient was 42 and newly diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia. He was Latino, understood limited English, and had just begun chemotherapy the previous night. When I walked into the room he was sitting on the side of the bed, he looked tired and was staring out the window. I introduced myself as a student nurse and began to do my assessment. I couldn't help but think the man must be so scared after his diagnosis but appeared to be closed off. A physician came in to discuss treatment after chemo and the man would nod his understanding. I wondered how much he really understood. Throughout the morning I worked on communicating with the patient and explaining to him everything I was doing and why, it turned out the man had understood almost nothing about what the physicians had been telling him. Gradually, he expressed his fears and his concern for his family and his business. I was able to form a trusting connection with him despite his apprehension and our language barrier.

I assembled teaching information about AML and its treatments. I gathered handouts and even found a pamphlet on radical chemo and bone marrow transplant printed in Spanish. I also created a sheet about ways to prevent infection and bleeding based on pictures so he could understand. The next day I presented the information to the patient and his family. I spoke slowly and took my time. I answered his questions and

those of his wife. The man almost cried when I gave him the pamphlet I'd found in Spanish, he said it was 'good, now my brothers in Guatemala will understand the bone marrow transplant and won't be so scared'. I could see renewed hope and strength in their faces.

I told the patient about the "survivor program" where the patient is paired with a Spanish speaking cancer survivor that he could talk to. Although I didn't see him again after that day I found out his wife helped arrange this and he became very close with his survivor over the next few weeks. I provided the necessary physical care for the patient but was able to recognize the additional care the patient and his family needed.

I realized that recognizing and acting on every feature of the patient's condition is what makes a difference. In this case I provided the patient with the complete nursing care he and his family needed. Now with every patient I see I try to look back and say, "How did I make a difference?"