

# No Mud, No Lotus

Category: Chronic Pain

written by Neeta Nayak | November 10, 2025

A doctor rarely imagines becoming a victim of workplace violence leading to chronic pain. I was a young, idealistic geriatrician fresh out of my training when I began working in a memory care facility. It was a high-turnover unit, with residents dying or moving and new patients with dementia admitting almost daily.

One Monday, I was briefed about Mr. C, a tall man who arrived in full cowboy attire. He refused to leave his room without his boots, his hat, and his belt with a large silver buckle. He even insisted on wearing them into the shower! The nurses wanted me to convince him otherwise—a difficult task.

I approached gently, waiting until he finished his steak. “Good enough for a cowboy,” he told me. Then I asked about removing his cowboy gear before showering. He protested, fearing theft, but reluctantly agreed when I promised we would lock them up. As I rose to leave, he extended his hand for what seemed a friendly handshake. In an instant, he crushed and twisted my petite hand. Gleeefully. I yelped in utter disbelief.

Embarrassed, I hesitated to report, but when swelling and wrist movement became unbearable, I notified my employer. After endless forms and visits to occupational health, I was left with chronic pain and little support. My medical career had been built on years of sacrifice. The thought that it might end was devastating.

What good was a doctor who couldn't document notes? “If you didn't chart, it didn't happen.” My twelve-hour days stretched to sixteen, and my employer, though sympathetic, offered no solution. There were no scribes or AI to rely on, only constant pain and exhaustion.

But even the darkest night ends, and the sun rises. My husband, ever the problem solver, suggested trying a new dictation software from Dragon: “If you cannot handwrite or type, why not dictate notes?” My employer refused to pay for it, so my husband bought it and installed it himself. Creating geriatrics-oriented templates was painstaking, but perseverance paid off. I returned to ten-hour days, with less pain and renewed hope. This happened twenty-five years ago!

Perhaps every dark cloud does have a silver lining. Today I thank Mr. C. He knew not what he was doing, yet saved me from burnout. “No mud, no lotus”—a Buddhist proverb that reminds us that even from the swamp, beauty can bloom.

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