# Jacqueline Goettl, Oncology Nurse

# Story from the Heart of an Oncology Nurse

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I am composing this submission at work this weekend. I work Monday-Friday as an Assistant Nurse Manager in Oncology. On this Sunday, I have come in to open the clinic for one of my patients who has MDS and is waiting to go to transplant. He is transfusion dependent and requires almost daily platelets and PRBC. Typically, he would go to the Emergency Department on the weekends for his transfusions, but these are not typical times. Due to COVID-19, we are trying to protect our vulnerable oncology patients by minimizing their exposure. This requires a clinic nurse to come in on their weekend off to administer his transfusion. They are a beautiful, gracious couple who thank me profusely for coming in to care for him. While I am grateful, it feels a bit uncomfortable. This is what I do. I am a nurse.

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Nursing is not just a vocation. It is not just going to a nine to five job and going home at the end of the day. Being a nurse is a process of becoming. It is an internal metamorphosis that reveals itself in the way we view life and humanity. Our world view changes as we grow in our own individual nursing practice and this change spills over into our everyday living. We are nurses, whether we are on the job, in our homes, or in our communities. This is an honor and privilege that must be reverenced and respected.

True nursing is a calling. It is a healing art, a holistic view of heath and its maintenance. Nursing embodies caring for the whole person. It is a practice that stands independently from the traditional practice of medicine. It is fluid and changing, evidenced based and on a continuum of striving for individualized, compassionate, competent care.

Nursing pushes us to excellence. It requires that we continue to learn, to change, to be in a state of perpetual evolution as science, medicine, and evidence-based practice guides us. We are required to have superior mental, emotional, and physical strength and endurance. Our positions require us to push ourselves beyond what we believe we are capable of. We must perform our duties in the face of adversity, stress, exhaustion, and in circumstances in which instantaneous decisions hold life in the balance. A nurse must have intestinal fortitude, be independent, and yet part of a team. Nursing is challenging and is a fluid profession that allows mobility. It is not stagnant, but instead creates new opportunities for mastery in a multitude of arenas. Education does not end at graduation but is an ongoing process.

It is the embodiment of nursing that draws me to it. It is the essence of who I am. My nursing pilgrimage began over 27 years ago. The beauty of nursing is the ability to experience its wide array of practice areas. I have had the opportunity to work in multiple areas of nursing over the years which culminated in my current role as an Assistant Nurse Manager in Hematology/Oncology. I have had many honors and milestones including Civil Servant of the Year, Outstanding Nurse Finalist Mpls. St. Paul Magazine, Oncology Council Member for Cerner Millennium EHR Modernization, and Office of Nursing Services Oncology Field Advisory Committee member. My educational path has led me to a Master’s Degree in Nursing and becoming a Certified Oncology Nurse. I am grateful and honored by the awards and achievements, but my greatest honor is serving the veterans in our oncology population.

My oncology patients are some of the people I admire most in this world. The grace and courage they manifest as they walk down this most difficult journey is extraordinary. As oncology nurses, we travel this road beside them. We laugh with them; we cry with them. When the battle is over, their loved ones often return to us with gratitude. One daughter wrote, “Years ago I was a back up to our oncology pharmacist…always appreciated the passion and compassion; however, it has been seeing and feeling your passion and compassion in a personal way during my dad’s care and your condolences now that multiply my pride in our facility and Oncology team and my gratefulness for all of you!” Oncology nursing is a specialty that is incredibly rewarding. It is emotionally taxing sometimes, but the lives we touch and those that touch ours are what drives us to endeavor in our nursing practice. It is a blessing and a privilege to serve these amazing veterans and their families.