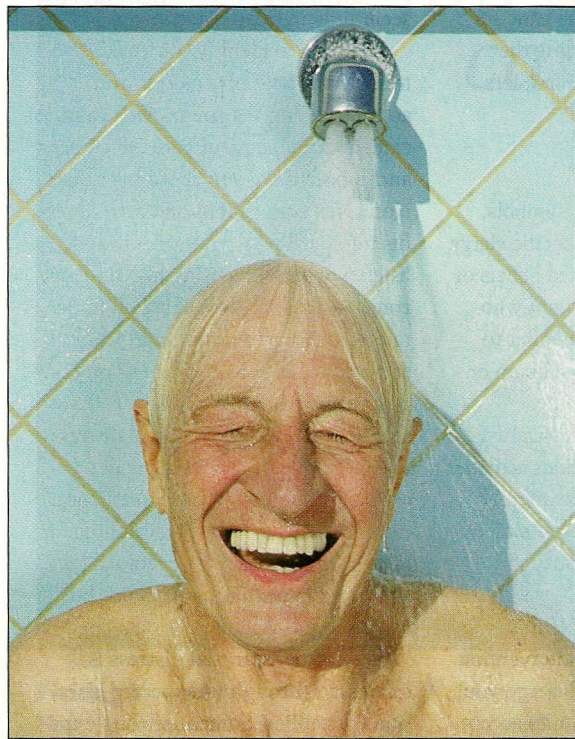


“Thanks, Larry”

By LeAnn Thieman, LPN

WITH THE CURRENT nursing shortage, sometimes we must work with short-staffing. On those shifts, we struggle to keep up with charting, passing medications, and other important nursing routines. But as we keep pace with these demands, we never want to overlook the “real” work of nursing, as this nurse’s story reminds us.



My morning was off to a bad start at the long-term-care facility where I worked. Not feeling well, the night nurse had left early without finishing her work and two nursing assistants hadn’t shown up. That left me with a team of one LPN and two nursing assistants to care for all the residents in the unit.

I glanced at my watch. I was already behind schedule and every available staff

person had gone to the dining room to help residents with breakfast. Eager to begin the “real” work of nursing—performing assessments, giving treatments, administering medications, and calling healthcare providers—I hustled down the hallway.

Then I caught a glimpse of Larry, 76. His numerous ailments included heart

failure, severe arthritis, and dementia. Now his large frame filled the doorway of his room. He was grinning pleasantly. That was Larry. Although he was confused and his speech was unintelligible, he was always cheerful.

I stopped short. Larry was wearing the top of his blue pajamas—and nothing else. His disposable undergarment lay crumpled by his bed. Larry hadn’t made it to the bathroom in time. He desperately needed a shower, immediately.

“Oh, no, Larry,” I sighed. “Not now.”

Why did I have to be the one to spot him? I

thought. Now I had no choice but to give him a shower.

Grinning happily, Larry was delighted to receive my attention. I threw a bedsheet over a wheelchair, helped Larry aboard, and drew the sheet up to cover him. With the speed of a marathon runner, I rolled him down the hall to the shower room.

After helping Larry from the wheelchair to a shower chair, I tossed his pajama top

into a hamper and turned on the water full blast. The sudden force of water made the long shower hose dance, spraying water in every direction, flooding my shoes, and soaking my pant legs. Larry giggled. Damp but undeterred, I managed to grab the hose nozzle and direct the spray onto Larry. While I soaped, scrubbed, and shampooed, Larry hummed.

Once he was squeaky clean, I struggled awkwardly to get him into a sweat suit. Although Larry was cooperative in spirit, his stiff body was cumbersome and unyielding. After what seemed like an endless tussle of pulling and tugging, I finally had him dressed and back into the wheelchair.

By then the morning was mostly gone. Knowing I’d never catch up anyway, I took the time to give Larry a quick shave and comb his hair.

“Larry, you look terrific!” I said.

Larry did look good. How I looked was another matter: My hair hung limply around my face, my pants and shoes were soaking, and my glasses were smeared. Both my stamina and my deodorant had been severely tested.

Larry treated me with one of his generous smiles. “You like what you’re doing, don’t you?” he asked. It was the first complete sentence I’d ever heard from Larry.

I looked into his face, so open and innocent, and gave his arm an affectionate squeeze. “Yes, Larry, I love my job.”

His surprising words made me realize that I’d been doing the “real” work of nursing all along.

—Barbara A. Brady, RN (Retired) ✦

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