

Unpack Your Week



by Penny Beattie

2020, what a year! We began the year with anticipation of it being the Year of the Nurse, honoring Florence Nightingale and all the nurses who have come behind her. What we learned in this year, was something unimaginable. Was it fate, that 2020 would not only be the Year of Nurse and the worst pandemic ever experienced in our lifetime? I think not. Nurses are an amazing group of healthcare providers and have been the most trusted profession for many years but truly in 2020, nurses have proven to be much more than that.

We learned that nurses are SUPERHEROS. One of my nurses describes how she has survived this pandemic where every day she was dealing with critical care COVID patients. Her process is to “unpack” her day after she gets home so she can lighten the burden of moral distress she carries with her. She goes on to say how without this ritual of “unpacking her day”, she would never be able to survive the heavy lift that is expected of her and is able to come back refreshed with a full heart.

This type of optimism is what I experience every day rounding on my units as their CNO. Another nurse describes that it is the team that allows him to get through his day, this male nurse is the strongest, most even keel and upbeat nurses I know. He is an experienced critical care nurse, I can always depend on him to be positive and bring his can-do attitude. During the first surge of COVID, after we had rolled out the use of iPads due to the visitor restriction, I asked him how he felt that iPads were working. He looked at me and said, “I hate them.” I was shocked as I had never heard him say anything negative, so I asked him to tell me more. He stated, “I just used one, so a 14-year-old daughter could say goodbye to her Dad while her Mom was in the room while withdrawing care, but I am so glad she could be there even if it was by using the iPad.” He had tears in his eyes, as he turned and walked away.

Unpack each day so you can allow yourself the time to process the difference you make it your patient’s lives, their families, your team.

This is the moral distress that you need to unpack each day so you can allow yourself the time to process the difference you make in your patient's lives, their families, your team and in the end the impact you make on your own career. You need to "process" the burdens you deal with each day during this pandemic and continue to care for patients that need you. As a nurse, you have superhuman powers that I have been so privileged to see in action in ways unimaginable. I am honored to walk amongst you and to be a NURSE.

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“Every challenge we encounter is an opportunity to reconsider who we are, what we stand for, and how we can honor the very best of ourselves as we turn away from the easy way out. The challenge – the climb – represents a pilgrimage, and a pilgrimage always holds within at the promise of greater self-knowledge.”

Jacqueline Winspear: *What Would Maisie Do?: Inspirations from the Pages of Maisie Dobbs*