



FEATURE

COMMON PATHS

Our shared needs
compel us to care.

by PETER ROSENBERGER

HEARING A COMMOTION, I peered from my wife’s hospital room to see medical staff clustered two doors down. Recognizing the flurry of activity, I rightly guessed a code blue. The event vividly reminded me of a code blue incident two decades ago while sitting with my wife recovering from another of her many operations. Reading beside her that day, I noticed she’d turned blue. Quickly, I alerted the nurse, who immediately called the code, and an astonishing number of people flooded her room and worked frantically to save her life. Standing quietly in the corner, I watched the team intubate and resuscitate Gracie and then quickly wheel her to the ICU.

Twenty years and 20 additional surgeries later, I listened to others experiencing the frightening scenario of a code blue. However, this time the ending proved heartbreaking. Wailing from a family member reverberated through the halls. As I returned to my wife’s bedside, she looked at me with wide eyes and weakly asked what had happened.

Sighing, I shared the harsh reality with her. She closed her eyes, and her face filled with sadness.

When I stepped into the corridor a half-hour later, I saw a tiny African American woman, whom

I correctly deduced as a family member, pacing back and forth in front of the room. Alone in the hall, she didn’t seem to notice me and continued pacing. I reached out my hand and quietly said, “Ma’am, I understand this has been a very hard day, and I’m so sorry.”

She accepted my hand as she looked up at me and shared that her father had just died. Mistakenly identifying me as a staff member, she invited me into the room where his body waited.

“Ma’am,” I explained, “I don’t work here; my wife is a patient two doors down.”

Surprised, she took a moment to ask about my wife. Watching her consider someone else while in her great sorrow deeply moved me. We stood quietly for a few minutes until a tall African American man, whom she introduced as her pastor, arrived. After we exchanged greetings, I took the opportunity to excuse myself and not impose upon the family. Taking her hand one last time, I again expressed my condolences and shared a Scripture. Then I left her with a phrase I often tell myself and fellow caregivers: “As you go through this — and it will be hard — allow His scarred hand to hold your scared hand.”

Embracing me, she nodded with understanding and gratitude.

Then I walked back into my wife’s room and watched her sleep — and again sighed while processing the moment.

As a caregiver for more than 35 years through a medical nightmare that’s included 83 operations, I’ve stood alone in many hospital hallways and felt crushed by despair and fear. So I understood that this grieving daughter deserved to have someone reach into her anguish and offer comfort.

Yet I also felt a twinge of bitterness settle on me when reflecting on the race division fueled by so many who have microphones and podiums. For the first time in my life, I felt awkward reaching out to someone in distress because some have pitted one group against another, lampooning and maligning would-be friends with false accusations. Given the vilification, what right did I have to insert myself into this woman’s pain?

But watching her struggle in isolation and grief, my own experiences compelled me to disregard the pervasive destructive rhetoric and offer what comfort I could.

On hospital floors, suffering and death

care nothing about race or politics. Twenty years ago, I watched a team dash to my wife’s room because the code sounded. Yesterday I witnessed another team do the same — because they also heard the alarm.

A different kind of alarm reverberates around our country — and the world — and it beckons us to rush to those in anguish. How many hesitate due to the divisiveness of those profiting from discord?

The team sprinting to the room two doors down contained people of all races and beliefs. They ran because a life was in danger.

Lives hang in jeopardy all around us — yet because divisiveness enriches some, caring for one another often suffers. A divided people love guardedly. Those weaponizing race may care little about brokenhearted individuals pacing in an empty hospital corridor. Yet their destructive words and deeds may rob those in need of comfort from others who, while looking different, still walk the common path of human fragility. 🌱

PETER ROSENBERGER hosts the nationally syndicated radio program, *Hope for the Caregiver*. Visit hopeforthecaregiver.com.

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