

## Creating Time

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2020 Joan Heimler Legacy of Life Scholarship Award Recipient

When I first started my career as a nurse, I was told that there would be many patients or situations that would impact my career. Being a night shift nurse, I found it hard to believe that anything like that could or would ever happen to me, until it happened. I have cared for a couple of donor patients and I can tell you each one of their names, what they looked like, every injury they sustained, how many family members they have, and what each patient loved to do while they walked this earth. I have seen many family members that are seared into my memory but there is one father whose face is burned into my heart, his voice echoes in my memories and I can still feel his pain.

Which leads me to a night shift I will never forget. A night of which the painful face and the shaky voice of a father would be forever inside my heart and a part of my soul. I had known I would be receiving this trauma patient from the emergency room; CT scan had showed severe herniation of which was unrecoverable and in-fact life ending for this young gentleman. I had known of the importance of activating Versiti early on in cases like these and as the house supervisor was telling me about the patient and the severity of his injuries, before I could even ask she stated that she had already called Versiti, and they would be sending someone very shortly to our facility. Time is of utter importance with critical situations such as these. As the patient arrived in our unit, he was unstable, and his body was hanging on for dear life. There in front of me was this perfectly good body with minor bumps and bruises, a beating heart, pink warm skin, fully functioning organs, but neurologically he was gone. How was I going to help the family process this, when hours ago the patient had been laughing and enjoying life? I knew this was going to be difficult as I had the task of keeping him alive to allow time for his family to meet with the physician and administer tests that I know would have devastating results. I introduced myself to them knowing that I would be their rock for the duration of the night.

His father wished to be at bedside during each assessment, he did not leave his son's side for the rest of my shift. Each neuro check I did he would stand at the end of the bed begging and pleading at his son to wake up. "Wake up, just wake up!" He would yell and beg repeatedly. His voice crying out in anger and pain, tears rolling down his face as each minute ticked by. I looked at this full-grown man losing his son before my eyes, knowing that his desperate cries would not be answered, and time was not on his side. I stood in the corner of the room as dad, mom, and brother looked on while the physician came in to do tests and break the devastating news to them. The gasps, the cries, the uncontrollable tears from a father who would not get to see his son get to grow old. His pleading eyes looking to me for answers of how and why. He said no words, but his desperate eyes looked to me and begged me to turn back time. Time that I could not give back to him. It was at this moment in my career of the harsh reality that trauma never sleeps, and time is one thing we can never get back once it's gone its lost forever. His son's body laid in front of us with minor external injuries, but he was gone and there was nothing in my power or the amazing team around us could do to bring him back. But I could offer him comfort and compassion during this time, that is what he needed because I knew that he would never forget this moment. I have never felt that a family member needed me more than in that situation and I am so glad that I could be there for him despite the tragedy he was facing. I was there for him.

I feel that by me being there and offering my comfort it allowed the family to be comfortable in asking further questions about organ donation I was extremely supportive in this situation and explained to them that another nurse would be here to talk to them shortly. There were more tests that we needed to stabilize the patient for which I knew was going to make for a long stressful day for all involved. The family decided to proceed with organ donation and that night I could see slightly less devastation in the father's eyes. His son's life had ended but with organ donation his son would live on through others.

Being involved in organ donation process has challenged and changed me both professionally and personally. I feel that I am more compassionate, understanding, and empathetic as a person and a nurse. I also now take advantage of opportunities to educate others about organ donation and answer questions about the process. I had originally thought that time was something that we can never get back but, once I really think about it, time is not lost in these situations, time is created in lives through organ donation.