

Saving Lives

Category: Nursing

written by Matthew Zwerling | January 4, 2026

My wife was a nurse. She trained at LA County USC Medical Center, the same place where I began my internship as a physician. Because of her career, I was always respectful of nurses but not fully aware of how valuable they really are.

My wife's post-graduate work was on the neuromed-neurosurgery secondary admission unit where I landed my second month of internship. She told me that her colleagues would take care of me, and they did. One night stands out in particular. There were three severe head trauma patients admitted in succession, and even before the resident (supervising) physician showed up, the nurses went to work! They told me to intubate the first patient (my first!), while they took care of the next two patients without supervision.

Then, decades later, on my last day on-call as an orthopaedist in private practice, I was just leaving through the ER following a night-time surgery, when a severe trauma patient arrived via ambulance. I witnessed the ER staff nurses go to work, again without physician input, starting IVs, calling for X-ray and pulmonary technicians, and charting. They were a well-oiled team. After thirty years of practice, I was once more in awe of the competence and care of the nursing staff.

My wife was right. The nurses really did take care of me, that first night and throughout my career. And they took care of all the other physicians as well. I guess that's why I never wrote an order on the chart without adding "Thank You."

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