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Author

Rappolt, Kim, RN

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COMPASSION & KINDNESS: The Universal Language of Nurses

By: Kim Rappolt, RN, OCN

I believe most nurses would say they chose this career to care for others. For some, it is a true passion. Aware of the long hours, knowing we would work countless holidays, miss special family events; none of that would dissuade us. So we endured nursing school, survived our orientation process, and thus began our life's dream to become worthy of the title bestowed upon us, "nurse".

So while we carry our title and wear it with great pride, what was always apparent to me, was that you can never stop striving for more. More knowledge, more experience, and the opportunity to make a difference. To touch a heart, change a life, provide comfort, or to provide educational experiences that have the capacity to touch and alter countless lives; the quest to "do more". For me, that opportunity to fulfill "my quest", was offered by an organization called Rad-Aid, an

Washington; men that instantly became my friends. We had never met, had spoken only a couple of times by phone via conference calls; yet the moment we met, we knew this was a journey we were in together, and one we would never forget.

Yinchuan's people, whether it be the medical staff, hotel staff, or the general public, welcomed us warmly and with a certain level of curiosity. Yinchuan is not exactly a tourist destination, so Corey and I definitely "stood out in the crowd". People were eager to know where we were from, why we were there, and then to express their extreme gratitude for us having traveled so far to share our knowledge and experiences with their hospitals.

Upon touring the hospital, you could almost at once see the differences between their facilities and the facilities in the United States. Visitors and patients seemed



abundance. We would later find out why this was the norm. The patients all wore pajamas, instead of the open backed gowns we find so common in the U.S., we found this comforting. There was minimal conversation between staff nurses and patients, something rapidly apparent to me, and something I felt was lacking. We were also shocked to find the number of nurses on each shift to care for forty-four patients; five nurses on the first shift (including the nurse in charge), and only one nurse for all forty four patients for the remaining two shifts. Hence the reason for no conversation between patients and nurses! There is no time to talk and still achieve completion of all the needed tasks. For someone like me, who became a nurse to work with oncology patients, this was heartbreaking. I had the opportunity to sit with the head nurse and a group of other charge nurses to explain why these conversations can be so crucial. How



Kim Rappolt RN, OCN is currently serving as a board member for the San Diego Oncology Nursing Society and on the UCSD Shared Governance Patient Experience Committee. Her love for the healthcare field developed when she was a teen volunteer at a children's hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida. In 1989, she returned to healthcare in a variety of roles for a large community hospital in Clearwater, Florida, where the CEO encouraged her to attend nursing school in her mid 40's. Having attended nursing school intent on caring for Oncology patients, that has been her focus since graduation; working both inpatient and outpatient; as a staff nurse, in a management role and as a Traveling Nurse, which is what landed her in San Diego in 2014. She is currently working at UCSD in Radiation Oncology.

to have conversations while you still continue working on your tasks, and how to have those monumentally difficult conversations with the bereft patients or family members when it is difficult to know what words will be the right ones. To help understand the value of sometimes, just listening; often more powerful than the words themselves. Information on side effects of radiation and chemotherapy were discussed, the

importance of adequate nutrition and hydration, and the extreme importance of adequate pain control, and palliative care, all topics where they were lacking both information and experience. While we are accustomed to finding any information we are lacking, on the internet, in China, many websites and links are blocked from access. We were fortunate to find some Oncology sites where though the access is slow, it was achievable, and these were saved for later reference and additional training for staff.

The hospital in Yinchuan has no medication distribution system, such as the Pyxis systems we have in the States. The medications are merely lined up on the counter, with nothing but an invisible line separating them. Each row lined up behind a laminated room number and disbursed accordingly. I actually felt my chin drop in shock for just a moment! We take so many precautions to avoid medication errors, and here, to see the medications just sitting on a counter, where a mere "bump", could move the drug to another patient's row of medications, I will have to admit, this shocked me just a bit. Lest I forget, the medication room is also not locked, in fact I am not sure it even had a door! The nurses were fascinated by the concept of a machine where the medications could be loaded and distributed by patient name and MD order.

Now, back to that abundance of family members who seemed to always be present! It was not long before we discovered the reasons. Family members or friends are responsible for supplying all patient meals, bathing, ambulating, assisting to the restroom; whatever the patient needed aside from their actual medications. When we inquired about what happens with

the patients who don't have family, it was explained to us that the family members of the other patients begin to provide meals and assist those patients as well, and it appeared this just happened automatically, no hesitation on the part of these kind and compassionate people.

One of the things I found most rewarding about this trip; was the opportunity to visit with the patients. To examine them, to speak with them about what they were feeling, whether it be physical or emotional. To offer thoughts on what might be helpful for them, to plead for pain control for a patient with metastatic disease who could barely stand, yet struggled to stand upright to bow and thank us as tears rolled down his cheeks. I was able to provide education on the importance of checking the oral cavity of a head and neck radiation patient who was also receiving chemotherapy with recent weight loss of more than twenty pounds and offer thoughts on interventions, on what might bring comfort, decrease weight loss, increase hydration; all information that the staff took note of, and valued. All of these patients and their families expressed much gratitude for all information that was provided, making one thing abundantly clear; kindness and compassion have a language all their own. A language that goes far beyond any spoken word. This was a trip that would forever change my outlook and level of gratitude for the many things that we take for granted every day. So if you have the opportunity to participate in an experience such as this one; I encourage you not to hesitate. I feel confident it will change your life, just as this trip to China and my new found friends, have changed mine.

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opportunity that would take me to Yinchuan, China!

On the journey to Yinchuan I was accompanied by a Radiation Dosimetrist, Corey Neill, from Reno Nevada, and a Radiation Oncologist, Dr. Shilpen Patel, from Seattle

to wander in and out of the hospital freely, no one taking note of who came and went. As we toured one of the Radiation Oncology floors, we would see in most rooms, 3 cot-like beds, sparse furnishings, and in many cases, family members in