

WORKING

The Patience Skill

It ain't easy
wearing green.

By Haidee E. Allerton

I have new respect for doctors and nurses. My father was recently in the hospital and sitting in his room for hours over several days, I saw firsthand what they have to do and have to put up with.

Now, *Working* is a humor column, so it does get funny (a bit) if you hang in here with me. Be patient. (*Patient*, get it?)

So, my father's roommate in the hospital was a gentleman who had become intoxicated and driven down an embankment. (That's not the funny part.) He'd injured his neck and poked a hole in his eye. (Not funny either.) I should tell you

that he was feeling no pain and is recovering, so you can be amused (or not) at what follows without feeling guilty.

Let's call him Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson was not happy to be in the hospital and kept coming over to my father's side of the room to ask my mother (for some reason) to get him his clothes so he could go home. He was wearing a c-collar to protect his neck and was supposed to lie down in bed and not move. So, the nurse had to keep coming in the room to escort him back to his bed and explain what he should do—over and

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over. And she did that—calmly, kindly, and with patience—over and over.

The doctors on round came by and started asking questions. “How old are you, Mr. Johnson?”

Mr. Johnson, who looked to be about 70, replied, “I’ll be 35 on August 10th.”

“Thirty-five? OK.”

“How did you get that scar over your right eye?”

“Fightin.’”

“OK. (sigh) Mr. Johnson, the accident poked a hole in your eye and we can stitch that up, but that will require surgery. We can leave it like it is, but you’d have to be careful never to poke or rub that eye again or you could lose your sight in that eye. Do you understand?”

“Not really. Where are my clothes? I’m going home.”

Oh, dear. I have listened to all of this, and I’m ready to poke some sense into Mr. Johnson. But the doctors try to help him make an informed decision as best he can. (He does have the surgery and is doing fine.)

In the meantime, Mr. Johnson comes from behind the curtain divider and heads for the hall—wearing his c-collar on top of his head. Shortly, an intern gently walks him back to his bed and explains, “Mr. Johnson, you’re supposed to keep the collar on your neck and you’re wearing it like a hat.”

I decide to ask for my father to be moved to a private room. I don’t know if you’ve been around a nurses’ station recently, but it is a hub of relentless activity, with demands and questions from all directions. Despite that, the nurses agreeably and quickly wheel my father down the hall and move the lone occupant of that room to become Mr. Johnson’s new roomie. Says one nurse, “We like to put the difficult patients in the same room. Makes it easier.”

I admonish my father that he had better not cause any trouble and do what the nurses say.

And then there are the urinal and bedpan duties. I rest my case.