

Student Articles

A Day in the Life of A Clinical Nursing Student

My name is Debra Snider and I wanted to give a sneak preview into a clinical day for all those anxious pre-major nursing students. I know I would have loved a preview myself, prior to beginning my schooling at UAA.

So much goes into the preparation of a clinical. Mainly the lab time you spend practicing your skills and really putting all the knowledge your instructors quench your mind with during lecture days, to apply to hands on skills for real hospital setting. Of course once you make it to your first day and you anxiously look at your peers, whose poker faces match yours. . .confident. Only inside you're ready to give into nervousness and you want so much to be capable and yet inexperience leaves you just a wall flower along side your colleagues, all wearing white scrubs with the team leader (instructor) to guide all of you.

You get to your assigned unit (ours this semester was the Medial Surgical Unit at Valley Hospital, Palmer) and we all meet together in the 'report room.' Round table discussion ensues and the nurses from the night shift mutter off medical terminology that flies right over your head. You ask yourself, "should I know what they're talking about? Did I miss something in class?" Truth is, although your instructors prompt you for 'not knowing everything' in the beginning, you will think you're the only student in the report room at a loss. Remember, everyone wears his or her poker face to clinicals. I didn't find it anywhere in the nursing handbook, but it seems everyone puts it on and it goes real nice with our sterile white scrubs.

You continue to listen and perk up when you hear your assigned patient's name or room number. Then when you realize who your nurse is for the day that you will shadow, you find your spot along side her/him somewhat clumsy and listen intently to details (I wasn't sure if I collected the most important data, but just to give you advice on your first five reports, if you miss anything, you will find a magic piece of paper known as 'the Kardex.' A student nurse mantra: 'Kardex. . .Kardex'). Now then, you have data and you're off to the patients room at 7:30am and your instructor says, "go and meet with your patient, get their vital signs, do AM care and make sure they are ready for any appointments or treatments for the day." Of course you head right out and get to the room to find a snoring comfortable individual, at which point you realize during lab, all your patients were classmates and none of them were sleeping while you performed skills on them. So then you carefully back out of the room and with lost hands, guess who is right behind you? Captain Clinical! She asks, "so, are you ready to get your patient up?" You reply, 'Yes!' What else are you going to say? She says, "okay, once you get them up and need the chart, find me and I'll make sure you have all the data in the right place on the nursing flow sheets and the computer." You're thinking, "whew, close one!" At which point your courage went up miraculously and you head back into the room. Gently you tap your patient on the shoulder and say, "Mr. Patient, time to get up. My name is Debra and I'm the student that met with you yesterday briefly and warned you. . .I mean, said that I would be with you today." Your groggy patient asks, "what time is it?" You reply, "7:30." He tells you, "I'm so tired, the nurse kept coming in and out during the night." You reassure him that it will take just a few minutes to get his vitals. . .but 20 minutes later, after wrestling with the equipment, you run out the door and realize, "oh no, how many times did they breath in fifteen seconds?" At that moment, the 'real nurse' goes into the room and flips on the light to see the patient. I thought, "wow, how did she do that?" She greets him with a good-morning and asks him a series of questions, for which she is busy checking him from head to toe. I'm carefully watching again; one, two, three and FOUR! Yes, I get to record sixteen breaths! Real Nurse looks at you and asks, "did you get his vitals this morning?" "Oh, ah, yes!" You both step out and you give her ALL the numbers. Whew, another close one!

Does this all sound tiring? True, some who have been in the hospital setting before getting into nursing school don't have the same 'new' experience. But I wanted to share with those who don't have any clinical experience and to let you know that all these feelings are perfectly normal in the first semester. Our class was given the privilege of being taught by a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, who gave a lot of support and reminded us about the stress we may encounter, which took a great deal of initial pressure off.



*Debra Snider
AAS Nursing Student*

If you find yourself overwhelmed, be cautious not to be too hard on yourself. This is part of our growing pains as nurses in the beginning and I would encourage you to try and get in touch with others who have been through a full clinical round and listen to their experiences. Also, talk about your feelings within your circle of colleagues to gain insight through their experiences. I think you will find some comfort and tips on how to overcome those feelings of inadequacy during long clinical days. You will also be able to concentrate on the most important experience in nursing school; your patients and your skills, that are based in good clinical knowledge. It will come. . .it will!

Debra Snider
AAS Nursing Student

Debra Snider was born in Alakanuk, Alaska (near St. Mary).
She is currently in her second semester of the AAS Program and her graduation date is May 2005.
Debra resides in Eagle River with her husband John, and their two children; Andrew, age 7 and Chrystelle, age 14.

"My incentive to become a nurse derived from my relationship with my grandmother, Lou Bahrman, 'Grandma B', from Florida. I had the privilege of caring for her during her rehabilitation following a stroke. Her frustration, loss of dignity and independence was devastating to our whole family and to assist her while she gained back a remarkable portion of her abilities was so rewarding. I firmly believe there is more happiness in giving than receiving and I'm ready to spend the rest of my life giving to people as a nurse."