



“Patients Can Heal Doctors as Well”

“In bed 2 you have Mr. M. He is a 54-year-old gentleman with a history of dilated cardiomyopathy and severe mitral regurgitation...”

It was my first day in the cardiac intensive care unit as a fellow and I was simply a ball of nerves besides myself. I was getting the sign out from the overnight fellow and although I had read about the patients, the night before – all the details were simply a blur. My mind was jumping and darting between listening to sign out and simultaneously reviewing the bloodwork on the rounding sheet that was in front of me.

“Oh and by the way I should add he isn’t exactly the nicest person in the world...” I looked up from the sheet and saw in bed a man who looked older than his stated age with a very somber look on his face staring ahead. For a brief moment we made eye contact. “Why is that?” I asked, as I turned to my fellow. “Well, communication has been an issue and the translator can only be here so often during the day – he is primarily Spanish speaking. We have been trying, but it he has been getting frustrated unfortunately. Wait, Ricky you speak Spanish right?”

I stepped into the room and introduced myself, “Hola, soy el Dr. Ricardo Nieves – uno de los medicos que lo va a atender en la unidad de cuidados intensivos” [Hello, my name is Dr. Ricardo Nieves and I am one of the doctors that will be taking care of you in the ICU]. In that moment I saw a spark come alive in the eyes of this once somber looking man. “Doctor! Hablas Español?” [Doctor, you speak Spanish]. I soon learned that Mr. M. was originally from Puerto Rico – in fact only two counties over from where my family lives, and that he had moved to the United States following Hurricane Maria and was staying with his son just north of Pittsburgh.

As his course in the CCU progressed I noticed that Mr. M. looked so much livelier and interactive with the nursing and medical staff. Every time I walked by his room I would hear him attempting to teach nurses

Spanish and then in turn try to teach him English - often accompanied by bouts of laughter. And every night before I would leave for the night I would check in with him one last night “Todo bien, señor? [Everything ok sir] and his response would always be “Si todo bien, que Dios lo bendiga doctor” [yes everything is well, and may God bless you doctor]. Over the coming days we would continue to talk about Puerto Rico and how much we both missed our families and friends. I also found myself settling well into the role of leadership within the unit while gaining confidence in my own capabilities and medical decision-making process. Eventually, Mr. M. would require going back to the cath lab for a Mitral Clip procedure, and I would accompany him for the procedure to ensure that there were no gaps in communication between the staff and patient. His procedure proceeded well, and he was eventually discharged from the hospital.

As I look back on my time with Mr. M., I realize now that while the situation initially started with a physician walking into the room to put a confused and anxious patient at comfort – the patient also helped a nervous and anxious first year fellow overcome his trepidations of a leadership role within the unit.

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Humans of Cardiology is an opportunity for PaACC members to share motivating stories about their personal and professional lives and was inspired by the wildly popular Humans of New York series. These stories showcase the compassion shown, as well as the hardships and triumphs members go through, as medical professionals. Our goal is to connect our members via these posts and reveal the uniqueness of our field through testimonials from our community. To submit your story, [click here](#).

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