

Woman’s Unusual Condition Lets Her Feel Others’ Pain

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Category : Human Interest

Unlocking Word Meanings

Read the following words/expressions found in today’s article.

- 1. **extraordinary** / ɪk'strɔː dʌ ɜː i / (adj) – not common or unusual
Example: The huge number of protesters is an **extraordinary** sight.
- 2. **pass down** / pæs daʊn / (phrasal) – to transfer something from one person to another
Example: The disease may **pass down** from the mother to her child.
- 3. **administer** / æd'mɪn ə stər / (v) – to give medicine or treatment to someone
Example: The medicine was **administered** to the patient.
- 4. **enraged** / ɛn'reɪdʒd / (adj) – very angry
Example: The **enraged** man was shouting and making threats against his wife.
- 5. **agitated** / 'ædʒɪ teɪ tɪd / (adj) – restless or not calm
Example: She got **agitated** upon hearing the bad news.

Article

Read the text below.

A pediatric nurse has been diagnosed with an **extraordinary** condition that enables her to physically feel her patients’ pain.

Megan Pohlmann was born with mirror-touch synesthesia / ˌmɪ əs'thi ʒə / (MTS), an unusual neurological condition that allows her to physically sense what others feel. Generally, MTS is hereditarily **passed down** from parents to offspring. In Pohlmann’s case, both her mother and sister have MTS. At present, only 1.6 percent of the world’s population has this condition.

As a medical staff, Pohlmann uses her condition to better understand and help her patients. In one instance, she suddenly started having a headache while watching over an infant in the intensive care unit. Thinking that the infant might be experiencing the same thing, she called the doctors’ attention. After checking, the doctors found that the infant was reacting negatively to the medication **administered** to him. They immediately stopped giving the infant the said medication.

Another person who has MTS is Dr. Joel Salinas, a neurologist working at Massachusetts General Hospital. Like Pohlmann, he also uses his condition to help his patients. In one case, he helped a woman who was unable to speak because of cerebral palsy. She woke up one morning screaming and seemingly **enraged**.

When Dr. Salinas came to check on her, his body mirrored the movements of the woman’s chest and shoulders. He suspected that she might be having breathing difficulties, so he had the woman undergo a test. Results showed that the woman had blood clots in her lungs, which was why the patient seemed **agitated**. With this, Dr. Salinas was able to properly treat the woman, thus saving her life.

Viewpoint Discussion

Enjoy a discussion with your tutor.

Discussion A

- If you were Megan Pohlmann, would you work in the medical field given your unusual condition? Why or why not?

- What do you think are the advantages of having MTS (e.g. can easily relate to others' situations)?

Discussion B

- Why is it important to understand or be aware of other people's feelings?
- Do you believe that having empathy can be learned or is it natural? Explain.

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