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Eng 100

Formal Assignment #1

25 April 2018

Opening New Doors

The circular button of the elevator lights up a dull yellow as I press the number two. Once the metallic silver doors slide shut, the elevator begins to ascend. Reaching into my pocket, I make sure I have a pencil and a notebook ready to go. My peers are all nervously discussing what medical units they would be observing for the week.

“So, Molly, what unit are you on?” Emma asks.

“2 East,” I said with a nervous smile, “You?”

“MedSurg,” she replies.

I nod not knowing what else to say. Below me, I can feel the elevator coming to a halt, causing me to lose my balance a little as we are suspended in the shaft. The shiny doors slide open and I step into the hallway.

“Good luck,” Emma shouts behind me.

Giving her a quick thanks, I turn toward the sign with arrows pointing in different directions to figure out where I need to go. For the most part, the hospital seems strangely quiet. I imagined there to be more hustle and bustle. The sign points me to the left, so I venture toward 2 East. Even though I am wearing baggy teal scrubs and white tennis shoes that give me blisters, I still feel like an outsider compared to the faculty.

After passing a hallway filled with abandoned beds and closed office doors, I finally make it to the medical unit. At the nurses' station, women in red scrubs are typing on the computer and talking to their co-workers. Others in blue scrubs are standing in various parts of the dim-lit hallway and typing on their portable computers or counting pills. Doctors in white lab coats are weaving in and out of patient's rooms, constantly putting on hand sanitizer. Excitement and nerves fill my stomach with butterflies. Today is my first day of clinical rotation through the Allied Health program. I finally get to shadow nurses and observe what the healthcare field is like.

All my life I wanted to become a nurse. My mother is currently a nurse at A.I. Dupont Hospital for Children and worked on the oncology unit for twenty years. When I was little, she would always tell me about how sick her patients were and I could not imagine what they were going through. Hearing her stories made me want to take care of them just like my mom and bring them comfort. I decided to apply for the Allied Health program during my senior year of high school so that I could shadow healthcare professionals in a hospital setting.

My feet feel like they are plastered to the floor, not knowing where to go or who to talk to. Timidly, I approach the nurses' station, trying to grab someone's attention.

"Excuse me?" I ask the nurse's aide across the counter that looms over her. She looks up with a bored look in her eye and a frowned expression.

"Um, I am one of the Allied Health high school students and I'm supposed to shadow someone. Is there anyone that I can shadow for the next hour?"

The nurse seems annoyed that I am inconveniencing her with the task of finding a nurse, like I was an insect pestering her. Looking up and down the hallway, she said, “Try Erin over there. She just started her shift. The one with the short, dark hair.”

“Thank you,” I said and go in the direction where Erin is standing.

Erin has tan skin and jet black hair like the aide had told me. It is perfectly curled into a short bob cut just above her shoulders and her makeup is beautifully done. Her stature is short and she is scribbling on a piece of paper in front of her portable computer which illuminates her face with a white light. She looks up from whatever she is writing as I approach her.

“Hi,” I said shyly, “I’m Molly. I’m one of the Allied Health students. I was wondering if I could shadow you?”

“Of course,” she said with a bright smile. “How long are you here for?”

“Just until 9:00. So about an hour.”

“Unfortunately, you won’t get to see much because we’re just giving the patients their meds right now, which could take a while. You’ll get to see at least two or three patients though.”

“Sounds good! Thank you,” I reply.

I follow Erin down the long hallway to where the med room is located. She scans her ID and I follow her into the brightly lit room. On the left side of the room are machines that have locks on them and require a thumbprint to open it. Along the other side of the wall, there is a sink and some saline bags with long plastic tubes.

“Do you know what this is called?” asks Erin, as she scans her thumb on the oval-shaped blue light. I shake my head no.

“It’s called a Pyxis machine. It keeps all the medicine locked up and one at a time, the doors will open so I can get the medicine for each patient.”

One by one, the doors keep opening with a pop. It is so fascinating to watch. It is like the machine has a mind of its own. I lose count of how many doors opened.

Erin begins explaining to me medications such as beta blockers, heparin, and insulin. Reaching into my scrub pocket, I take out my notebook and pencil to write down what she is telling me. My hand quickly jots down bullet points about the facts of each one. As she is organizing the pills, my knee starts to stiffen up and my lower back begins to ache. I discreetly kick my knee up to try to relieve the pain and stand up straighter to crack my back. Erin keeps talking about insulin, but I cannot fully concentrate because of the pain.

There is a second reason why I wanted to become a nurse. When I was nine-years-old, I myself got sick with cancer. My diagnosis was osteosarcoma which is a type of bone cancer and the tumor had developed in my right femur. Going through treatment was the most difficult thing I have ever done in my life. I went through a total of twelve surgeries and nine months of intense chemotherapy. My nurses helped me get through it, though. They did everything for me. My nurses got me juice when I was thirsty, they encouraged me to eat even when I did not want to, and held my hand when I was in pain. I knew I wanted to be just like them when I grew up. I wanted to help kids like me.

However, once I went into remission, I was no longer the same person physically and emotionally. Initially, I could barely walk around half the block without getting tired. I worked hard in physical therapy to increase my stamina, but even today it is not like how it was before I got sick. I had a lot of back problems because my growth plates were taken out, resulting in my

legs being two different lengths. The surgeries performed on my leg make my knee stiffen up easily and I cannot stand for long periods of time. This is what made it so hard to stand there in the med room, listening to Erin.

“Alright, let’s go give these patients their meds,” Erin said cheerfully.

I hold the door for her as she carries a handful of pills all different shapes and sizes to her portable computer. She pushes the computer across the hall to the room of our first patient. The door is ajar and when we step in, the sounds of soft chuckles come from the patient in the bed and another nurse who is already in there.

“Good morning,” Erin said to the patient, “My name is Erin and I’m going to be your nurse for the day.”

The patient smiles, but unfortunately, that does not last long. Due to patient confidentiality, I cannot reveal what her medical condition is or what occurs in the room. All I can say is that being in the patient’s room is an emotional experience. Seeing her so sad and sick brings me back to the time when I was in the hospital. The smells, the lights, the monitors. It all reminds me of when I was diagnosed. As I stand in this room, I feel like I am suffocating. I can picture myself back in a hospital bed, feeling just as sick as this patient. Bile rises in the back of my throat. To focus my attention elsewhere, I try to listen to what Erin is teaching me and keep my head down towards my notebook.

After spending at least fifteen minutes in each patient’s room, I am in so much pain and ready to leave my clinical rotation. I cannot fathom how Erin could do this as her job. She lifts patients into bed, she is on her feet all day, and she watches her patients suffer. Standing there for an hour was hard- I cannot even imagine a twelve-hour shift as a nurse...

...Tears stream down my face as I bury my head into the soft comforter of my parents' bed. I cannot control my sobs. My lungs tighten up and my breaths become faster. I curl my fingers around the covers until my knuckles turn white.

"Molly, you have to tell us what's wrong. We can't help you unless you tell us what's going on," my mom said with my dad standing next to her. Lifting my head from the blanket, I try to catch my breath and utter the words I did not want to admit.

"I don't think I want to do n-nursing anymore," I choke out. "And I'm worried it's too late since I already applied to college."

My parents do not say anything for a minute. I think they are stunned and confused.

"What happened? I thought you liked Allied Health," my mom asks.

"I do, but I'm in so much pain just walking around and it's so hard to see the patients so sick. Everything just reminds me of when I was in the hospital. I-I don't think I could handle that for the rest of my life," I explain, my face soaked with tears from the reality of it all.

"Well, it's definitely not too late to apply to college. You can email the admission offices of all the schools you already applied to and change your major. We can also look into more colleges since you aren't looking at nursing schools anymore," my dad said, always so optimistic.

I wipe away my tears and my brain is trying to put a puzzle together of what my dad is saying.

"But what will I major in? I don't want to just choose something random that I might hate," I reply.

“You can apply as undeclared,” he said, “You’ll take some gen eds and then you can get a feel for what you like.”

“Will I fall behind?”

“No, no. Everyone has to take gen eds anyway,” my dad explains.

This changes everything and my thoughts are spiraling. Nursing is no longer an option for me because of the limitation with my knee and back. I know there is no possible way to pursue a career that requires me to stand on my feet for a twelve-hour shift. Emotionally, it is too hard to see patients sick because I know the pain they are going through. What would I major in? Computer Science? Psychology? English? What college will I go to? Before, I was only looking at nursing schools. Now, it is like my entire life is a clean slate. There are doors open to endless possibilities. I have no plans for my future and the idea of that is terrifying. Yet, I feel my entire body relax and my breaths become steady again.

“Molly, are you sure you want to do this?” my mom asks.

I nod and smile.

“Will you guys take me to the college fair on Tuesday?”