

## **A Beautiful Gift**

By Laurie Johnson, BSN, CCRN

2015 Joan Heimler Legacy of Life Scholarship Award Recipient

I responded to a code coming into the Emergency room. That act changed my life forever. After assisting with CPR at the bedside I went to the patient's son and explained what was happening and what to prepare for. It was then that I found out that all the family was in town for a wedding that was to take place the next day. I immediately bonded with this family.

We eventually were able to obtain a pulse and started vasopressor medications {used to increase/maintain his blood pressure}. Once the patient stabilized, we took him to obtain a CT scan of his head and from there to the ICU. The cardiologist talked with the family and let them know the prognosis was not favorable. After this discussion I contacted the Wisconsin Donor Network and made them aware of the patient and the fact that we were initiating hypothermia protocol.

I learned so much about this family and what a giving person the patient was. I also learned the patient had just been given rights to administer the sacrament of marriage to his son, which was to take place the following day.

The next day I updated the Donor Network and let them know when we were going to start rewarming the patient. A repeat head CT was to be done early afternoon. The network was going to send out a nurse that afternoon as well to talk with the family. The head CT showed significant amount of swelling and what the doctors felt was soon to be brain death. The family gathered in a conference room so the doctor could give them the results of the head CT and what actions could be taken from here. After this we all left so the family could have time to themselves. The patient's wife came to me and stated that they really wanted to pursue organ donation. I let her know that a staff member from the donor network would come and speak with her and explain everything. Our focus now was to give comfort to this family and fulfill the wishes of the patient.

Shortly thereafter, the patient's daughter approached me to let me know that her brother, who had cancelled his wedding, was requesting to be married at his father's bedside. I told her I would do everything I could to make it happen. I immediately contacted our supervisor and let her know the wishes of the family and their request for one of our chaplains to come to the hospital. I let the donor network know the request as well.

Within about one hour, we had all the family in the hospital room, a chaplain present, and even a pan of brownies for the "reception" made by the hospital kitchen. The patient's oldest son read what his father had wanted to say at the wedding. It was the most beautiful gift to be a part of. Our entire hospital staff surrounded the room.

After this emotional event the patient was evaluated by a neurologist and then taken to a cerebral blood flow study. The patient was declared brain dead. Immediately the patient's wife and their son worked with the donor network to determine what could be done to pass on their loved one's legacy. What better way than to donate to another. Knowing what I know of this patient and family, that is exactly what he would have wanted.

I was honored to be a part of the journey with this family and know that I did everything I could to help fulfill not only the family's wishes, but the patient's as well.