

# **Component I. The Nurse Burnout Awareness Guide™**

## **1**

### **A Day in the Life**

“Idealism is what precedes experience;  
cynicism is what follows.” – D. Wolf<sup>1</sup>

*“F#@!% you, Nurse! You wait till I get one of them customer surveys!”* These were some of the last words I heard from an ED patient under my care. The dialogue and scenario were hauntingly familiar. This particular “frequent flier” was well known in our department. I had just notified him that his request for a Demerol injection was denied by the attending ED physician. Just prior to that, the patient told me with a grin, *“It’s the only thing that usually works,”* as he rated his chronic back pain at 10 out of 10 between sips of his Big Gulp® and yelling at Jerry Springer on the TV.

Sadly, I knew that this patient would probably receive a customer satisfaction survey in the mail, that he would actually take the time to fill it out (never mind that he couldn't spare ten seconds to throw on a condom before conceiving a fourth child he had no intention of supporting), that he would badmouth me, and that I might very likely find myself in my supervisor's office for a lecture about my bedside

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manner. And I knew, too, how that lecture would play out. I would stand there, defeated, knowing that there was little point in defending myself or recounting things as they had *actually* happened. After all, the customer is always right.

The scenario that day was not uncommon, and the

shift was like any other. What was different was that I suddenly realized that everything I once loved about nursing was lost. And I was lost too.

It didn't start out this way. Patients had become customers, and they knew it. The sick ones were sicker. The ones who were not were more demanding

and felt more entitled. (*Was I a nurse or a waitress?*) They were less respectful and less accountable. Nurse Managers had become suits, knee-deep in paperwork and politics, unsupportive, and far removed from the realities of what was actually happening on their units. The economics of healthcare, including compensating to cover the costs of treating the uninsured and underinsured, managed care and dwindling budgets now dictated our policies and practices, rather than the doctors who actually attended medical school and the nurses who actually nursed.

At that moment, I knew that the system was broken and that it had broken *me*. I also knew that I couldn't fix it, and I couldn't take it any more. I did the only thing I could do to save myself, my family, and my sanity. I discovered a better way.

This is my story.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>D. Wolf quotation from Mary Elizabeth Croft (2005), *How I Clobbered Every Bureaucratic Cash-Confiscatory Agency Known To Man: A Spiritual Economics Book on \$\$\$ and Remembering Who You Are* (p. 12),

