

The Power of Caring

BY MICHELE J. ROLLE, R.T.(R)(M)

SHE ARRIVED LATE for her appointment that day, not unlike several patients who were surprised by the heavy snowstorm.

I could not help but notice that she appeared uncomfortable as she sat in the corner of the waiting room. When it was her turn, I called her back into the mammography suite. She never lifted her head as I instructed her to remove everything from the waist up.

Once we were inside the exam room, I questioned her briefly about her breast health history. She answered softly. At first I thought she was somewhat fearful about having a mammogram. We approached the mammography unit together. She removed the cape from her shoulders. I took a deep breath to keep from responding inappropriately to what I saw. Both of her breasts and her upper torso were covered with bruises.

I wrapped my arms around her and for a moment neither of us spoke a word. The tears flowed unabated from her eyes. She freely explained that her bruises were

inflicted by her husband who deliberately beat her in an area that would not be easily seen. My urgent question was, "Are you safe now?" Yes, she nodded and said she was living in a shelter for battered women. I told her I was so relieved that she was free from further abuse.

I gently completed her mammogram with all of the compassion and professional care I could muster. She dressed and before she left the mammography suite I promised that what we shared behind closed doors would remain confidential. I never saw her again.


This encounter reminds me of why I come to work each day, besides providing breast imaging: I am here to serve my patients, some of whom are at their most vulnerable.

During our training we are taught anatomy, physiology, physics and proper positioning. Sometimes there are units on professional ethics and death and dying. The textbooks give us made-up scenarios and suggestions for how we should handle these situations. In the real world of radiology, we often are presented

with something very different. The patients we encounter each day have needs that go beyond what we learned in the classroom.

What I have learned in my more than 22 years in this profession is that my observation has to be keener than just what is required to properly position my patient. I've learned that even in the midst of my most hectic day, when it seems that having two more arms and an extra exam room would not be enough help, I must sharpen my senses to the most important priority of the day — my patient.

I believe we were all drawn to this challenging profession because of our need to serve mankind. Neither professional titles nor increased pay can replace the sense of gratitude we feel when patients leave our department knowing that we cared. We must remain committed to reach beyond boundaries to rescue a patient who is silenced by a crisis.

The next time you see a patient's head hung low, or a patient takes a little longer undressing or winces when you reach out to touch her, remember my patient who suffered abuse from another's hands. Your caring heart and hands may be just what she needs to begin the healing process. 

MICHELE J. ROLLE, R.T.(R)(M), is the chief mammography technologist at the Virginia Women's Center in Richmond, Va.

SIDE NOTE

DOMESTIC ABUSE HELP:

www.ncadv.org

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/domesticviolence.html

www.4woman.gov/violence