

ORNAC National Conference May 3rd 2015

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On Sunday May 3rd 2015, I attended the 24th National ORNAC Conference in Edmonton, Alberta. The theme for the conference was “Bridging Excellence in Perioperative Practice”. The keynote speaker for the day was Amanda Lindhout, who shared her heartbreaking story, “A House in the Sky: A Remarkable story of Courage and Resilience”.

Amanda shared her experience, when in 2008 she was captured in Somalia, Africa while working as a journalist. Amanda’s story was powerful and I am thankful that I had the opportunity to see her speak.

I learned and took away several points from Amanda’s story, and many of them relate to my career as a Perioperative Nurse. Although I have never experienced anything like the severe trauma that Amanda experienced through her kidnapping, I found that I could relate to Amanda in several ways. As a 34-year-old female who grew up in Alberta, I always had a strong desire to travel and to make a difference in the career I choose, just as Amanda did. She travelled to many countries before she made the decision to enter Somalia. In 2011, I travelled to Sierra Leone, Africa and volunteered with the Mercy Ships Organization as a Perioperative nurse for 5 weeks.

I felt a strong desire to help in a place where there was no access to basic health care, and people would not otherwise be able to have surgery. Most people living in Sierra Leone live in extreme poverty, similar to the people of Somalia. One major difference however, was that Sierra Leone was considered a safe country to visit, while Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

Throughout Amanda’s time in captivity, she experienced torture, starvation, and violence. However, throughout her experience she was able to remain positive and hopeful that she would survive and return home to Canada. One of the most powerful messages she shared was that of forgiveness. She explained that she was

able to see that the teenage boys who held her captive, had themselves all been through traumatic experiences, and difficult life circumstances which pushed them towards a violent life.

We are all human, and have a story of our past. This was a reminder to never judge, in both our personal and professional lives. Being a Perioperative Nurse is a career I am proud to be in, and we have the opportunity to touch the lives of many patients every day. Perioperative Nurses must be courageous in our everyday practice, whether it is in standing up for patient needs, or remember how important our role is when surgeries become difficult or emotionally hard to handle.

After Amanda's return to Canada, she has set up an organization, the Global Enrichment Foundation. She has returned to Somalia several times and works to better the lives of the people living in Somalia and other African Countries. She continues to give back and work to help the lives of those in need.

I felt inspired to continue working as a nurse in both Canada and hopefully in future volunteer trips to countries in need, after listening to Amanda speak. Amanda Lindhout's bravery, and resilience is a sign of the true strength of the human spirit, and shows just how strong we can be.