

The Heart Attack Grill: A Cause for Action or Reaction

Star Evangelista, DNP, MED, BSN, RN, CNL

Six o'clock in the evening, on the corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Fremont St., a man walks in a half-full establishment. He is welcomed by a couple of ladies dressed in unusually tight and short white outfits...were those "hand wash only" clothing stuck in the washing machine and dryer too long? The man, looking quite uncomfortable, willingly hands his jacket to one of the ladies. He is then handed a hospital gown. "Turn around Sir, this gown ties at the back, just like in the hospital, and by the way, my name is Jenny and I'm going to be your nurse tonight," the blonde says in a monotone, seemingly bored by the routine she had been doing in the last 8 hours. The man or patient, is seated on one of the bar stools and given a huge clipboard, a menu of services perhaps, or maybe a consent for treatment or release of medical record? The passers-by stare in awe as groups of hospital gown-clad people engage in conversation; a male dressed in surgical scrubs, a disposable cap, a mask, and a stethoscope around his neck, introduces himself as the "physician in charge." and of course there was the unusual lively bustle of the "school of nurses" wearing cardboard caps strategically placed on top of a fake chignon or pony tail, fishnet stockings and high heeled shoes. I was wondering why these "nurses" were not wearing "fall risks" bracelets as they attempt to tip toe around in their 6-inch stilettos... From my view across the street, the scene seems like a really bad episode on one of those popular medical series. ER maybe, since there was a 1950's GMC Suburban ambulance (that looked like a decked up hearse) parked right outside the front door.

With the chilly November breeze, came with a sense of realization. I just left the Emergency Room where I worked as a nurse. After an 8-hour shift, I came here to support my fellow nurses in their attempt to change how the public perceives nurses. What I'm looking at isn't an ER episode; the women in there aren't nurses; the only thing they have in common with real nurses were maybe the varicose veins on their legs, that told a story of hours of "nursing" although each from a very different context; the people dressed in patient gowns...well, although they seem to enjoy the role they are playing and the generous serving of burgers they are devouring, they are well on their way to becoming real patients.

I'm witnessing one of the more interesting marketing gimmicks on Fremont Street...the Heart Attack Grill, was founded in 2005 with the intent of serving "nutritional pornography". Eat at your own risk by eating huge servings of high-calorie items complete with deliberately provocative names: "Single", "Double", "Triple", and "Quadruple Bypass" hamburgers, ranging from 8 to 32 ounces (230 to 910 g) of beef (up to about 8,000 calories), all-you-can-eat "Flatliner Fries" (cooked in pure lard), beer and tequila, and soft drinks such as "Jolt" and Mexican-bottled Coca-Cola made with real sugar. Customers over 350 lb (160 kg) in weight eat for free if they weigh in with a (doctor or nurse) before each burger. Las Vegans and tourists alike verbalized their amazement at the hospital themed restaurant where waitresses ("nurses") take orders ("prescriptions") from the customers ("patients"). A tag is wrapped on the patient's wrist showing which foods they order and a "doctor" examines the "patients" with a stethoscope.

On a featured article on Star News Online by Vickie Eckenrode, real-life nurses were interviewed on their reaction on how nurses were portrayed on TV. According to the majority, Hawthorne, a story about a Chief Nursing Officer; Mercy, a nurse who just came back from a tour in Iraq; ER's strong willed patient advocate Nurse Carol and Abby, nurse turned resident; Nurse Jackie, and MASH's Hot Lips Houlihan, although not realistically depicting reality at all times and possibly leaving viewers some questions on the real world of healthcare delivery, are a welcome pop culture change. Over time, screenwriters and producers have improved on how nurses are depicted in these medically themed shows. But the reality is that there will always be bad portrayals of nurses, people will always have fantasies about nurses, and there will always be nurse stereotypes and businesses that will make money out of "nurse-themed gimmicks

The last decade was an important era of media and communication surge. The role of nurses has been brought to public attention not just by media depictions but also by how nurses have created their image over

time. Nurses exist in a much-troubled world of healthcare delivery. The issue that nurses face is the failure of the majority of nurses to look beyond our role as care givers. We have continuously isolated ourselves from each other, creating walls among nursing specialties and roles (academia, organizational leaders, clinicians (all levels), researchers, educators). We are now scrambling for solutions. Time has passed our field by and in order for us as a profession to catch up, it would require all of us to reinvent who nurses are. This can be done by creating a movement toward a "Renaissance" that is more than just a paradigm change within the profession. This movement also requires working with the public/community in creating a system that looks at the same vision of quality and safety. We need to unite, organize our ideas, have our voices be heard and lobby for policies that will allow us to provide that safe and quality care that we all speak of...and that which we want to be recognized for.

I am sure that passion is what drives us to stay in the profession. Our image as one of the most trusted group of professionals, I hope, will allow us to see beyond people's fantasies, human desire to eat whatever they want to eat, and businesses that are morally unacceptable. Yes, these issues need to be addressed, but not fight. These issues are a part of a huge marketing ploy that targets the weaknesses of humans...and creating negativity is not the way to engage the public. Nursing is in a stage where nurses are just now realizing that there is a much bigger arena, that we do have control over, unless we start having control of the direction of our profession. A re-direction of our efforts is necessary to fight a cause that will have more impact on nursing and nurses' image. That movement, I believe, should start from within the profession..."A Nursing Image Renaissance" ...starting with clinical nurses and using social media as an arena for experienced and novice nurses to recognize the issues that need to be addressed in the real world of Nursing. We need to set a unified vision regardless of specialty, cultural group, educational preparation or role. A strategic renaissance in Nursing education, activism in the socio-political arena, a new wave of transformational leadership, innovative practice development and creation of new knowledge to support clinical practice should be a part of that vision. As professionals, we need to speak up about who we are and what we are capable of doing. We must demand respect, again demand respect as professionals, and work collaboratively with other healthcare providers in making our needs to be better professionals heard.

Looks are just looks but the only way that we can change our true image is to collectively, as a profession, let our voices be heard. Let us be the leaders that we are. We are a special group of selfless people, We have to take care of what we need as a profession to grow, nurture the young nurses, develop a secure sense of leadership, get involved with policy making without being in politics, encourage innovation and leadership on both the micro and macro systems level, develop new knowledge and seek the best professional that we can be.

Really, so what if Pamela Anderson wears a nurse outfit? What matters is the fact that nurses are the most trusted professionals. We can undo the way healthcare delivery is perceived and focus on community education, prevention, awareness and empowerment by using the same tool as corporate marketing strategists have used to keep the public astray. We have to react with strategies that are proactive and not those that are deterrent to our already ailing profession. With public trust, the principles of nursing as our ammunition and the media as our tool, we have the power to change how our practice and we are perceived.