

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Taken from *Thriving Youth Groups* by Jeanne Mayo

Imagine this scenario – a teenage guy looks pretty normal from all superficial appearances, but in reality he’s experiencing slow, internal bleeding that will eventually take his life if the condition isn’t addressed. His whole family, sensing that something is terribly wrong, begs the young man to visit a medical facility to get some help. But he repeatedly refuses, telling everyone around him, “I feel OK and besides, I don’t like doctors and hospitals.”

Months pass, and to the relief of his whole family, he agrees one evening to visit the emergency room of the local hospital. When he walks in, no one acknowledges him. He walks to the counter to make his presence known, but the staff seem preoccupied with each other. He clears his throat, shuffling nervously to gain their attention. Finally, one of the medical personnel gives him a token greeting, right before walking into another room laughing with one of the doctors. Minutes later, a female technician makes eye contact with our ailing friend. Awkwardly, he attempts to introduce himself to her, as a way of asking for help. The attendant responds coolly and tells him to have a seat in the small crowded hospital waiting area. He sits down hesitantly. It seems that everyone else there somehow knows each other personally, but no one speaks to him.

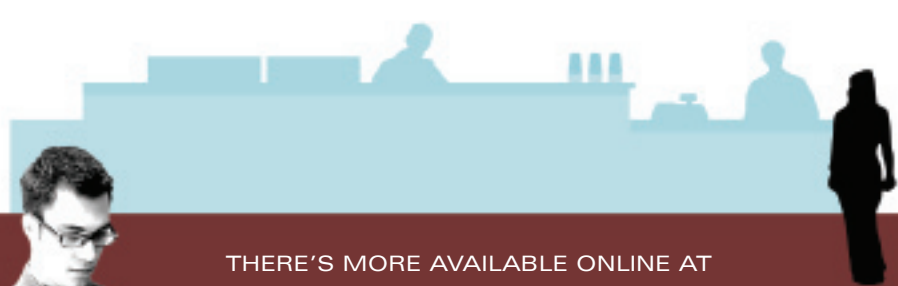
Over an hour passes. None of the medical staff makes any effort to personally connect or respond to the young man. They just seem to think his medical problems will get better by his sheer presence inside the hospital. Because he has nothing else to do, he observes the medical procedures that are going on all around him. He doesn’t understand everything he sees. The medical language is foreign, and the procedures are too complex for him to make sense of them. He isn’t sure whether he feels the people in the hospital are unfriendly, weird, or just confusing. Amidst all these emotions, one of the doctors passes a container around the hospital waiting area, asking all the guests to contribute to the ongoing expenses of the hospital.

Finally, after over an hour of medical talk and procedures that our friend does not understand, one of the medical assistants behind the desk looks up and thanks him for coming. Confused, our ill teenager stands to leave. No one has connected with him personally or acted like they wanted to know what brought him to the hospital in the first place. Nor has anyone tried to assist him in any concrete way. They seemed quite content that he merely visited the hospital.

As he starts to leave the hospital that evening, he is more confused and turned off than ever. He wasn’t so sure he wanted to come in the first place. He didn’t know anybody there and honestly didn’t think he needed any medical attention. Now, after his initial visit to the hospital, he is even more convinced that the hospital is both irrelevant and impersonal. Just as the door shuts behind him, the doctor, in a detached voice, calls out, “Be sure to come back next week!”

“Fat chance,” the young man says to himself sarcastically. “I never should have let myself get conned into coming in the first place.” And as he drives away, the entire medical staff inside the hospital celebrates about the number of visitors they had that night. They quickly email their visitors’ record to other hospitals around them, and a well-respected medical magazine finds out and asks them to write an article on how they’ve built their attendance.

Amidst their excitement, there is a grave problem. Unbeknown to them, their ill guest has left the medical facility with a greater determination to “never be caught dead in a hospital again.” His expression is haunting, for though he does not realize it, he continues to die from his untreated internal problem. Ironically, the next time he visits the hospital, he will arrive as a corpse. It’s tragic that the medical personnel didn’t pay more attention to making sure his visit to their facility really did count.



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