

The Lone Nurse Lament

Category: Poems

written by Ray Bingham | January 25, 2013

Ray Bingham

The supervisor called, she's pulling Noel to Peds,
Where, she says, they've got really pressing needs.

And Nadia, poor girl, must float to 12 East,
To face the scourge of the adult med-surg beast.

Though the administrators won't admit to a nursing shortage,
When the census hits the rapids, they attempt this portage.

So here in our quaint little Newborn ICU,
I'm left for the shift with two nurses too few.

The ward clerk's on holiday, the housekeeper's sick.
The supervisor's advice? Make the best of it.

So with a babble of babies to care for alone,
I'll empty the linens while I answer the phone.

I'll suction one baby while I tube-feed another,
Hoping my catheters don't get crossed in the bother.

While I mix special formula, I'll hang TPN*,
Then gather antibiotics from the pharmacy bin,

I'll round up the mothers for the baby bath class,
Then while I have them, teach breastfeeding en masse.

I'll run to alarms wherever they beep,
So they won't disturb all my little ones' sleep.

Check all the IV sites, write notes in the charts,
While I take the admit with the hole in his heart.

What's that you say, we need to go out on transport?
There'll be nobody here to update shift report.

I'll call the supervisor, she's such a riot,
She says just put all my patients on autopilot.

What was that on the news, the HMO gave a bonus?
While on the nurses they lay such an onus.

Oops, there's a crash c-section, it says on my beeper.
This is our payoff for doing things cheaper?

*TPN (Total Parenteral Nutrition): intravenous feeding. TPN is used to prevent malnutrition in patients whose intestinal tracts can't handle oral feeding.

About the poet:

Ray Bingham lives in Gaithersburg, MD, with his wife, three kids, three cats and one dog. He worked as a neonatal nurse for more than ten years before turning his attention to science writing and editing. His essays and stories have appeared in a wide range of publications, including [The Washington Post](#), [Health Affairs](#), [American Journal of Nursing](#) and [Journal of Nursing Jocularly](#). He is an avid, if not particularly fast, runner.

About the poem:

"Nurses in every field have experienced frustrating days like this. I hope what comes through in the poem is the dedication to our patients and the love of nursing that keeps us all going."

Poetry editors:

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro