

As of now, I have volunteered in Department 6A: Adult Rehabilitation at the University of Michigan Hospital for four hours of every Friday afternoon during the past month. This wing of the hospital primarily treats adults who have suffered spinal cord injuries of various degrees. The patients tend to range from people of high school age to the very elderly and come from a variety of different backgrounds. Each and every case is very different with regards to the cause of the injury and the kind of treatment that is warranted. The condition of the patients when they come in as well as the length of time they need to stay in the hospital varies dramatically as well. It is simply amazing just how much this tiny wing in a giant hospital does to treat spinal cord injuries and just how much I have become a part of it in just a few weeks of volunteering.

As a volunteer, the types of tasks that I am allowed to perform all have to abide by the laws, rules, and regulations for what exactly an untrained individual is allowed to do within a hospital. Since the safety and comfort of the patients is the most important subject within a hospital, the kinds of duties that I can be assigned are severely limited. One of my primary tasks is to answer patient call lights and turn them off after they are attended to. If the patient needs something simple, such as taking off his shoes or opening a bag of potato chips, I can serve him directly without referring to anyone else. On the other hand, if the patient needs to be treated or moved around, I have to designate that chore to a specially trained doctor or nurse so that I would not be liable in case of an accident or malpractice. I am also allowed to keep a patient company, serve him food, and send him off when discharged, but I am not allowed to be there whenever he has to privately see a doctor or nurse. All in all, I usually get as much patient interaction as I am legally allowed to have access to with respect to the laws at hand.

Usually, most of the patients end up going to therapy on another floor for a couple of hours in the middle of my shift and Department 6A gets pretty slow. During the down time, I

primarily help out with getting the entire wing ready for when the patients get back. It is not an uncommon occurrence that I end up stocking towels and bed sheets into the cabinets outside of the rooms for a period of time so that they are readily available for use. I also usually spend a decent amount of time helping the people in charge disinfect and then set up the beds for the patients. Whenever the furniture within the wing needs to be moved around, those tasks are usually delegated to me while the doctors and nurses figure out what they have planned for the patients when they get back. Throughout this experience, I was shocked by just how much physical labor is if overlooked while keeping a little wing within a little hospital hospitable to patients.

During the volunteer experience, there were several aspects that I particularly liked about working in the hospital. My favorite part about being a volunteer is that I get to interact with all different kinds of people, ranging from doctors and nurses to patients that are currently in very bad condition. At first, I naturally noticed each patient primarily for his injury rather than himself as a person. The reason is that I honestly have never been around that many injured people for an extended period of time and it is a natural defense mechanism for a person to cringe at an injury to try to not associate himself with it. Nevertheless, I inevitably got to interact with the patients when they were not being attended to by a trained professional during the middle of the day. It proved to be very interesting to learn about how these people were like before they had their injuries. One elderly lady shared with me just how much she regretted the fact that she could not spend as much time as she wished with her newborn granddaughter. A middle aged man talked about some of his experiences back when he was a child growing up in Ann Arbor, Michigan. A young man also shared with me how much he missed playing football on his high school team. All in all, I quickly began to see the patients as people for who they

were and the fact that they were injured was shoved to the back of my mind. I discovered that these tended to be very intelligent people that unfortunately suffered a major injury in their spinal cords.

It soon became apparent that the doctors usually did not necessarily love their jobs just because of their high salaries. Usually, it is the interactions that they have on a regular basis with other doctors, nurses, patients, and volunteers tend to be very rewarding in itself. It tends to be a great feeling knowing that an individual's job is to make such a big difference in peoples lives every day. That tends to be the reason why doctors are usually not that eager to retire, even when they become very elderly themselves.

However, I did not particularly enjoy performing some of the duties that were assigned to me as a volunteer. During the down time in the middle of my shifts, I was often assigned lots of tedious tasks that tended to be unappreciated whereas the doctors and nurses got all of the glory. It definitely is not fun to stock towels for a couple of hours and I definitely do not enjoy cleaning beds without really getting to see just how important these tasks were in running the department. Often, this gets so boring that time seems to stand still while watching the patients share all of their gratitude to the doctors and nurses. During this down time, I often feel like I could be doing many more things with my life that are much more worthwhile. Although I do not particularly enjoy performing these tasks, I have to realize that it is a necessary price that I have to pay in order to get to see what it like to work in a hospital given my present credentials.

As a volunteer, my primary strength is that I have been able to get along with everyone within the department from the doctors and nurses to the janitors and patients to a point that I am very welcome there every week. I tend to find that I am pretty good at making and holding up a decent conversation and adding in a little humor here and there whenever I see the opportunity.

A lot of the people within the hospital are big Michigan football fans and I am really good at sharing what I know about the subject. Likewise, a lot of the people are very interested in my experiences as a student at the University of Michigan and what my plans are for the future. During these interactions with others, I often find that they are so rewarding that I often forget that I was actually working there unpaid because I just happened to be taking Project Outreach this semester.

On the flip side, my primary weakness is that I am usually very tired after a long and stressful week of school. Sometimes, when I have a lot on my plate at a given moment I often feel like it would have been so much easier had I been allowed to avoid my volunteer duties just to catch up on my own personal matters. The reason is that I am often so tired when I get off my shift that I tend to be very unproductive for the rest of the day. Whenever the down time hits, I often find myself staring at the clock, just hoping that it would tick faster just so that the dullness of the Friday afternoon would simply just end. Often, I just find myself wishing that I actually possessed the credentials required to perform better appreciated tasks in the department. As a result, I become very board and unengaged with hospital duties from time to time. I need to work on this but I truly believe that I can find something that would motivate me to find more interesting tasks to keep me busy and useful within the wing.

Over the course of the semester, I have developed several goals that I would like to meet before winter break. First of all, I really want to get at least 40 hours in, not just because it is a requirement for passing the class, but also so that I can truly feel that I really did something that was worthwhile with a significant amount of my free time. Seeing that I only have 15 hours so far, I will most likely have to either do extra shifts or stay longer when I go to the hospital. In addition, I really want to make a good lasting impression on the people who I work with in the

department. In order to do this, I need to not only spend some of my time talking to them about whatever comes to mind but also become more motivated to work with them, even during the down time. Also, I would really want to get to know the patients better because they are the reason why the hospital exists in the first place. I truly believe that this can be done if I just simply go out of my own way to approach patients and ask them if they need anything or would like any company if they seem bored. All in all, I think these are all wonderful and yet realistic goals in which I can try to achieve by the end of the semester.