
My Cream of Wheat Story (1992)

When I received the night nurse's report about a new patient, Susan, I was told she was 55 years old, recovering from abdominal surgery, where a large malignant tumor was discovered. This new diagnosis of cancer, and the subsequent cancer treatments it would entail, caused her to be very depressed. She was not eating and barely talking. I determined that I would try to get her to start eating, and began a series of "comfort interventions."

I went into her room and introduced myself. Susan was crunched down in her elevated bed, and her sheets were disheveled. I noticed her breakfast tray untouched nearby, the cold scrambled eggs and everything else on the tray untouched. I asked her if she could eat or drink anything on the tray and she replied "No." Her affect was flat and depressed, and she did not want to chat. My informal assessment concluded that her comfort needs were: nutrition, mobility, positioning (physical); improved spirits and motivation (psychospiritual); social support and understanding (sociocultural), and a tidier room, light and noise management, clean linens (environmental).

I began implementing my comfort care plan, asking Susan if anything at all might taste good to her? She weakly answered, "Maybe some cream of wheat." I told her I could order that, which I did immediately. Then I asked if she could get into the chair so she could eat more easily. She agreed, and I helped her sit up. Already her affect improved a bit. I adjusted the TV and shades in her room to her specifications, picked up tissues and trash, and put her call light at her fingertips. "Are you comfortable?" "Yes, I'm OK." Telling her that I would return with the cream of wheat, I left the room, told a team member and the ward clerk that I would be in Susan's room, and asked them to try not to disturb us...I was going to help Susan eat some breakfast. I turned off my beeper, retrieved the cream of wheat, entered her room, and closed the door. We needed some uninterrupted time!

I sat down in front of her with the tray table between us, and I asked her if she needed help with the spoon. She nodded "Yes." Such a simple, non-technical "intervention" and yet, the following note was my verification of how important these kind of comfort measures can be to our patients.:

Thursday
July 30, 1992

Dear Kathy,

What a most pleasant surprise to hear from you and for you to remember our 44th Anniversary!

It's your cream of wheat that started me back to recovery, but more than that, it was your t.l.c. (tender loving care) and time that I needed in my much weakened condition. It was quite an effort to raise my head to eat so I thank you and picture you feeding me very often in my mind.

I am eating better, sleeping better but still feel very weak. It takes a lot of effort just to fold a sheet or walk out on the porch.

Please stop by anytime, however, I do have an appointment Friday at U.H. with the doctor.

Thank you for being a "bedside nurse"!!

Marty D