

Hospital

The hospital has many departments and many different types of employees. They are each compartmentalized like an ant hill. Above ground you see an ant hill, maybe the size of a softball, but underneath the ground is a labyrinth of corridors and rooms. Did you know that once, in Africa, scientists dug up and analyzed a colony of ants that was a square mile long and wide, and over 7 feet in depth? That's what this hospital is. The building with the fountain out front and the circle drive is what people recognize above the surface, but below, there is more than any one person can imagine.

The employees walk the two blocks in from the parking deck. Observing the walk is like watching zombies shuffle away from their graves. Everyone is still half asleep. No one talks to each other, except in grunts, as they all mindlessly walk to the same door. Some people are doing the zombie shuffle a little faster than others, while some are trying to get that last drag on their cigarette before they cross the invisible no smoking line. Once they enter the hospital there is no leaving for 12 hours or more.

Entering the front door, the employees travel down a short hallway of windows, which for some of them, it will be their last glance of the outside world until tonight. Then they head into the stairway. It's solid concrete. The walls are concrete, the stairs and floors are concrete. The only sound heard is that of the rubber tennis shoes as they jog up the steps and out through the next door. Then they follow the maze of bridges and corridors to the main hospital entrance. They entered all together, into one place, but it's here where each will split to take their own journey.

When the employees split up this morning, one person goes to the ICU. She will now have a patient that was in a horrible car wreck. The patient was riding in a car that lost control. Both she and the driver were drunk. She had received a scholarship to play volleyball for her favorite college the upcoming year. She broke both arms, her collar bone, one ankle, her pelvis, and is now in a medically induced coma. That nurse will get to watch the mother and father who meticulously raised their daughter come to visit their daughter. They will enter the small ICU room holding each other because they wouldn't have the strength otherwise again today. Her mother will stroke her hair away from her face and her father will hold her hand. She will continue to breathe through a tube and be bathed by that nurse today.

That won't be that nurse's only patient today. Her other patient will be an elderly man who fell at the nursing home and had a head bleed. He, however, will get to go to the floor today. He can feed himself again, and the black eye he's sporting has now faded to seaweed green. If he can support himself with a walker tomorrow, he will get to go back to the nursing home. He is notorious in the ICU to call anyone into his room that might be walking by the door. He longs to talk to someone and have company to socialize with instead of sitting in there solemnly watching tv. He knows there won't be much to work with at the nursing home except other old farts who can't remember where they are, let alone finish a conversation. He wants someone new to tell his story to. The one that he has carefully scripted and sculpted over the years. So when his nurse enters that morning, he gives her a huge smile and starts telling from the beginning.

Another nurse will go to the floor. This nurse has five patients today. They range in diagnoses from pneumonia to COPD. This is her first day in the string of three this week so he will have fresh new patients to work with.

Last week was interesting for him. He had a “wandering” patient named Jack. Jack would forget where he was, and would covertly leave his room to wonder the halls if no one noticed.

When the nurse was coming back to the floor from the cafeteria he rode the elevator up with a few coworkers. The first stop it made was two floors below his. When the doors opened, there stood his patient. He had on no gown or any other clothing and was peacefully smiling at the occupants of the elevator. He apparently had decided to take a poop while waiting on the elevator, because it was coming out of his nice white butt and landing on the floor behind him.

Getting him back to his room and keeping him there had been a challenge. None of his coworkers had wanted to help pull the naked man into the elevator, of course. However, one did stay behind on the floor to clean up the poop. He would have to buy her a coke and a snack for the help, but he felt it would be well deserved. No, this week he was relieved to find out that he will have all new patients. Mr. Wanderer was now escaping from a different floor and a different nurse.

At the split up upon arrival to the hospital, there is still another man that goes a different direction. He has hunched shoulders and looks down at the floor as he walks into his job as a tech in the OR. He doesn't feel like talking to anyone as he turns the corner and clocks in. Last night, his four-month-old little princess stayed up all night with the croup. He thought

the poor baby would cough herself to death, and didn't know how she could cry so hard since she hadn't slept in what felt like days. His wife was supposed to go back to work today. However, when she got in her car to leave, the battery was dead and wouldn't react to a jump. He had to drive her to work first and then rush to his job. He was late again. Just yesterday his boss had given him a written warning about being late. He will be lucky to keep his job today.

Later on, he is helping to move a sleeping patient from the OR table to his stretcher. The anesthesia team stops them right before they move the patient and asks for just a couple of minutes to fix something. While he waits the heavy steel of tiredness takes over and his head drops as he accidentally doses off. He loses his job today.

Three floors up from the OR is Janice. She is a "frequent," a patient that comes back to the same floor often. This is the second time this month she has been admitted, and she knows all the nurses and techs names by heart.

Janice is homeless, but she stays close to the hospital. She has PTSD and sometimes talks to herself. All of the businesses around the hospital know her and help to feed her and donate medication to her when she comes by.

This time something must have happened to stress her because the talking to herself escalated and she stepped out into traffic without realizing. Luckily, she wasn't hurt, but the police brought her in so she could be checked out. Amanda is her favorite nurse and Amanda likes to volunteer to be her nurse when she comes in.

"Good morning Amanda," Janice says.

“Morning sweet friend!” Amanda replies. “I hate to see you back so soon. How about we get a nice hot shower and I can bring you some coffee?”

“I could really use that,” Janice replies.

There is a wing of the hospital that has been reconstructed with huge floor to ceiling windows that look out to the mountain. This morning Will looks out at the October morning fog that floats around the trees. His wife is still asleep on the tiny plastic love seat next to the bed. They both had a hard time falling asleep last night with all the anxiety and anticipation for today.

“Good morning,” Dr. Tyler whispers.

“Morning doc,” Will whispers back, “I didn’t hear you come in.”

“I didn’t want to wake your wife.” He jesters towards the love seat.

“Any news?” Will asks hardly able to squeak it from his throat.

“You’re clear,” Says Dr. Tyler with a large smile.

Will covers his face and his neck starts to turn red, “You’re sure?”

“Yes. All the cancer is gone. You can go home today if you like and just follow up with me in a month. I’ll let you give the good news to your wife,” Dr. Tyler winks and reaches to shake Will’s hand.

“I can’t thank you enough. You have been so kind through this whole journey and I’m so grateful.” Will shakes his hand and tears roll down his cheeks.

Doctor Tyler softly walks back out of the room and Will turns to wake his wife.

One floor up and on the west side of the hospital a code-0 was about to start. A young man about 18 walked in to see his grandmother. She is slightly grey tinted and she didn't appear to be breathing. He quickly turns and walks out to the desk and asks a nurse to walk back to the room with him to check on her. The nurse takes one look at the patient as he walks through the doorway, and hits the red button above the bed.

"I need help in here now!" He yells out with as much authority as he can.

He drops the head of the bed and the side rail. The young man's grandmother still hasn't moved.

"One, two, three, four," the nurse starts counting out loud while his hands and arms thrust upon her chest.

People start flooding into the room. They bring large rolling carts and handfuls of equipment. The young man gets crowded out of the room. The feeling of infinite hopelessness showers over him. All he can do is stare through the gaps of people at his grandmother, silently and alone.