

Stories from Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul

Fish story

By LeAnn Thieman, LPN



We've all heard the expression "laughter is the best medicine." Over the years, scientific evidence has corroborated the therapeutic value of laughter, which has been shown to lower BP and heart rate, improve lung capacity, improve memory and alertness, reduce pain, aid digestion, and lower levels of stress hormones.

But during a hectic workday, as we witness the worries and sufferings of others, we often forget to laugh. Indeed, we wonder if it's even appropriate. How could we laugh in such troubled times? This true story from *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul, Second Dose*, reminds us that laughter is good for the patient's soul too.

Several years ago I had the pleasure of lounging around as hospital patient for several days while I was being treated for a staph infection. My profession was in health care and I worked at this hospital, so I knew many staff members well. Although I had a serious infection, I didn't feel sick, and I found myself on the receiving end of a few practical jokes (which I swear were completely undeserved).

I awoke the second day of my stay when a nurse came in to change my I.V. solutions, which included several fluids and antibiotics. I noticed immediately that she was carrying a large, old-fashioned glass I.V. bottle containing at least a liter of fluid.

That's odd, I thought.

Then I saw three goldfish circling in the water. I spotted my friend Gary, the pharmacist, lurking nearby, and he, the nurse, and I laughed and carried on about my fish. For some reason, it just seemed right to name them Larry, Moe, and Curly Gary, even though Gary was a few hairs shy of curly.

They started to take the fish away, but seeing opportunity rear its mischievous head, I called them back.

"Let's don't tell the nurses on the next shift about the fish," I suggested.

It's amazing how easy it is to enlist silent co-conspirators. I turned the bottle spout up and uncorked it so the fish could breathe until the afternoon.

As the 3:30 shift change approached, I recorked the bottle and hung it behind the largest of my I.V. bags so the fish were mostly out of sight. I then carefully taped extra tubing from the fish bottle to my I.V. line so that there appeared to be a connection.

Just after the shift change, I pressed the call button. "My I.V. has a problem," I reported innocently through the intercom.

A new graduate nurse was dispatched to my room to check my I.V. line.

Entering the room, she asked, "Your I.V. has a problem?"

"I hate to complain, but I think maybe the line is blocked."

She started checking the I.V. site at my wrist, as nurses are trained to do. Seeing no problem, she traced the line upward, checking each connection. As she got halfway up multiple tubes, movement in the fish bottle caught her eye. She shrieked so loudly that I jumped even higher than she did, which must have been impressive considering that I was lying flat on my back. I'm sure even the fish jumped.

When she landed, she covered her mouth with both hands and shouted, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh!"

The laughter of her coworkers filled the doorway behind her. She turned toward them, fanning her face with her hand.

"Man," I said, "you scared the bejeebers out of me! That's no way to treat a patient!"

"Out of you!" she said breathlessly. "You should have been in my shoes!"

"Are they still on?"

I had high hopes for a repeat performance at the next shift change, but that nurse was on to me. She simply gave me a "you-are-so-busted, Mister" look, shook her head, and went about her business.

The next day Larry, Moe, and Curly Gary were discharged home to live happy goldfish lives as pets for one of the nurse's children.

The day after that, as I was preparing to go home myself, a patient from the adjacent room stopped at the doorway of my room and said, "You know, I've been in the hospital a lot recently, but this was absolutely my best hospitalization."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Because laughter is good medicine."

"Laughter is good medicine," I chuckled. "Nurses and patients need a dose of it more often."

—Daniel James ✧

Daniel James, who lives in Colorado, worked in a hospital business office at the time of this story. He has also been a hospice volunteer and supported medical missions. LeAnn Thieman, a certified speaking professional, is a motivational speaker and the coauthor of *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul* and *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul, Second Dose*. To learn more about her books or presentations, visit <http://www.NurseRecruitmentandRetention.com> or call 1-877-THIEMAN.