

Nurse Lacasad Paints for Patients: A Service Credo Story to Improve Health Care

By Mia Medcalf

Nursing school was the hardest thing she ever did, but Sharon Lacasad, RN, saw it as a calling to become an oncology nurse; she likes to say, "It was destiny, oncology chose me."

Oncology chose Ms Lacasad as breast cancer had chosen her mother. It didn't sink in that her mom had cancer until one day when she was cutting her mom's hair and it was falling out due to the chemotherapy. It changed her life. She had been a physical therapist but she changed course, went back to school, and embarked on a path to become a nurse. She appreciated the care that her mother had received and wanted to be of service in return.

Many of the oncology patients in her unit are elderly and have few remaining family or friends. Ms Lacasad was concerned that the nursing staff was so busy and that the patients didn't really see how much the nurses cared. She knew it was important to demonstrate to her patients that the nursing staff cared about them deeply. She also had a sense that they weren't going to heal if they had no human interaction. Imagining herself as an oncology patient, she realized that it must be boring to stare at the blank walls in a room day in and day out. That was when she had the idea to brighten the walls by taking classes to learn how to paint and creating art for the patients.

Ms Lacasad takes time outside of regular work hours to get to know her patients and to create paintings that speak to who they are, what they care about, and what they like to look at. One of her patients loves to fish, so she painted a fishing scene for him. No flowers are allowed in her unit, so she has created scenes with flowers and landscapes. There are other scenes such as a



"Dif-fruit Points of View" Mixed Media: Watercolor and Ink (above) by Sharon Lacasad (left).

serene woman holding an apple, a cathedral, and a row of colorful apples. A funny thing started to happen when the paintings were hung on patients' walls: the nurses started to slow down and engage in conversations with the patients in their care. Other people would notice the paintings and drop in to learn more about the pictures and their recipients. Patients and nurses became known to each other in a deeper manner with the paintings as a catalyst of something to share and enjoy.

Ms Lacasad is passionate in her belief that it is important to expose patients to more therapeutic modes of healing, such as the warmer care environments that she

promotes. She also speaks strongly about the need to educate the public about the relationship of environmental stressors and toxins to cancer. She shares that her mom never knew about everyday toxins that the average person encounters. Ms Lacasad is concerned that there is so little teaching about cancer prevention and would like to see free cancer prevention education courses in the future.

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As for the paintings that she shares with her patients, these are her thoughts "You do it without any thought of recognition or reward. You do it because you care" ❖

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