



# Embrace the Joy of Tears and Sweats

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## Going with the Flow

My teacher once asked me what my dream was. "Just go with the flow." I replied. As precocious and sentimental as I was, I wished to be a rock under a waterfall, polished, though without a trace. The answer could not satisfy my mentor, who ridiculed me for my lack of ambition. I am but an ordinary person, concentrate only on the moment, maybe pondering years later from time to time, but nothing beyond.

When filling in the preference card for university, I thought about servicing the community as a medical professional. When I received the news that I was accepted into the nursing department, I dove right in, in spite of my doubts working in the field as a male. It was around the time when national health insurance was introduced, I, still ignorant of what future have installed for me, comforted myself that nursing is a professional with high demands, unemployment is highly unlikely. Moreover, I enjoy helping others; selecting something I enjoy as my vocation, is it not bliss?

I was confounded by my standard passers-by attitude once I started working, a thought within forced me to change. I chose psychiatric care to fully utilize my sensitive and observant nature and to overcome my poor interpersonal skills, the director of nursing department at the time also felt that placing a boy in psychosomatic medicine might not be a bad idea, and since then I have accumulated decades of experience.



From novice to veteran, Jen-Che Kuo for a moment forgot how to empathize with patients, but ultimately regain his perspective with the demonstration of the senior nurse. Now, Jen-Che and the ward team work hand in hand to safeguard patients' mental health.

## From Novice to Veteran

In nursing profession, there is no “craziest”, only “more and more crazier”; no “busiest”, only “more and more busier”.

Eight hours flew pass as I wandered from one bed to another, occupied with evaluation, drug administration, treatments, health education, and resolving emergencies. What about reports, you might ask? I hardly had any time to sit and rest, not to mention structuring and writing reports! I had to, after my shift is over, carry a pile of patient records and cold dinner, sitting in the seminar room, dig into the dinner with my left hand to satisfy my empty stomach; squeeze words out of my fatigued brain and jot it down with my right hand. From day shift and evening shift, and then to night shift...sigh! Overworked every day, a life so different from how I envisioned. I begin to doubt my career choice.

As those who came in the same time as I did disappear one by one, so are the girls around me, and I barely had the chance to ask for their numbers! Just as I began to lose confidence in my perseverance and decided to consult with



the divinities, an internet article caught my attention, and it said, “Before we fully comprehend the matter, we have no right to deny or be skeptical, and instead direct attention to the aspects we have yet to discover. Keep your heart open, spare some room for your life to thrive.” I felt enlightened! How am I to judge if I barely stepped into the realm of nursing? Those four years of academic life is nothing but theoretical, it means nothing without practice! What does not kill me makes me strong. If there are rocks ahead, I shall climb these rocks and carry myself higher and further.

With each day passing, I began to grasp the tempo of my work, understand how to accomplish the trivialities by utilizing the fragmented free time, and eventually get off work earlier and earlier. I earned a sense of accomplishment by confronting various challenges each day, but a sense of emptiness began to creep in. The hectic workload is squeezing me dry. For sake the efficiency, I did what I thought was best for the patients in the shortest time possible, while thinking I was truly doing them a favor. Somehow, though, many patients and their families simply did not appreciate my endeavor, how annoying!



As the head nurse, Jen-Che Kuo would also discuss, during morning assemblies and team meetings, ways with staff to safeguard the safety of patients as well as staff.

One day, a patient diagnosed with clinical depression arrived. She seemed to wearing a pair of grey glasses, seeing nothing but sorrow and despair, and her stubbornness and obsessions blinded her from my efforts. Waves of powerlessness overwhelmed me, pushed me to the edge, and I almost screamed at the nursing station. A senior nurse picked up on my predicament, tapped me gently on the shoulder, told me to take a rest and took over the patient for me. I took some time to calm down and went to assist the nurse, and what I saw astonished me. The nurse, sat by the patient's side, spoke to her like a friend, guiding her thoughts, and all of the sudden, the patient burst into tears. The nurse handed over some tissue paper and held her hand, providing support and company. The patient, after her emotional release, decided to cooperate with the therapy. It was at that moment, I finally realized, what we are treating is not simply a disease, but a living being. The senior nurse showed me the art of nursing, a revelation which revamped my definition of nursing.

### **Thoughts on Challenges, Blessings Enhanced by Challenges**

People often asked me, "It must be quite an easy task working in the mental health clinic," and to which I always answer with a smile. Actually, the experience was certainly polarized, under the glamorous white robe is often sweat and tears. A dramatic portrayal would be "smiles reflected in our tears", and the colloquial version would be dumbfounding. Only those working in the field would truly understand. Of the 3600 days in this department, the emotions are profound, explained only by the following:

Ten years of nursing, fatigued in body and soul,  
Ponder upon ponder,  
Unforgettably so;  
Overburdened with bitterness,  
Where can I talk them out?

Because of the nature of this unit, to protect the safety of patients and staff, there are many hospital inpatient regulations. We would comfort and treat the patients as if they are our family. But there are times when patients are ill, and they can no longer control themselves, staff must be firm and determined to stop their inappropriate behavior. Patients may be angry and disgruntled when their



demands are not met. When we are lucky, some patients know it is not right to be violent and would complain through the normal grievance protocol. When we are not so lucky, we count our blessings when we are not hurt as some patients are like to speak with their fists.

Due to the unique nature of our department, many regulations are in place to ensure the safety of our patients and staffs. In addition to empathetic comfort, the staff have to restrain the patients' inappropriate behaviors when they are vulnerable due to cognitive impairment. It is unavoidable to have grumpy patients whose demands are not met. If lucky, the patient is decent enough, they would choose to file complaints to release their anger; if unlucky, the patient is proficient in communicating through fists, it would be a blessing to us to get out unscathed.

When new colleagues report to the mental health department, I always encourage them with reverse psychology, "If you have not been beaten by a patient, you are not considered as a good mental health nursing staff." I am not encouraging that everyone should look for a beating, but rather, to face patients with a positive attitude.

For example: a patient, who suffered from depression, was admitted because of suicidal intent. During the nursing period, it was soon discovered that he had a tendency to twist others' intentions, easily angered when his psychological needs were not met, and would vent his dissatisfactions through various channels. The most recent confrontation was during a routine check-up by the attending physician, where the patient, who was in the shower, misunderstood the physician's intent to discuss follow-up treatment plans as an act to get rid of him. The thought angered him, who revenged the physician with constant complaints and threatened to call reporters. Our colleagues, upon hearing the news, came to clarify the misunderstanding. With the knowledge of the patient's instability, they spent more time and attention to communicate with him to avoid further complications. When facing these "mental bullies", nursing staff would have to shoulder even greater stress and workload. Cases like this would be discussed during morning ward meetings and team discussions in order to study more nursing techniques, avoid further cases from occurring, and prevent patients conditions from deteriorating.



**Head Nurse Jen-Che Kuo said that ten years of nursing had fatigued his body and soul, but the experience also enabled him to transform predicaments into solutions.**

Life is filled with inconveniences and obstacles. Looking back, though, such obstructions may be our boost, inspire our advances and cultivations. It is why Master Cheng Yen educates us to utilize compassion and wisdom in our affairs, open our heart, to relieve the bad karma we created in the past.

Life is destined to be challenging. You would only avoid tripping if you do not move at all. There is no safe road out there. As long as we persist, everyone can overcome challenges. If we have a goal, we can begin our journey, and that is half the success. With success, you are one step closer to your dream. Never forget that we grow great by dreams, how would our life be without dreams? Master Cheng Yen inspired us with her words, "Life enriches through helping others, wisdom grows through self-actualization". I am fortunate to adhere to my mission, to earn the opportunity to benefit others, to constantly strive forward and self-actualize.