

## “Simple Things”

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Thank you for the invitation to share some of my thoughts today. Congratulations to our 100 Great Iowa Nurses for 2011. I would like to take a moment to congratulate your families who have sacrificed the night shifts, weekends, family gatherings, and other important moments in your lives to allow you to provide care for the patients and families you serve. For us to do the work of our heart, nursing, we need the support of families and friends and I can tell by the number of people who are here this afternoon how proud they are of your vocation to nursing practice. Your recognition today, your work matters to them.

I wish I could offer something really special to say today, inspiring and motivating, perhaps like a Fairy Godmother and wave a wand so you could understand the joy this profession of nursing brings to those of us who love what we do. I have no magic wand, no Fairy Dust and heaven knows I would cause a bit of a stir in a tutu....so instead I think I will share with you some stories about some of the nurses I have met in my life that embody the theme for national nurses week this year, “Nurses Trusted to Care”.

My first story is about a nurse I met when I had been a nurse for about ten years, and frankly I thought I knew what nursing was all about...until the day my father needed emergency bypass surgery, and he did not do so great. From my experience working in the NICU, any time you let the entire family into a critical care room at the same time the news is not going to be good. So imagine a big Irish Catholic family with rosary beads in hand entering my father's room in the CCU. We listen to the physician and the news is grave. Since I am the oldest and the nurse in the family everyone is looking at me for reassurance. Instead I lose it. Honestly? I cried like a baby.

Since we are people of faith, my mother, who I believe to be the bravest woman I know, reminds us to keep praying, and with my family, I spend one of the longest 3 to 11 shifts of my life. For the first time in my career as a nurse, I am in a hospital, and I am not in control. This is not my hospital, I don't know these nurses, and I don't know the doctors.

The CCU staff, nurses and physicians work very hard to stabilize my father and a few hours later, my mother and I are allowed to enter my dad's room for a 5 minute visit. I am terrified. The nurse providing care for my father encourages my mother and I closer to his bed, she leans in close to dad and whispers in his ear, “John, wake up and show these girls your beautiful blue eyes.” And he did. And it was magic!

To this day I don't know this nurse's name. I wish I did. I do remember how she made me feel. This wonderful nurse gave me something to hold on to that night, and while I have no doubt of her technical and assessment skills, what I remember is her caring that her patient was a husband, he was a father and he had beautiful blue eyes. I honestly believe I became a better nurse after this experience. I learned how the simple things matter most to families when hope is fragile and the evening is full of fear.

I believe that there are 500 more stories that could be shared today from the 500 nurses who were nominated; I know 100 of them are represented in front of me right now. I am blessed to work with outstanding nurses each and every day who demonstrate the essence of care. I can personally tell you how:

- Linda Carter, one of today's recipients, transported a very sick baby girl from a local hospital and 20 years later, while chatting with a student nurse about why she decided to go into nursing discovered this student nurse was the very same sick baby girl. You see, Linda really cares about student nurses and likes to find out about them. Imagine if Linda would have never asked?
- Kory Dunsbergen, another recipient today, cared enough to simply sit and spend some time with a young teen recovering from a farming accident. Kory has another passion besides nursing; he has a passion for farming, so he cared enough to give up some of his personal time to offer encouragement and to listen.
- Sometimes it takes courage to care. As leaders we often make choices which impact our nursing staff, and some choices are better than others. Beth Nelson, another nurse to be recognized today cared enough to write a letter and share her thoughts about what the image of nursing means to her as a person. I still keep her letter close at hand and have pulled it out from time to time, when I am faced with a choice which may impact our nursing staff. Her words keep me centered when there are difficult choices to face.

All of these stories of caring are not about the big things, not about the skill to run a ventilator, or start an IV, rather the simple things in making a connection from one human being to another. I think Mother Teresa shares it best in this story, entitled:

***“Remember the Small Things”:***

*Some of my sisters work in Australia. On a reservation, among the Aborigines, there was an elderly man. I can assure you that you have never seen a situation as difficult as that poor old man's. He was completely ignored by everyone. His home was disordered and dirty.*

*I told him, “Please, let me clean your house, wash your clothes, and make your bed.” He answered, “I'm okay like this. Let it be.”*

*I said again, “You'll will be still better if you allow me to do it.”*

*He finally agreed. So I was able to clean his house and wash his clothes. I discovered a beautiful lamp, covered with dust. Only God knows how many years had passed since he last lit it.*

*I said to him, “Don't you light your lamp? Don't you ever use it?”*

*He answered, “No, No one comes to see me. I have no need to light it. Who would I light it for?”*

*I asked, “Would you light it every night if the sisters came?”*

*He replied, “Of course.”*

*From that day on the sisters commented themselves to visiting him every evening. We cleaned the lamp, and the sisters would light it every evening.*

*Two years passed. I had completely forgotten that man. He sent this message” “Tell my friend that the light she lit in my life continues to shine still.”*

*I thought it was a very small thing. We often neglect small things.*

I have the honor of being a nurse for over three decades. I have witnessed the decade where nurses were challenged to focus on quality, then we moved to a decade of safety, not only to keep our patients safe, but our staff safe as well. Now, our challenge is to do provide safe quality patient care with outstanding service. I believe we can do this, we are after all nurses trusted to care for our patients. As Mother Teresa reminds us, if we pay attention to the little things, we can shine a light for the people we serve. I know the nurse who cared for my father many years ago, shined a light for me, and helped me understand what family-centered nursing care feels like and her light continues to shine on in me.

Congratulations to all of this year's recipients. As your peer I am honored by the work you do and by the difference you make one person at a time.