

A Little Ray of Sunshine

I checked off the relevant tasks as they were attended to: observations, tick, medications, tick, drips, tick and documentation, tick. All sorted, my work was complete. I could now relax and enjoy the part of the shift I relished most. I walked to the end of the corridor and looked out through the windows of the ED doors, to see the stunning sunrise. I was never disappointed. The depth of the mountains made a purple silhouette amongst the bright orange sky. It was so peaceful compared to the usual buzz of the wounded and ailing presenting here at all hours of the day and night.

My thoughts of the peacefulness quickly came to a halt as I noticed a car turn in and began screeching down the hospital driveway. A young man jumped out of the driver's seat and ran around to the passenger's side opening the door with an anxious tug. A young girl emerged. She appeared to be heavily pregnant while, to my shock, manically inhaling a cigarette. I wondered if the girl had any clue about the effects smoking would have on her baby, as well as the hospital's strict 'no smoking' rules. Then, as though my own question transcended her, she promptly trod on the cigarette stub with the twist of a heavily swollen ankle.

As the couple entered through the ED doors the pale faced girl began having another contraction, doubled over moaning from acute pain. As I began to take her details, I learnt that she was just seventeen years old. She informed me she had been having contractions for most of the night and that her waters had broken some hours ago. I could tell from experience that this baby was getting close.

My thoughts were that they had endured the labour at home, on purpose. Consequently, this meant that they would not have time to make it to the local Base Hospital that was situated a couple of hours away. The locals were well aware that our hospital was not a designated birthing centre. The local community midwife would have stipulated that as soon as they went into labour, they were to

get checked by a doctor at our hospital and generally, as long as their labour was not too advanced, travel on to the Base Hospital to have their baby. I explained to them, gently but firmly, that they should have come sooner, to allow enough time to travel to the Base Hospital. I explained to them that our hospital was limited with equipment for deliveries and that there were risks as we were not geared up in the case of any complications. Educating pregnant couples of these vital 'delivery' facts was my responsibility as an RN, but secretly I was excited about being involved in the upcoming delivering.

The doctor on call happened to be a locum who was recently new to our town. As I phoned him, I wondered about his expertise in deliveries. It was reassuring to find out that he was in fact, an obstetrician. He enquired as to whether I was a midwife or if there were any on call. I was not, and explained that there were not any to call on however, I had some previous experience with assisting in deliveries, and that I was a mother of four children, hopefully endorsing my knowledge even further. The doctor gave me the benefit of the doubt and agreed that all will be well, and to go about preparing for the birth. He promised that he would not be far away.

The girl's contractions were getting closer and stronger in intensity, but I was comforted by her assurance to me that she did not have an urge to push. Her partner rubbed her back soothingly during each contraction. I got her some ice to sip on.

I began preparing for the birth by opening up the delivery pack, setting up the humidicrib, getting the suction ready and prepping the injections to draw up as necessary.

The doctor strolled in a little while later, rubbing his hands together and inquiring into how things were progressing. It did not take him long to examine her and, to everyone's surprise, discover that she was almost fully dilated. He explained to the girl that the baby was not too far away and that it was just a waiting game from here on. He stepped into the office to do the obligatory paperwork and then proceeded upon a round of his inpatients whilst waiting for the baby to come.

I heard him chatting in the office a little later, which meant that the morning staff had arrived. Excellent, I thought, the extra helping hands were just in time. I ducked into the office and explained about the imminent birth to my colleagues. Fortunately, both staff had worked the evening before so they did not require a lengthy hand over of the inpatients. I explained to them that I was happy to stay back to help with the delivery. They were pleased to be relieved of the task and were content to take over care of the ward and any new ED presentations.

As I came back to the expectant mother I heard the ED bell ring. I knew the other staff would take care of it. Hugely relieved, I could wholly concentrate on helping with this delivery now.

“Breathe deeply through each contraction,” I explained to her, as she puffed away.

Through a narrow gap in the curtain, I noticed the nurse bring in an elderly couple. The man was holding one hand on his heart, the other hand held his wife’s. As the doctor had requested, the nurse dispensed some anginine and aspirin.

“When did you first get this chest pain?” I heard the nurse ask, as she helped him onto the bed adjacent from us in the ED.

“I’ve had it all night,” he paused, “I kept trying to talk myself out of it, but it just didn’t ease off!” he wheezed.

The nurse continued taking the fellow’s medical history, as his wife anxiously threw in her two bobs worth. With great efficiency, the other nurse appeared with the ECG machine and started sticking on the electrodes. The doctor marched in to check on the situation and becoming aware of his heart condition began cannulating him. I poked my head through to ensure they did not need my help, but the doctor firmly instructed me to stay with the girl, the baby would be getting too close to leave now.

Moments later, we heard raised voices through the curtains.

“Blimey, look at the rhythm! He’s in VT!” one of the nurses shrieked.

It was as if by hearing this diagnosis that it caused the poor man to slip into unconsciousness. The nurses readied themselves with the defibrillator and commenced CPR. The doctor had a calm aura about him and directed the staff in a composed fashion; mindful of the dying man’s wife, clinging to her beloved husband’s side.

“Harry! Harry! Please don’t leave me!” the wife begged. It was a despairing sound as if she was saying her final goodbye.

Suddenly she let out a big sigh and declared, “Enough is enough! He wouldn’t like this. I know he’s got a bad heart and all, but, well, he’s had it for years. Please ... stop the CPR! I don’t want my last memories to be like this. I just want time with him now.”

Taken aback, the staff obliged the poor woman and stopped. They commiserated with her and informed her that she could take her time. They would leave and give her some sacred time and space with Harry. The nursing staff along with the doctor staggered into the office, exhausted from their first half hour of work.

I could see the girl was becoming traumatized about the recent commotion behind the curtain. I whispered to her; encouraging her to stay positive and that she needed to focus all of her energy on getting this baby out. The young girl’s contractions were becoming closer and closer together. I told her that if she had an uncontrollable urge to push she was to do just that. It seemed like it was only a few moments later that she reached a decision, she was ready to push. With this knowledge I encouraged her to push with all her might at each contraction. I hoped that the doctor would remember us behind the closed curtains and presumed he would soon return to see how things were progressing.

After three more contractions there was still no crowning of the head. I suggested that she might be better off squatting by the bed. Frustrated and extremely uncomfortable she rolled out of bed and squatted, willing to try anything. I laid towels down on the floor and continued to encourage her to push with each contraction. I noticed that she was beginning to lose heart after a few more contractions as there was still no sign of the baby. I advised her to get back onto the bed. She shook her head in exhaustion, but reluctantly complied. Then, just as she lifted her leg onto the bed, the baby's head popped out.

“Doctor! Quick! We need you here!” I shouted.

Gratefully he was close by and just in time to check the umbilical cord and help deliver a screaming healthy baby.

“It's a boy!” the doctor declared euphorically. “Any names in mind?” he asked in his next breath.

The young mother, drenched in glistening sweat did not hold back her reply. It was as though she had an epiphany.

“What about Harry?” She looked across to her partner for approval. He nodded his head. He was speechless and still overwhelmed from witnessing the incredible birth of his son. I smiled, heartened, and agreed that I would definitely go along with that. It was indeed a great name and a sentimental gesture for the sad lady behind the curtain.

I poked my head through the curtain to see the man lying there, lifeless. He looked so peaceful with his wife by his side. The woman sensed me there and looked over at me trying to smile. She had heard the couple name their baby, Harry.

“I’m touched,” the lady said quietly, edging away from her husband. It was fortifying, I thought, for someone in her state, to then take the liberty of coming through the curtains to share in the new parent’s joy.

“My old Harry is gone now, but I can see there’s lots of life in this brand new Harry,” she smiled bravely as the baby howled at the top of its lungs. “He’s adorable,” she continued, “If he turns out anything like my Harry, you’ll be very proud!”

Despite all, there was joy in the atmosphere. The new mother seemed certain with her decision in naming her son Harry. She kept assuring us that she really did love the name and that it was one of the ones she had been considering anyway and the preceding event had reinforced it. Moreover, she was pleased to see that the grieving woman gained some happiness from it.

I felt a wave of exhaustion coming over me as I started to tidy up after the birth. One of the nurses came in and took over, allowing me to go home. Pleased to be relieved of my duties I walked out of the hospital with mixed emotions. I felt the warmth of the sun’s rays on my back, the sky was a clear blue now and the previous silhouette of the mountains had dissipated into the background. The sun had just poked its head from behind a cloud as if it was dancing. I strolled over to my car and breathed in the fresh air, pondering the amazing mystery of life.