

IN THE END

BY MARIE LOUGHNANE



What nursing means to me...

WORKING IN INTENSIVE CARE MAKES YOU REALIZE THERE ARE PEOPLE IN this world who experience more than their fair share of hardship. I recall one such patient who reinvigorated the way I feel about nursing, and what it means to me.

Pete* was admitted to the hospital initially with complications due to a knee replacement. He had several admissions to intensive care during his stay for breathing problems. When we were unable to wean him from the ventilator, he was sent to another facility and while there, was diagnosed with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis). He returned to us ventilator dependant with movement only

in his left index finger and his head. His care was complex and there were few facilities that could accommodate his needs. In the three years he

was with us, he became a part of our family and we became a part of his. We celebrated holidays and birthdays, and grieved with him when he lost his mother. Pete was only 55 and felt for his family and the burden he must have been placing on them. There were good days and bad days, and we respected his need to feel angry and cry over the losses he was experiencing.

When I was assigned to care for Pete, I would try to just sit and talk, or watch TV for a few minutes. I felt his hand one day and noted how cold it was from the lack of movement. From then on, I did hand and foot massages to get the blood flowing. I tried my best to treat Pete as a person, not a condition. His vulnerability was

obvious. His embarrassment over his dependence was immense. When he cried, I wiped away his tears. No words could change what was happening or make it better. Sometimes it was just a presence that was needed.

Then came the day when Pete decided with his family that he had had enough. He wanted to be removed from the ventilator two days after his birthday. In the time leading up to this, he said goodbye to everyone. There were many tears as we tried to support and respect his decision. He said something to me that has stayed with me ever since: "Some people go to work, to work, and then there are those who go to work to change lives. You are one of those people."

I realized then that he had changed the way I feel about nursing.

In our busy, task-filled days, we often forget how important the little things can be to someone who is scared and unsure. We have the ability to change people's lives not just by what we do, but how we do it. That is an incredible gift and an enormous responsibility that we should never take for granted. Pete reminded me that as a nurse I cannot forget that inside broken bodies are people who need our comfort, our care and our empathy. It is what makes nursing rewarding. **RN**

MARIE LOUGHNANE IS A CLINICAL PRACTICE LEADER AT ROUGE VALLEY HEALTH SYSTEM IN SCARBOROUGH. ALTHOUGH PETE WAS A PATIENT SHE MET WHILE WORKING IN THE ICU OF A SMALL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL, SHE CONTINUES TO HELP NURSES REMEMBER THE "LITTLE THINGS" IN PRACTICE THAT CAN HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT.

* A pseudonym has been used to protect privacy.

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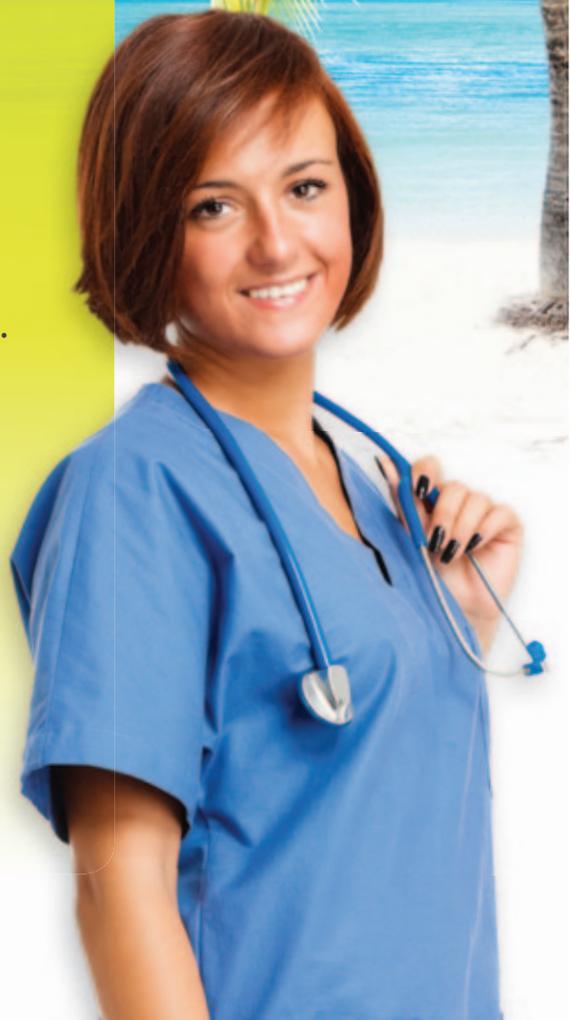
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