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The true heroes in healthcare

Many people believe that it takes a truly special person to pursue a career in nursing. Providing exceptional care for patients isn't only emotionally demanding but it also requires many skills and values that healthcare workers must apply every day. From showing effective communication and critical thinking to empathy and teamwork. Nursing assistants also known as CNA's play a vital role in maintaining a smooth-running facility and ensuring quality care. Some think nursing assistants or CNA's have the easiest role in a healthcare workplace and that they make enough money. Some may see nursing assistants as less valuable than other medical professionals. Some think they don't play a crucial role in providing excellent quality care for patients. Despite the crucial role we play in providing good quality care, nursing assistants are undervalued and do not get the respect or recognition they deserve. We work in challenging work conditions that are physically demanding and emotionally draining. Many people do not understand how hard this job really is. Nursing assistants have to work with excessive workloads, understaffing, and challenging patients which can lead to frustration and burnout. Nursing assistants are just as valuable as other medical professionals, yet they are disrespected and underestimated. This is because people don't understand nor respect the level of training, skills and responsibility it takes to have to be a good CNA.

To begin, becoming a nursing assistant takes a lot of hard work. It requires dedication, intensive studying, and the ability to think quickly in high pressure situations. New and different things occur each day with patients. Some people think working as a nursing assistant is whatever and all we have to do is “babysit”. They are not taking into consideration we are caring for vulnerable adults. Adults that weigh one hundred and plus pounds. There are many stories I could tell when simple being present, aware and using my critical thinking skills has helped me prevent my patients from having accidents. I monitor my patients every fifteen minutes; within those fifteen minutes I have had patients nearly on the floor. Other times, I have walked in on patients already on the floor and I must get help from other nursing assistants to assist them off the floor. We risk hurting our backs and become very exhausted after we have helped these patients. Nursing assistants also deal with a lot of patients that are choking or unconscious. Which means we perform the Heimlich maneuver and CPR quite often. Having to perform the Heimlich maneuver or CPR on a patient can be very stressful, especially in urgent situations where every second matters. What makes getting this job done even more challenging is that we have to make sure the patient is not on the do not resuscitate list. It can be a slap to the face if you make the mistake of reviving a person that no longer wishes to live. Along with dealing with tricky situations like these, nursing assistants have about eight different patients we must care for each day. Having eight patients to myself could be considered a good day, but in situations where coworkers call off. Which is often. We are left with an entire unit until further notice. Which can result in not being able to complete all of my tasks due to the high workload. It also results in not meeting patient's expectations and needs. We must bathe, feed, groom and assist them all day long with their daily needs. Running back and forth the entire shift makes the day go by super-fast leaving no time for

ourselves and even missing our lunch breaks or being asked by our supervisors not to take one because they need us due to being short staffed. This makes our job extremely difficult.

In addition, it is often said nursing assistants get paid sufficient for the work that they do. Not only is this a lie but there is a shortage of CNAs for a reason. Nursing assistants are often tasked with some of the more difficult and uncomfortable aspects of patient care. It can be gross. We must clean up many bodily fluids like urine, feces, vomiting, and blood. We also deal with bedsores. Patients with limited mobility develop sores on their skin which must be treated by us. We must reposition them and get weight off that bed sore; making sure they are comfortable at all times. We deal with patients who are incontinent meaning they can no longer control their urine or feces from exiting their body, which requires us to preserve their cleanliness and keep patients free of unpleasant odors. The smell and appearance of the waste we deal with can be tough to handle and not just anyone can do it. For example, I have had patients that must be at an operation room at a certain time, but before that I make sure they have eaten, showered and are clean enough to be on the operating bed so my coworkers can perform their duties. Aside from the bad parts of being a nursing assistant we are the ones providing emotional and psychological support to those who are going through a challenging time, even if our lives are not so great.

We develop close, trusting relationships with our patients due to the amount of time we spend together. Many patients in healthcare settings are lonely, anxious and in pain. With nobody to count on but us. Patients who are near the end of life need a lot of comfort and emotional support. We offer empathy to them and their families as well. This can be something extremely rewarding because it feels good to know I can make a positive impact in

a person's life and that they look forward to me being present for them. However, on the not so bright side of this nursing assistants must deal with their own personal problems just like any other human being and it can be emotionally draining having to make sure we are in a good mental state so our patients can be surrounded by happiness, reassurance, security, and peaceful company. While working as a CNA the pay can be rewarding, and you can make many connections in the workplace. The amount of money a nursing assistant earns will never be equal to the work that they do. The amount of intimate care we do for patients is over the line.

Despite the crucial role we play in healthcare, nursing assistants often face a lack of recognition and appreciation in several ways. Our work can be undervalued, overlooked, or taken for granted. Nursing assistants often work behind the scenes doing all the hands-on tasks and fully engaging with patients. For example, nursing assistants are the main ones to clean up patients once they have passed away. I've cleaned up deceased bodies plenty of times, ensuring that they look clean for their family members to see them and so the morgue can receive a semi clean body. It is a very hard and upsetting thing to do, but no doctor or nurse will do this type of job simply because "it is not a part of their job description." In many healthcare settings, the spotlight tends to fall on doctors or nurses whose work is highly visible considering CNA's do all the behind the scenes. Which leads nursing assistants' contribution as being undervalued even though we are performing much of the hands-on work which directly impacts not only the patients' comfort and well-being but also the image of the healthcare facility. Due to the staff shortages in healthcare, we often must care for a higher number of patients than we really should, leading to stress and burnout. I was once working in a nursing home that had numerous call offs every day. This meant almost every day I had over ten residents that were under my direct care. I could have said no and gone home any of the

times this happened, but I always felt bad for the residents. The staffing shortage was not their fault. However, I was hurting myself by taking on so many residents until further notice. Often times residents need an assist of two people, which makes it incredibly hard to be working as the only CNA and having nurses around that aren't available to help. This leads to having an extremely hard and stressful day. There are many other nursing assistants that deal with this throughout their time working as caregivers. Our workload can become overwhelming, especially when we are expected to do our best with truly little resources and often all our efforts do not get acknowledged by our higher ups. However, we learn to deal with it because at the end of the day if we are not valued by our employers the residents are very grateful to have us there.

In conclusion, nursing assistants are the heroes of healthcare. Not only providing physical care but also emotional support to patients. Our dedication, compassion and commitment to our patient's well-being can often be overlooked, despite the essential role in the daily operations of healthcare facilities. Nursing assistants play an irreplaceable part in maintaining a hospital, nursing home, and other settings. I am extremely grateful I have been able to experience what it's like to be a nursing assistant before I become a nurse. It's taught me the value of hard work, compassion, and the impact of being there for someone in their most vulnerable moments. When I become a nurse, I will respect and support the nursing assistance who work with me because I know exactly what it's like to be in their shoes and I can't take that role for granted. Recognizing their value and supporting them with different resources, pay and acknowledgement of their work will ensure nursing assistants continue to provide the high-quality care they have been doing that is vital for excellent patient care.

