

Not Like Nurse A!

Category: Getting Motivated

written by Joan Greland-Goldstein | October 8, 2024

In the mid-seventies, when learning to be a labor and delivery nurse, one of the first people I met at my new job was Nurse A, a wizened veteran of the department. She stood four feet, eleven inches tall, weighed ninety pounds, had short dyed brown hair and was ten years past retirement age. She sprinted up and down the halls, rushed in and out of rooms, talked nonstop and ordered everyone around like a drill sergeant. Her trademark was the “3 H” enema – high, hot, and hell of a lot – to stimulate contractions.

When coaching a patient in labor, Nurse A leaned over the mother’s head, rubbed her back and crooned in a soft voice, “Now, honey, just relax. Breathe easy. That’s good. Let all the tension float away.”

In the midst of this, though, it wasn’t uncommon for her to suddenly shout an order to someone passing in the hall, “GET ME A WARM BLANKET!”

The patient always jerked in response to her sudden loud voice, but Nurse A never seemed to realize the incongruity of her actions.

I learned a lot from this veteran, both what to do and what not to do as a good labor nurse. What I gained most from her, though, was a determination to get out of bedside nursing. All I could think when I was around her was, “I do NOT want to be like Nurse A, still doing this when I’m old enough to retire!”

I didn’t have a clear picture of what I wanted to do instead, I just knew it wasn’t going to involve doing direct patient care for the next thirty-five years.

Subsequently I explored many options: serving as a clinical instructor for practical nurse students at a technical school; applying to a GYN Nurse Practitioner program (where I was not accepted); briefly flirting with the idea of becoming a massage therapist.

Throughout every aborted attempt to get out of bedside nursing, my desire not to be like Nurse A continued to spur me onward. Eventually I got a master’s degree in health education. This was finally my ticket out of bedside nursing, while still staying in the health care field. From my first job as a health educator, I ultimately became a project manager for the department of medicine, helping to implement care management programs for patients with chronic conditions.

And I owe it all to Nurse A!

Joan Greland-Goldstein
Denver, Colorado