



A Sacred Encounter: Farewell Fellow Marine

I received a call at 5 a.m. in the morning from the nursing supervisor that a patient in the ICU was requesting spiritual care because “he wasn’t doing well and his numbers were indicating he was going to die”. By the time I arrived in the ICU the nurse informed me the patient was being transitioned to comfort care and the family was present at his bedside. I informed the nurse I was going to grab a comfort care blanket for the patient. Upon looking at the choices, I randomly chose a red blanket with a white outline. When I returned to the room the patient was sitting up with a full mask strapped to his face and struggling to breathe. His wife was holding his hand while his son was on the other side of him holding his other hand. I introduced myself, and allowed the wife to share her feelings about the patient being placed on comfort care. After she shared her feelings she returned her focus to her husband, and said to him “you fought hard my strong marine, but it’s okay now you can let go and go home”. As she gave him permission to die he closed his eyes and squeezed his hands together, and then released them and laid back into the bed as he had just breathed his last breath.

It was a powerful and profound moment to be present in as the room filled with nurses rushing in to see if there was anything they can do, only to recognize there was nothing they could do as he had just died. His wife started thanking the staff for helping him along his long and tiring journey of trying to get better. As everyone had tears in their eyes, the nurses quickly excused themselves and returned back to their jobs. I remained with the family who just lost their husband and father. The wife explained how she was happy her wish came true that he died peacefully and there was no suffering.

I then laid the red comfort care blanket over the body of this marine, and explained to the wife that I too served in the Marines. The patient’s wife shared how touched she was for the red blanket that was the same color as the Marine Corps and how meaningful it was for her husband to have a fellow Marine at his side when he died, knowing how important the Marine Corps was to the patient. She was touched spiritual care came in to be with them, but to have the Chaplain be a Marine was truly special.

This was a very sacred moment because there have been recorded near death experiences where military veterans are greeted in the afterlife by another veteran. And God in all his wisdom chose me to be with this fellow Marine veteran and share with him the final moments of his life until he is greeted by another veteran. There is an unspoken connection veterans have with each other, a bond like no other and being able to provide that here for our veterans who come in as patient and being able to comfort their families is what make moments like this one truly special.

Submitted by Jeremy Miller, Chaplain, Mercy Hospital of Buffalo.