

Moments with Marcus

By Marcus Engel

“More than ‘just’ a nurse”

During Hospitals Week in May I was keynoting for a session, which, I thought, was an invite only presentation for docs. Turns out, a decision had been made to invite not just docs, but everyone from the hospital. Awesome! The more, the merrier!

Before the presentation started, three ladies made their way into the empty auditorium. I always like to go meet folks before I keynote, so off I went to introduce myself.

After we’d exchanged names, I asked, “So, what is your area of practice?” Keep in mind, I still thought this session was physician only. The response was informative... but made me a little sad.

“Oh, Marcus, none of us are doctors. We’re just nurses.”

“Just” nurses?

Nurses... those professionals who probably log more hours with patients than any other employees in the whole institution? Those who are members of the most trusted profession in America? Those individuals who are there to provide expert skills, compassion and support during the most vulnerable moments of a patient’s life?

“Just” nurses?

I found their use of the J word a bit perplexing. My interpretation was that they did not see themselves as vital as doctors. They seemed to take on an air of “less than” since they didn’t have M.D. or D.O. after their names. Sure, there are different paths to different professions within healthcare, but there is no “just” anyone.

When these ladies described themselves as “just,” it felt like they were putting themselves in a lower category. That, “Aw, shucks”, eyes glancing at the floor thing where one’s body actually seems to shrink a bit at feelings of lower self worth. To this I say, “Bunk!”

If you are hands on with patients, even if just by verbal communication, you are essential. You are the spokes in the wheel that gives health care the momentum to propel patients to healing. You, nurses, are those who spend the greatest amount of time with patients and provide the most support in their return to health.

You are a healthcare professional! Be proud of that! I mean REALLY proud! You do an incredibly tough job, day in and day out. It is a job that can leave you physically, mentally, emotionally

and spiritually worn down to nothing at the end of a shift. It can also lead to the most incredible, humbling and life affirming experiences;. Sometimes on the same shift!

If you've ever gotten off work and sat in your car and had a good, ugly cry before going home, you're doing it right. When all you want is to be alone and curled up in a ball for hours, and you still walk into the next patient's room with a smile, that's when you're doing it right. When you go home and can barely drag yourself to bed, that's when you're doing it right. And I know that, for most everyone reading this, that is exactly what you do. You are not "just" anyone! Be proud, friends, you are doing it right!

Marcus Engel really likes healthcare professionals!

He's also the author of "The Other End of the Stethoscope" and "I'm Here: Compassionate Communication in Patient Care."

Marcus speaks, writes and lives to provide insight and strategies for excellent patient care.

MarcusEngel.com and ImHereMovement.org is where you can find him.