

I AM NOT *JUST* A NURSE

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We've probably all said it. "I'm just a nurse." Just. What is that supposed to mean? If you hear someone say "I *just* prevented that patient from a sacral ulcer that would have lead to sepsis" or "I *just* noticed and that patient's bladder was distended before we started the operation so I catheterized them", wouldn't that be ridiculous? But we say it. Worse yet, we *feel* it. As nurses, we forget that we are in a position of high responsibility and heavily relied on. We marvel at the skilled hands of our surgeons, but we forget to marvel in the fact that without us, they wouldn't even be able to book the case cart. It is expected and necessary for us to learn the names of thousands of instruments, what they do and when they are needed. You know there is that one special finochetto that this doctor likes. It's on the third shelf on the fourth wire rack in that specific, yet generic metal container amongst a sea of metal containers. We have a memory that is relied on and no book, or manual or app is going to replicate it. You are dedicated. You try your hardest and no software system is ever going to rival your knowledge.

People ask us "How do you do your job?" We don't think about it since we have trained hard for this moment. "This moment" is every moment. We don't take the time to contemplate that while we were assisting a surgeon drain a life threatening subdural hematoma, others would be falling apart, frozen with fear. What we do everyday is a big deal. Our skills, the checks and balances we do, the supervision we provide make a dangerous situation manageable, tolerable and safe.

Every single operation has the potential to be life threatening. We make people stop breathing on purpose. This is extraordinary. We expect it, we meant for that to happen. In virtually every other place on the planet, this is the worst possible scenario. For us, it's just ordinary. The unexpected is the norm. The trauma, the broken equipment, the confusing pathology requisition, it's on us to figure out how to get what we need and how to do it right. There is no choice but to figure it out, and quickly. *Just* figure it out

When did extraordinary become ordinary? Perhaps when extraordinary becomes the basic standard of care we then shift our mindset that this is *just* ordinary now. It still isn't! So how do we value our incredible skills and work? We take a step back, we look at our colleagues and we give each other a well deserved pat on the back. "I knew you could do it, and you did a fantastic job!" Nobody else is going to do it. Nobody else even sees what we do! You are a good nurse. You are a great nurse. You will never be *just* a nurse.