A Nurse on a Mission of Compassionate Care

Simeon Gayle is not immune to hard work in the face of adversity, but he also has a keen eye for things others may take for granted.

Simeon went into nursing because he wanted a career where he could take care of people in a nurturing way, something he didn’t get enough of growing up.

"I wanted to give back," Simon said. "I wanted to give compassion. When the family can’t advocate for a patient, the nurse is there."

While attending the Phillips School of Nursing at Mount Sinai Beth Israel, Simon worked full time, attending school and raising two younger brothers. He managed household logistics, oversaw his siblings’ schooling and his own, and held down his full-time job.

After graduating with the highest honors and serving as class valedictorian, he became an ICU nurse at Mount Sinai Beth Israel one year before the pandemic hit. That’s when his grit and compassion were put to the test.

When asked if he felt safe going into work, Simon said he went into nursing knowing what he needed to do at a time like that.

"It was amazing to see nurses from all backgrounds galvanized to come together and try to make a difference fighting an unknown disease," he said.

At the most challenging times, compassion was the strongest right he had. When a patient was at the point of being removed from life support, Simon asked their family what the patient’s favorite songs were. He played their favorite music and bathed the patient before they passed.

After the first wave subsided, Simon’s mission for the best patient care and compassion was still his greatest strength. Before going on a long-awaited trip to South Africa recently, he noticed the hair of one of his long-term patients had grown out, and his nails had grown long.

Dedicated to compassion and nurturing patients who may be unconscious or unable to communicate, Simon and a colleague went and bought shawls. Even though Simon had a very heavy workload, he prioritized his time to spend an hour cutting the patient’s hair and nails. The patient, who had been on supportive care for months, slowly passed while he was away. Still, Simon took comfort in knowing the patient smiled after his haircut and being told he looked like a "billion bucks.”

"That’s what nursing is about," Simon said. "You have to have that compassion regardless of the situation."

Simon’s brothers are teachers and continue their family tradition of pursuing advanced education. One brother is working on his second master’s degree, and the other brother is working on his doctorate.

— Mount Sinai Health Systems

A Nurse’s Account of Caring for a Very Special Patient

A nurse was somewhat confused from her infection. She had already endured a month of non-stop testing, procedures, treatments, and complications. She was completely debilitated and had lost all of her will and independence.

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