

DON'T BE AFRAID, YOU ARE NOT ALONE

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Three days after the Formosa Fun Coast Explosion, my sons, who usually take forever to get ready for school, suddenly were sweet and obedient before I left for work that day. They said not to worry about them. They would get themselves ready for school so I could get to work to care for the victims of the accident. They seemed so selfless and all grown up that day.

Although I have cared for burned patients in the past but I never had to deal with so many burned victims all at once. At the beginning, I was not sure where to start. My heart felt heavy when I was listening to my colleagues during a shift change. We worked together to change the dressing. From the last dressing change, the wounds were still bloody in appearance but this time her limbs seemed pale. We asked the patient if she was in pain. She didn't even make a sound. A thought flashed across my mind: This patient might be suffering from "acute compartment syndrome" and might need urgent fasciotomy! She cried in pain when their fascia had to be cut open to relief the pressure to bring back circulation in the region. Even though she had been given a large dose of pain medication, my heart ached when I saw her tossing in bed, protesting about the pain. As I was cleaning the open wounds, all I could do was to remind her: "It will only take a few seconds. This will keep the wounds from infection."

During visiting hours, most patients put up a happy face and tried to be strong in front of their families. One said, "The nurses at the ICU take good care of me. I have been a good patient and I am fine now. Please don't worry." These young adults exhibited such strong characters that touched everyone's heart.

While caring for their wounds, some patients started to describe the event on the day of the explosion. As they recalled the event, their bodies and mouth shivered and tears started to flow down their faces. They were afraid that that they would die at that moment. Some regretted lying to their parents about attending the event. Some felt ashamed. All I could do to ease their fear was to tell them not to look back but to focus on getting rest, eating nutritious meals and keeping up with the basic physical activities so they can have a speedy recovery. That was the only way to pay back their parents.

One time, I ran into a patient's mother as I was getting ready for my shift. Just as I was thinking about the coincidence that she was my patient for the day's shift,



and how I would try to encourage her, I saw a group of nursing staff in her room surrounded by many medical instruments. My heart sank. When I saw her face, I was shocked to see the rapid deterioration of her condition. How could this be? A couple of days ago she was still talking to me. I felt helpless at the moment but quickly realized that I am a nurse, not her family member. I must act professionally to save her. However, the minute I started working on her, I could no longer hold back my tears. I couldn't hold myself together if she was my daughter, knowing that her family was waiting outside, concerned and anxious. Finally, the attending physician explained her condition and nurses and volunteers helped ease their fear and calm their nerves.

All the explosion victims are young but had to withstand tremendous emotional pressure from this incident. They were sad, hurt and frightened. I told them: "You are not alone. Your nursing staff will be right by your side." Their courage is admirable. I know that they will be able to get through all the complications in wound debridement and rehabilitation and be on the road to recovery.