

Critical Care Exemplar

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Theresa Brown, author of *Critical Care: A New Nurse Faces Death, Life, and Everything in Between* gives a firsthand account of what it is like to make the transition to becoming a first year registered nurse in an oncology unit. She writes of the struggles and the joys of becoming a nurse, as well as the physical and emotional aspects of this strenuous, yet rewarding profession. Brown's chronicle of these times is written in such a powerful way that it almost feels as though I was right there with her, experiencing everything she experienced, and feeling everything she felt. After reading *Critical Care: A New Nurse Faces Death, Life, and Everything in Between*, I feel as though I have been enlightened not only about the experience of becoming a nurse and entering the practice, but also about the true meaning of life as well as mortality. As I delve further into the process of becoming a nurse myself, I found that the connection I made with this former English professor was inevitable.

Mixed in with all of the excitement and anticipation I am experiencing at the thought of becoming a nurse, I also have feelings of fear and nervousness that I can not suppress. Though I normally try to welcome any emotions that associate with stepping outside of my comfort zone, it is still easy to succumb to the occasional doubts and worries about my ability to be the efficient and resilient nurse I hope to be. There is no doubt that there are elements of this career that are, as Brown put it, "unsettling", and I trust myself to have the wherewithal to cope with most of the unpleasant aspects of nursing. However, I have had no experience with death firsthand, and I wonder how much of a psychological toll this will take on me, especially in my first year as a nurse. I have heard hundreds of variations of the expression, "leave work at the door", but when

it comes to this sole factor, I didn't know if that will be an option for me. That was until I came across this quote by Theresa Brown:

“Death is always death, and in real life, especially in the world of the hospital, sudden death, whether violent and gruesome or unbelievably prosaic, is unsettling. What can one do? Go home, love your children, try not to bicker, eat well, walk in the rain, feel the sun on your face, and laugh loud and often, as much as possible, and especially at yourself. Because the antidote to death is not poetry, or miracle treatments, or a roomful of people with technical expertise and good intentions - the antidote to death is life” (Brown, 2010).

Brown explained to her readers that death is simply not easy to handle. It is disconcerting in any circumstance. However, we must take this experience as all the more reason to lead a life worth living.

These sentences have liberated me from my greatest fears about becoming a nurse. I now know the day will come when there is nothing more I can do to save a life, but when it comes to that, I will think about all of the goodness that one individual spread and received, and I will be capable of finding solace in the life that person lived, rather than anguish of the life that was lost. The role of a nurse is not a simple one, but it is more than gratifying if you allow yourself to find joy in every chart you fill out, every dosage you give, and most of all, every patient you care for. *Critical Care: A New Nurse Faces Death, Life, and Everything in Between* has also taught me that instead of “leaving work at the door”, I can take it with me but in a positive light, rather than

lingering over the stress and setbacks of a long day. Instead, I can use both my victories and failures as motivation to be the best nurse, caregiver, family member, and friend that I can possibly be. Because after all, the only antidote to death is life.

References

Brown, T. (2010). *Critical care: A new nurse faces death, life, and everything in between*. New York: Harper Studio