

### The Story of Maureen Sitler and Daniela Green

Maureen Sitler is the chief respiratory therapist in the respiratory intensive care unit (ICU) of a large university hospital. Two staff therapists are in the unit with her.

Maureen has been on vacation during the last 2 weeks and arrives home late Sunday night. When she reports to work on Monday morning, she finds a note on her desk saying that Karen, one of the two staff therapists, has had to leave town to be with her mother, who has had a serious heart attack. Karen writes that she will be gone at least this week and maybe next.

The other therapist, Tom Morgane, arrives and brings Maureen up to date on the activities. He assures her that, as usual, the patient load soared immediately after she left and that the unit has been buzzing ever since.

They sort through the current patient load and are relieved that no new patients have come in over the weekend. They decide that between them they can just manage for the day. Suddenly, Maureen feels weary, as if she had never been on vacation.

She is writing names of the patients on the schedule board in the office when a unit clerk brings a note to her detailing four patients in other parts of the hospital who need therapy. The note is from the hospital's other respiratory therapy department chief, the one who serves the general inpatient population. Often the two directors make such requests of each other when their own loads are especially heavy. Maureen's first impulse is to refuse to accept any more patients, but she takes the note to her desk.

The first patient is an 81-year-old widow with inhalation burns. She accidentally started a fire that gutted her kitchen when a kitchen towel caught on fire. The second referral is a 3-year-old child with congenital lung and bronchial deformities. Another repair of the bronchial tubes had been performed. The third patient is a 31-year-old woman with severe asthma.

Maureen lays out the three referral sheets in front of her without bothering to read the fourth and studies the schedule again. At most, they can accept only one more patient today. She decides to call the other chief therapist, Sandra Haynes, to ask her judgment regarding the relative urgency of these patients.

She is dialing, tapping idly with her forefinger on the one referral she has not yet read, when the name Daniela Green leaps off the page at her. She picks up the referral and reads it. Her heart begins to pound in her throat. She slams down the receiver and runs to the treatment area where Tom is working. "This can't be our Dannie!" she exclaims. Tom puts a hand on her shoulder, "I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you with so much else to catch up on. As you can see, she was hospitalized with severe pneumonia while you were gone. We should find a way to fit her in."

Maureen feels sick to her stomach. Daniela Green is the head nurse in the oncology unit. Daniela and Maureen often have the same patients, so more often than not, they find themselves on the same health care teams, whether it be in the oncology or respiratory ICU units or as members of the rehabilitation team. Daniela recently gave an excellent in-service workshop

for the physical therapy, occupational therapy, and respiratory therapy departments. On a number of occasions, Maureen and Daniela have attended plays and other social events together. Two years ago, they initiated a drive to find support for improving, or as they put it, "humanizing," the environment of the waiting areas throughout the therapy areas. On several occasions, Maureen has called on Daniela as a "sympathetic ear" and has found her insightful and understanding. During her vacation, Maureen had been thinking that she should take the time to cultivate this budding friendship, knowing that it could take root and deepen.

Maureen's first reaction is to squeeze Daniela into the treatment schedule, no matter what. But something stops her. How can she be fair to all the patients on the list, she thinks, and still respond to the additional loyalties of kinship she feels toward her teammate Daniela?