

“**YOU** can’t go in there!” stated the Spiritual Support Worker (SSW) as I approached the patient’s room. She moved to the door and blocked the entrance. With her back towards me she turned her head and fixed her eyes on my ID. Because I had introduced myself earlier she was aware I was a nursing student. She was also aware that I had been caring for the patient and that I knew the family. She did not know however that the patient was a retired Royal Canadian Air Force Officer and that I was a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. She also did not know that because of this we had developed a special bond.

We were in our last year of the Bachelor of Nursing program and completing the Palliative Care rotation. I had completed my Basic Officer Training and this provided many a topic of conversation during his care. Knowing I was embarking on my military career he once told me to “never be afraid to toot your own horn once in a while and sometimes you just got to speak up”. On Remembrance Day I visited him in my dress uniform and proudly saluted him before leaving. I was honoured.

At the start of my next shift I proceeded to review the charts. I saw his sitting on the counter and asked the night nurse why. “He passed away this morning” she said “and we haven’t been able to get a hold of his family”. My heart sank. When the day nurse arrived we spent some time with the patient and she was able to contact his family. The SSW had been called in anticipation of their arrival. When the SSW arrived on the floor I introduced myself and while she waited for the family I tended to other patients. I was notified when the family arrived and I briefly spoke with them before they entered the room. They invited me to join them and I quickly went to notify my instructor. Upon my return however I was met by the SSW. I remembered the patient’s advice and “spoke up” respectfully noting that the family had invited me.

During this rotation I became acutely aware of expectations: Expectations that I had for myself and of those that others may have. I wondered what expectations the SSW had. Did she think a student nurse was not capable of providing professional and compassionate care to a patient and family during such a time? If not then, how did she *expect* a student nurse to act?

Two years after graduating I was invited to be a guest speaker at a work shop held by Brandon University to help empower nursing students entering into their palliative care rotation. My message was clear: To never doubt your worth or your contribution as a nursing student and to not let anyone else doubt it either as they can make a difference. I wanted them to know that they could trust in their education and in themselves and if they ever felt that someone else’s expectations were any less I shared the advice that someone once gave me – to use their voice and “speak up”.