

Choose Compassion

She was only 13, had never been so far from home and she was alone. She put on a brave face, but she was so scared. Her back was numbed before the biopsy. Like when her ears were pierced, the needle squeaked as it traveled through. But the kidney wasn't numb! She would never forget the nurse who held her hand and said to stay still, but when it hurt to squeeze as hard as she could.



The crash came from nowhere. They needed to cut her car apart to get her out. An EMT got into the back, offered her hand and explained that it would be loud and that sparks would fly, but she was not alone. They were in the car together. If she got frightened, to squeeze that hand as tightly as she could. They put a fireproof blanket over their heads. The noise was deafening. And so she squeezed.



He had been so sick. Now he was gone, but still she sat at his bedside. She couldn't bear to leave him here alone and walk out. The nurse said, "we'll all leave together". The nurse took one rose from the bedside vase, placed it on his chest, zippered the shroud, and they all left the room together.



Compassion is always important, but so much more so in the healthcare community. People entering the medical world often seem to be entering a foreign country where they do not speak the language and are at their most vulnerable. Compassion can translate; help build a bridge between uncertainty, fear, pain and pivotal care. That translation can drastically affect medical outcome.

At some time, each one of us will *need* compassion and will have the opportunity to *show it*. Each of us will be a patient, a caregiver, a loved one. Each of us will face darkness and will have the power to dispel darkness for another. But we must *choose* to *use* that power. Compassion is a thread connecting us all and weaving us together into life's tapestry. The biopsy patient and the nurse – two threads woven together. In that moment the nurse's compassionate care brightened the darkness for my 13-year-old self. And while she was simply doing her job, it is her compassion that still connects me to that nurse. More than 50 years later, I am the EMT in the back of the car. And that nurse reaches along the tapestry thread as I offer my own hand – a beacon of compassion in the chaos. It is a nurse's compassion and the memory of a rose on my husband's chest as we took our last walk together that shines a spotlight on the next threads being woven into the tapestry. And on it goes.

We must never doubt the potential impact in a moment of compassion or hesitate to show it. If, in the darkness even the smallest light shines, then given the chance that light can illuminate the world.