Finding the Way by Following the Heart

Jonelle Hudson

I am a nursing student at Boise State University, a mother of four, and a volunteer at St. Luke’s Mountain States Tumor Institute. Three years ago, I was asked to move from the information and discharge desk in the main hospital and over to Mountain States Tumor Institute. I did this move with anxiety, not sure how I would react to patients with cancer. At that time, I had the dream of being a labor and delivery nurse, but now, three years later, I cannot imagine being anywhere else but in oncology.

The lessons I have learned from the patients and nurses are lessons that I will carry with me for life. The perseverance, strength, and faith of each patient that I have come into contact with has touched my soul forever. As a pre-nursing student, in the spring semester of 2011, I was able to take holistic nursing from Marty Downey, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, HTPA, CNE. Her wisdom, strength, and teaching only fueled my passion for wanting to pursue my oncology certification once I finish my degree. It was in her class that I was able to put words to the type of nurse I want to be and to dig deeper into why I want to be a nurse. It is not the money and it is not the job security; rather, it is to be there for patients and their families as they journey through their healing experience.

Each patient’s experience is different. Even if that healing comes at the end of their life, to be able to give support to patients and their families through that journey is where I know I have been called. For Professor Downey’s class, the students were required to write in a journal each week and record what we learned and our experiences. One week, Professor Downey asked us to write a poem, a song, or lyrics around an

In the Quiet

Cynthia C. Adams, RN, MSN, EdD

In the quiet, I face the bald head in the mirror
I breathe in the courage it takes to accept this new branding
All the peace and joy of my life has taken a sudden turn now
A fierce spirit of survival grips me as my young children play at my knee
“Death is not an option,” speaks my husband and I nod slowly in agreement
A new chapter opens and we travel an unknown path with trembling hearts.

In the quiet, I gather all the tools of my twenty year nursing career
Time to turn the table and receive the best of my own care
Time to draw from the art and science of all that has come before to heal me
But cancer has taken that choice away now, and I must learn to receive
I must humble myself in this moment and channel my strengths inward.

In the quiet, I fill with the love and kindness of all the people circling my family
I live now in the world of casseroles and cards, potted plants and outreached hands
My doctors reach deep for a special kindness as the end of chemotherapy draws near
I am tired, weak, struggling to continue. They remind me of the high stakes involved
My two children center me, anchor me, and pull me forward to the future
The clarity of my purpose here on earth provides direction that overrides all.

In the quiet, I pause to fill with gratitude for I am blessed to have so much to live for
There are people in the waiting room who go home to empty houses
There are people in the waiting room that have no one to hold them close at night
I share my casseroles, offer rides, and knit scarves for my sister patients
All the while savoring the smell of my children just out of the bath each evening
And snuggling close in their pajamas to read bedtime stories that take all our fears away.

Dedicated to my beautiful children and Hanna Adams

Jonelle Hudson is a nursing student at Boise State University and a volunteer at St. Luke’s Mountain States Tumor Institute, both in Idaho; Cynthia C. Adams, RN, MSN, EdD, is the director of Nursing at Capital Community College in Hartford, CT; and Monica Beck, MSN, RN, OCN®, is a clinical assistant professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this article and poetry. The authors did not receive honoraria for this work. No financial relationships relevant to the content of this article and poetry have been disclosed by the authors or editorial staff. Hudson can be reached at hudsonjonelle@gmail.com, Adams can be reached at cadams@capitalcc.edu, and Beck can be reached at monica.beck@uah.edu, with copy to editor at CJONEditor@ons.org.

Key words: lessons learned; blessed; mentor

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/14.CJON.125-126
experience we had. During that week, I was given a moment to watch as one of the nurses tended to a patient. I had gotten to know this patient while he received treatments, but on this day, everything had changed about him. I didn’t know at the time as I watched this interaction that this would be the last time that I saw this patient.

I feel blessed to have observed this moment between nurse and patient, and it was hard to hold back tears as I watched them. This particular nurse has become a great mentor to me and has shown me so much of what a holistic nursing experience can be. My thoughts and feelings poured out into a poem titled “The Creator Calls” as an expression of oncology nursing from the heart and the spirit of a volunteer pre-nursing student.

The Diagnosis

Monica Beck, MSN, RN, OCN®

You are scared.
You may ask, Why me?
What have I done to deserve this?
You may think,
Cancer is so big.
And I am so small.

How will others react toward me?
When they look at me, will they know
That a foreign invader has deceived all my defenses and taken control of life?
Will they know that everything I knew to be true is now questioned?
That the lens through which I see my life is forever changed?

You may protect your fear with a shield
Focusing on the pragmatic, medical side of things:
Chance of cure, appointments, radiation beams,

Toxic infusions and tumor measurements.
You may don a mask of courage
To be strong for others
But in the quiet and solitude,
Your fears, anger, regrets, and guilt
Well up from the depths of your soul
And overflow with such ferocity,
With such veracity
That you cannot contain them
You scream God, how could you let this happen to me?
I feel so alone.
Will I suffer?
Do I have the courage to suffer gracefully?

My sisters and brothers,
I do not have the answers to your questions
And I am not traveling your journey.
But I CAN say,
I will accompany you every step of the way.

The Creator Calls

Jonelle Hudson

So tall and mighty, like the giant oak you once stood.
Fighting the fight ready to win.
Now frail and withered; slumped and pale.
You have fought long and hard, you have taken all of the storms in stride.
The fight is gone, your strength depleted.

She tends to you, with love and compassion.
Over the mask all you see is her eyes, but you know what she is saying, as do I.
Those who tend and love you are not ready to let go, but she knows, it is your time.
It is OK, your creator calls.
She is letting you know it is OK for you to fall.
Fall into His arms; let Him take away the pain.

They will be OK; He will tend to them now.
Let go and slumber, may your pain be gone.
We can do no more; it is out of our hands.
May you go in peace and gentle slumber.
We will see you again when our creator calls.