

## The Cost of Healthcare on Our Own Health

Kelly Welton, BA, RRT-NPS

As a new grad Respiratory Therapist in 1983, I quickly learned the value of my career choice. For one, I could work just about anywhere I wanted in the USA. And another bonus: I could work as much overtime as I wanted. In my 20's, this was no big deal. With or without overtime, my choice of Healthcare as a profession started showing its wear and tear. It started with me wondering about inhaling all that Ribavirin. And then Pentamidine. And cleaning our own equipment with Amphyl and Cidex, the unforgettable smells of both are still fresh in my memory. Time ticks on as I become a 10-year veteran RT. Then 20. Then 30. Then I semi-retired to start an education company. At last, self-employed! Then, the dreams began.

***“Time ticks on as I become a 10-year veteran RT. Then 20. Then 30. Then I semi-retired to start an education company. At last, self-employed! Then, the dreams began.”***

A mind is still a mysterious place even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Do a Google search for ‘where does the mind go when we dream’ or something similar, and we still get only hypotheses for answers.

I decided to see if other retired healthcare workers had similar dreams. I sent out a survey, and here is what I got back:

- Dreams of getting called into work, but the license is expired
- I went to work and spent the entire shift lost in the hospital
- At work and cannot find any ventilators or supplies
- Ventilators are alarming, and the silence button does not work
- I hear a heater alarming but cannot find the room it's coming from
- The department director is writing me up for something I would never do
- I get called in to make the day shift assignment, but there are no assignment cards, pens, or paper. I do not know any of

the oncoming staff or what areas they can work in.

- I dream it is my first day at a new hospital, and I am running late, and when I finally get to work, I forget my shoes. And stethoscope.
- I dream I'm trying to get to the psych unit, but the hospital has tunnels you have to crawl through, and I never get there.
- I dreamed that the elevators only went up or down.
- Patient care corridors go off at odd angles, and I cannot find where I need to go
- I had to put together lots of pieces of a ventilator that no longer exists

My nurse friends tell me the same thing: Stressful nonsensical dreams that, upon waking, seemed so real.

All of us in Healthcare are committed to sacrificing our time, our sleep, and our bodies for years on end. My hips and knees feel better now that I'm not pounding them all day, every day. But the strange dreams persist. Are these dreams simply GIGO (Garbage in, garbage out)? It is said that during REM sleep, we revisit memories and process them without the stress chemicals.

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However, the scenarios talked about above never really happened. Is the stress of taking care of other critically ill humans so stressful that the brain imagines even more possible scenarios

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after we retire? Maybe these are messages from other realms. Maybe we have sniffed SO MUCH secondary Albuterol over time that it has triggered a dormant storytelling center that only comes alive when we finally stop ingesting it. Whatever the reason, the laughable dream stories seem to get better the longer you have been in Healthcare.

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*Disclosures: The author is President of the Academy of Neonatal Care, A Delaware 501 C (3) not for profit corporation.*

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