

2008 Nursing Student Scholarship

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As a fresh nursing student, I have found that each patient I have encountered remains in my memory and exemplifies the importance of nursing care. One patient in particular helped me realize the significance of simple introductions. This patient had experienced a CVA, and was completely aphasic. When I first entered his room, I was nervous about how he would react to my presence. I found him entirely unable to communicate except by acknowledging me through eye movements. I felt a sense of sadness as I thought about his situation. He was unable to express his fears and concerns, or even pain. He seemed reluctant to allow me to check his vitals and help him wash. Throughout the day, I realized that as members of the healthcare team entered his room, they were neither introducing themselves, nor acknowledging his presence. He would become increasingly uneasy when this happened, and would refuse further care.

The next week, I had the same patient, and I decided to use my observations from the previous week to the patient's advantage. Upon entering his room, I simply stated who I was, that I had taken care of him the previous week, and that I would be assisting in his care that day. It was the most exciting experience when he smiled as I reintroduced myself. He seemed to recognize me, and was certainly less tense as I checked his vitals and helped administer medications. Though he still couldn't speak, he seemed to be more comfortable with the care I was giving; he complied more readily and was much more receptive of care. Through his actions, I could sense appreciation of the fact that I recognized him as an individual, not as a diagnosis.

I certainly hope that I made a difference in this man's hospital stay by acknowledging that even those who cannot speak deserve to be heard, however difficult that may be. It is all too easy to ignore patients who cannot express gratitude verbally, and dismiss them as incompetent. I learned that an authentic acknowledgement of a patient's needs can affect nursing care for the

remainder of his or her stay. Although I do not know if this patient will remember me, I will certainly remember him as the one who taught me a valuable lesson: to regard all patients as valuable, regardless of the appreciation they may be able to give in return.