FOR IAHC JOURNAL CLUB – 8-11 & 18-20

Nursing Situation A: Mr. Thomas James, Nurse Gretchen and Robot Nicki

Mr. Thomas James is a 69 year old farmer who lives alone since a divorce. He has one daughter who is away in college. He was admitted to the community hospital with a diagnosis of an acute exacerbation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). His monitor showed a rapid heart rate with some arrhythmia. When I met him, he was sitting straight up in bed and struggling to breathe, and he seemed scared. With the heart monitor beeping quietly in the background, he looked at me with wide opened eyes. As a newly graduated nurse, I quietly introduced myself, and checked his vital signs, then listened to his lungs. “I can see you are having difficulty breathing. Please help me understand about your not wanting to do the breathing treatments prescribed for you.” With some difficulty, he said, “I can’t take them, my doctor told me that was causing my heart to beat too fast.”

As I learned in my nursing education program based on the Nursing As Caring theory, I asked “what matters most to you right now? And he said, “I don’t want to die, I have a daughter to raise and a farm to run.” I said, how can I help you? He told me he needs help to breathe right so he could get out of the hospital quickly, going on to share that he has no health insurance and no one back home caring for the farm.

I said the breathing treatment will help your breathing and will help you relax too as you start taking deep slow breaths. I asked if it is ok with you, I am going to check on your orders and I’ll be right back, and he said that would be ok. I left the room to check his chart and to consult with the charge nurse. Having been introduced to the TRETON theory of nurse-robot-patient relating in school, I wanted to bring Nicki, our new healthcare robot, in to help with Mr. James’ care. Although my charge nurse was still skeptical of the value of Nicki, our robot, she agreed to let me try.

Nicki had been programmed to speak, to monitor and report vital signs, to SKYPE and to show videos. We walked back to the room and I introduced Nicki to Mr. James. I explained that the breathing treatment that was ordered for him did not have any medication that would speed up his heart. And I explained Nicki’s capabilities including SKYPEing his daughter once his breathing was stabilized. Mr. James agreed to try the new treatment and to allow Nicki to be with him during his treatment and then to call his daughter. Before we activated Nicki, I told Mr. James that the healthcare robot could show a calming video if he thought that might help. He said ok and told us he relaxes by sitting on his back porch looking out over the fields and crops at sundown. We turned Nicki on and programmed her for breathing assist, to monitor respiratory rate and send results to the nurse, and to play a video of sunset on an open field. Nicki blinked on and introduced herself in her soft, quiet, but steady voice. She said, “Mr. James, I am going to help remind you to stay calm and to take deeper breaths. I am going to stay with you and you will not be alone. So let us start.” Respiratory therapy had been called and was ready to administer the breathing treatment again. As the treatment was administered, Nicki quietly reminded him to take in a breath and to slowly release. The video started and Nicki began to describe the beauty of the sunset, the slow descent of the sun and the colors of various shades of red and yellow as the sun slowly set, birds flew home to roost, and the cows walked slowly toward the barn. She continued on, with moments of quiet and then reminded Mr. James that he was doing fine and to continue to take a breath in and let it slowly out. I stayed with Mr. James, Nicki, and the respiratory therapist until Mr. James began to stabilize, breathe more slowly and deeply, and his heart rate slowed down too. I left the room to the voice of Mr. James talking to Nicki and the steady beat of the heart monitor. About 30 minutes later Mr. James said he’d like to SKYPE his daughter and tell her about Nicki. Mr. James took a “selfie” with Nicki and forwarded it to his daughter and set up a time to SKYPE. Later that day, within 24 hours of admission, Mr. James was discharged home with a prescription to obtain the new medication for his nebulizer and with further instructions for fluids and rest as much as possible. I stood in the hallway with Nicki and my charge nurse to say good-bye to Mr. James and wish him well. As he left, Mr. James thanked us for being so helpful to him and stated that Nicki was very helpful too, especially in calming him down. He said his daughter was very impressed that her Dad had a personal healthcare robot and that he too was pleased.