

Poor Me

Category: Holidays

written by Marilyn Barton | December 14, 2017

Usually, I loved my work as an RN in the coronary care unit. But I always dreaded leaving my family on Christmas. *Poor me.*

So, whenever the schedule called for me to work on the holiday, I'd think back to 1980 and my patient, Mr. Watkins.

As I brushed the snow from my sleeves to clock in, everyone else was at home exchanging gifts and feasting on turkey. A seasoned ICU nurse noticed my glum expression, "First time holiday, huh? Hang on to your cap; we're on our own, no managers or doctors, just us nurses, respiratory, lab and housekeeping."

After the nursing report and a review of my patients' charts, I went in to assess Mr. Watkins. He was a previously healthy 45-year-old college professor. Medically speaking, he had a *fresh MI* (heart attack) with a big rise in cardiac enzymes and crushing chest pain. During the night he'd flat-lined twice and had to be resuscitated. He needed to be monitored every minute for arrhythmias and chest pain.

Since the unit was quiet, instead of checking IVs and taking vital signs first, I sat on the side of his bed, took his hand and chatted for a while.

"Hi, I'm Marilyn, your nurse this evening. How're you doing?"

His eyes welled up with tears, "How big a heart attack did I have last night? My doctor called it the *widow maker*, that I'm lucky to be alive. Is that true?"

"Mmm, yeah. What worries you the most?"

"Having that awful pain again, not being able to breathe, dying, I guess. My wife, our three kids watching the Christmas Special on TV without me . . . "

It struck me that while he and I were both required to be in the intensive care unit on the holiday, he was a prisoner of his disease, whereas I got to go home after my shift. *Lucky me.*

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