

## The Story Behind the Dream Hat

BY RAE REAM, RN, BSN, CNOR

**A**s a staff nurse in the operating room at the Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center, Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute, (The James) I do not have the opportunity to spend a lot of time with our patients while they are awake, so I try to make the most of the little “awake” time that I do get to spend with them before they come back to the Operating Room. This is one such experience with a particular patient who I did have the privilege to meet and spend a little time with in the pre-op area before her surgery.

The patient was a 22-year-old woman newly diagnosed with breast cancer. She was understandably anxious and frightened about her upcoming surgery.

I introduced myself as her operating room nurse and held her hand as I answered some questions for her.

We talked a little about her future ambitions to become a nurse. I learned that she was a nursing student who had put her plans on hold while undergoing

treatment. She shared with me that her biggest fear was not the surgery she was undergoing today, but the possibility that she might have to undergo chemo and radiation treatments after her surgery.

She was worried about losing her hair and what she might look like.

She had noticed all of the colorful hats that the staff and I were wearing and said that she might look into purchasing some for herself to wear “just in case.”

Surrounded by several family members, she told me that they were all praying that her surgery today would come back with good results and further treatment would not be needed. I told her that I, too, would pray for her.

After leaving the patient I immediately went to my locker where I keep several hats that I make for myself and staff to wear as part of our scrub attire while working in the operating room. I selected a hat that I thought my patient would like. It was a fun hat made up of stethoscopes, B/P cuffs, and nursing caps.

I then went back to the pre-op area where my patient was anxiously waiting with her parents. Showing her the hat, I asked her if she liked it. She said she *loved* it! Then I told her that while she was not a nurse, I believed when she did become a nurse she would be an excellent one. I said that I wanted her to have the hat and to remember—even if she did lose her hair—nurses are all heart and soul, and the hair does not really matter. In other words, it is not what you look like on the outside that matters, but the compassion and empathy you



feel on the inside that makes the difference. With tears in her eyes, my patient thanked me and gave me a hug.

Overwhelmed at my patient’s response to my simple gesture, I was inspired to develop the *Dream Hats Project*. My goal: for every cancer patient to receive a hat. For patients facing chemo and the possibility of losing their hair, a hat can offer a sense of dignity and confidence. For others a hat can be a reminder of the challenges they must overcome; for still others a special hat may help inspire the courage to go forward. While that is my goal, my dream is for every patient to face the future with faith, hope, and a resolve to one day cure cancer.

The *Dream Hats Project* has now expanded beyond the walls of The James. We are piloting the project in several surrounding hospitals and cancer centers. The “Dream Team” is indeed dreaming big and one day we will wake up and find that we live in a cancer-free world. A world where the cloud of a cancer diagnosis is only a distant memory and that finally cancer and even the *Dream Hats Project* no longer exists.

For more information about Dream Hats, Inc., visit us at [www.dreamhats.org](http://www.dreamhats.org) or follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/JamesDreamHats](http://www.facebook.com/JamesDreamHats).

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