

## Fleeting Moments and the Smallest Gestures

Good evening everyone.

I am honored to have been selected by the Board of Directors of the OSRT as this year's Penn-Hu-Mac-Par-Gill Lecturer. Thank you so very much for this privilege.

Only the very best people in any field will take the time and make the sacrifice to come to a conference like this and work to make our Ohio society as successful as it is. You are the top people in Imaging, the ones who make our profession...well, professional. So, I'd like to personally thank all of you for being here, and I'm looking forward to sharing my thoughts with you.

When I started thinking about a topic to share with you this evening, I first looked at the previous lecturers and their topics. Did you know that there have been 53 lecturers since 1966? And interesting to me was that in 1968 another Albrecht, Leroy Albrecht, was the 3<sup>rd</sup> lecturer. Maybe a distant relative? Who knows? I see many past lecturers here this evening, which is a testimony to the dedication of our OSRT members. But looking at the list of names and topics really just showed what topics I couldn't use.

So, I had to look within myself at what is most important to me, and what I've experienced in my life. As a caregiver, radiographer, and educator I've always believed that you take care of your patients and their family members as if they were one of your own family. I'm sure all of the educators here in this room have said the same thing to their students many times. I also want to be clear that when I use the term educator, I mean every person who teaches a student, whether their title is instructor or RT. Everyone touches others' lives and can make a difference by sharing their experience and expertise.

I'm fortunate to work for an organization where **patients truly come first**. Where **empathy is** so very important that all caregivers receive special training in communication and caring. Where the Cleveland Clinic Empathy Video still makes me cry every time I watch it.

We are all caregivers, no matter what our job title. We are there for the patients and their families. One of the most profound moments I experienced as an instructor occurred when I was teaching a medical terminology class where there were students from many different healthcare fields, and some who were just starting their education.

As each student introduced themselves and shared what healthcare field they were going to school for, and what they currently did, one young lady said, "I'm a caregiver". So, I asked her what area, and she said "I'm in housekeeping. I see more of my patients than even their doctors do. I make sure they're comfortable and that everything is clean for them." They were **her patients**.

I was speechless...well, not for long as some of you who know me best realize I'm rarely speechless. She truly was a caregiver. And although I've been a caregiver for over 40 years, this young lady made an impact on me and how I viewed everyone who takes care of patients.

But it was my own experiences as the family member of a patient that truly brought home how important every person who comes in contact with a patient can be.

And this is the reason that I chose my topic, Fleeting Moments and the Smallest Gestures. All too often, you do only have "fleeting moments" with your patients. We all ask our patients "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

Sometimes you are blessed with extra time that you can spend with your patient. I know management is very concerned with productivity, but I would imagine that a big part of your institution's core values concern empathy; the ability to imagine what another person is going through. And the willingness to work to alleviate their suffering and create joy whenever possible. This doesn't take a lot of time or need to be grand gestures, small gestures are much appreciated because we know they come sincerely from the heart.

During the last few years I've seen healthcare from a very different perspective. Some of people I love most in my life have each had medical issues that required extensive hospitalization. Thankfully, not all at once. I've spent countless hours at their bedside in the hospital as each of them has struggled to heal. I've learned first-hand how important everyone in the hospital is to the health and peace of mind of patients and their families. The **smallest gestures** make the greatest impact on us as patients and family.

Those caregivers who took the time to stop and have a conversation with us made a huge impact. Not just a conversation about the reason you are in the hospital, but a real conversation. About sports, the weather, family, dogs...well, really anything besides our medical problems. It helps us feel somewhat normal, or as normal as we can be while basically living in a hospital. And it helps take our mind off our troubles.

Taking the time to have a conversation and ask how you can help is **so very** important. These are the **fleeting moments** that you have with your patients and their family.

I remember the young lady who brought up the food trays from the kitchen. She was so nice, she would stop and talk about the weather or anything and just make small talk. I know we are all supposed to ask, "can I get you anything else?" And that is welcomed but taking the conversation beyond what you are "supposed" to say makes it feel more natural and comfortable.

Doctors and nurses who didn't just stop in to check on our progress or report test results were also greatly appreciated. Those were the ones who went out of their way to explain things clearly and make sure we understood everything involved.

And when someone first asked **me** if I needed anything, I was so surprised. I'm not the patient, not the important one, but they didn't see it that way. Time after time I was asked if they could get me water, coffee, a blanket, a snack. I was also reminded by these amazing caregivers that **my health** was also important, and that I needed to **take care of myself** too. You sometimes lose sight of the importance of your own health when your loved ones are ill and in pain. To have someone care of about me, touched me deeply.

After discharge, we went to the Wound Healing Clinic each week. The front desk staff, the nurses and doctors were very special people. We saw them every week for months, so often that when we came in they would say "Hello Albrecht's!" Sort of like the TV show "Cheers" where everyone knows your name, but not as fun! But seriously, most weeks brought incrementally small healing, but to hear them report you'd think it was going great. They cheered every small step and stayed positive and friendly. Truly wonderful caregivers. They're conversations with us didn't completely revolve around just healing, but talking about holidays, vacations, how we spent the weekend, etc.

So I urge you, as caregivers, take every opportunity to get the most out of these fleeting moments with your patients and their families. **Smile, laugh, be a bright spot in their day.** Share yourself with them, so they can share themselves with you. Remember that it is the **smallest gestures of kindness** that are **most remembered and cherished.**

The Cleveland Clinic Empathy video is very powerful. I mentioned previously that I cry every time I watch it which is why I didn't show it at the beginning of my speech. This video touches you deep in your soul. It reminds us of some very important things. That we never know what other people are going through, and as difficult as your life may be at the moment, there are others who are going through as much as we are, or even more. This includes our students, co-workers, family members, and really anyone you see and interact with.

I'm also reminded of how you just never know what a person is going through or dealing with when I hear the quote "Everyone you know is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always". So very true.

I would like to close with a viewing of the Cleveland Clinic Empathy Video and a heartfelt thank you for allowing me to share with you this evening.