

A Day in the Life of a Nurse

It is 5:00 am Monday morning and as I turn off the alarm clock I know that I need to get going and not be late for work. This will be my third 12 hour shift and I can't wait until my day off tomorrow but now I need to get to work. I sure hope my day today is better than yesterday.

Yesterday began like any other day. I arrived at work and had my coffee and chatted with my coworkers before the shift report. We were all in a good mood and looking forward to a calm day. I received report on my patients and I was ready to begin the day.

It didn't take long for the day to fall apart. One of my patients was going to surgery in 30 minutes and the consent was not signed. I had to contact the physician to make sure the procedure was explained to the patient. It took three calls before I could reach the physician. Once the patient left for surgery I was behind on administering medications. I rushed to catch up and some of the medications were not available so I had to call the pharmacy twice to get the medications.

As soon as I thought I was caught up I received a new patient from the Emergency room. The patient was in a lot of pain and also spoke only Spanish and I had trouble getting the information I needed to call the doctor. I contacted the interpreter to assist me with getting the information that I needed. The patient was experiencing a lot of pain so my priority was to contact the physician and give the patient medication to relieve the pain.

While this was going on one of my patient's family members wanted to speak with me. As I tried to talk with them, the patient I had sent to surgery arrived back in his room. I needed to stop my conversation with the family and excuse myself to check the patient from surgery. It took 45 minutes to get the surgery patient settled and comfortable before I could return to talk to the previous family member.

Okay, it was only 10:00 am and I was exhausted. I still had so much to do and nine more hours to work. I ran to the break room and had a quick cup of coffee to rejuvenate myself and then go back to work. Things went smoothly for the next hour and I thought that now the rest of the day will be fine. Wrong!

One of my patients slipped and fell and the new admission was having increased pain and I needed to deal with both situations at the same time. I called both physicians and the patient who fell needed to go to have x-rays and the patient with pain needed to go for a CT scan. I got both patients prepared and sent off for their tests.

For the next hour things were quiet and I had the time to actually visit all of my patients and make sure that they were all comfortable. I was supposed to be doing hourly rounds on each of the six patients but I had not been able to see all of them every hour. I really needed to do better the rest of the day and see each of the patients hourly.

The patient who fell was okay without any injuries and was now resting in her room. The patient with the pain needed to go to surgery immediately so I began to prepare him. I contacted the

interpreter and family to instruct them on what was going to take place. I needed to complete all of the pre-operative orders and call physicians in addition to completing all of the teaching. This took about one hour to complete. Now my hourly rounds were once again behind schedule. It was also time to pass medications again to all of my patients. My coworker came by and said "let's go to lunch". I responded that I can't go yet because I am trying to catch up with my work.

It was 1:00 pm and I finally had some time to eat lunch. No sooner do I sit down to eat and I received a phone call that the physician for the patient who fell was here and wanted me in the patient's room right away. I went to meet the physician and discuss the patient's condition. There were additional tests to be done so I needed to arrange the tests before I could go back to lunch.

It was now 2:00 pm. The good news was that I finally finished lunch. The better news was that there were only five and one half more hours to go before I could go home. I went back out to check my patients and the charge nurse approached me. She stated that another nurses needed to leave for a family emergency and I would need to take care of two additional patients for the remainder of the day. I reluctantly agreed even though I was already so busy with my other six patients. I checked on the two new patients and then I sat down to do some charting. Even though the charting is on the computer it was still time consuming. I also needed to complete the risk report for the patient who fell.

By 3:30 pm the patient was back from surgery and after 45 minutes I had him settled and comfortable. The shift was over for those who worked only eight hours and I was jealous that they could leave and I still had four hours to go. I met with the new staff and filled them in on the events of the day. I started rounds on my eight patients and hoped for a smooth four hours.

Just as I was finishing rounds on the patients one of the patients pulled out her IV and another just was informed that she could go home and her family was already waiting and somewhat impatient. Discharge teaching and preparation takes at least 30 minutes to complete properly but I really needed to restart the IV. I spoke to the impatient family and informed them that it would take a little time to get the paperwork ready and I had a procedure to perform first. They were not happy but reluctantly agreed to wait. Of course the IV did not go in smoothly and it took three tries to finally place it. Now the family was really upset and I went to do the discharge process.

It was 6:00 pm and I only have one hour to go. I was on the home stretch and what else could go wrong? Then it happened. There was only one empty bed on the unit and I needed to admit another emergency room patient with only an hour of the shift to go. Fortunately most of my coworkers were relatively caught up and they all helped to admit the patient. Admissions go so well when done by a team effort. I finished calling the physician, completing the new orders and charting just in time for the end of the shift at 7:30 pm. I gave report to the oncoming nurse and went home.

I was so exhausted that I only ate a bowl of cereal and went to bed. Now it is time to go to work again. Yesterday was a busy but a successful day. Today may be busy again but I am a nurse and I know to expect the unexpected. I love being a nurse and I am glad to be going to work for another day.