A Nurse's Experiences in the Emergency Room
Vocabulary list

abdominal – adj. pertaining to the part of the body between the thorax and the pelvis.

Band-Aid – n. trademark for an adhesive bandage.

beta-blocker IV – n. an intravenous infusion of fluid containing a drug that decreases the rate and force of heart contraction and helps lower blood pressure.

CAT scan – phrase. a kind of x-ray that shows soft tissue, such as the brain tissue, rather than just the bones. CAT – computed axial tomography in short.

catheterize – v. to pass or introduce a catheter into.

chaotic – adj. disorderly, confused.

concussion – n. an injury resulting from an impact, usually to the head.

desensitize – v. to have been made less sensitive.

hip – n. upper part of the thigh, formed by the femur and innominate bones.

hockey – n. a game played on ice by two teams of players using hockey sticks and a puck.

laceration – n. an irregular wound or tear in the flesh.

patch up – v. to mend, to bandage.

stat – abb. (Latin statim) immediately.

stitch – n. process of joining two surfaces by sewing, a suture.

typically – adv. characteristically, usually.

unique – adj. being the only one of its kind.
ER: A Nurse’s Experiences in the Emergency Room

It's a busy Saturday night at the Kelsey General emergency room (ER). There's a long line of people with various injuries waiting for the attention of the busy doctors and nurses. There is a child with a face laceration, an older man suffering from an intense pain in his lower back, and a young man who seems to have broken his arm in a hockey game. On such a night, ER nurses are busy.

Being an ER nurse is no easy profession. Nurses have to remain calm, act fast and do a number of things at once.

“ER nurses are among the most skilled nurses in the hospital,” says emergency room doctor Peter Driesen. “The emergency room can often be a chaotic place, and nurses have to deal with so many different situations.”

Zachary West, emergency room nurse, agrees. “In one 12-hour shift, I may have to catheterize a 14-year-old boy who comes in with an abdominal injury, start a beta-blocker IV in an older man showing signs of a heart attack, take the blood pressure of an older woman with a broken hip, and prepare a 17-year-old girl with a concussion for a CAT scan.”

ER nurses typically work a 12-hour shift with three 15-minute breaks and a half hour lunch break. Unlike doctors, who move to different areas of the hospital as their services are required, ER nurses must remain in one place for their entire shift. How do these nurses do it day in and day out, especially when hospitals are becoming increasingly understaffed with various cutbacks to health care?

“What is most difficult for me,” says ER nurse Valerie Stanley, “is not becoming desensitized. We just see so much in here all the time. There are so many terrible things happening and so many people in a lot of pain. It is hard to remember that each person's experience is unique. I find myself thinking sometimes: OK, we've got two broken arms, a head wound that needs stitches,
bed six had a mild stroke etc. “I feel frustrated with myself when I think of patients as injuries rather than as people.”

West agrees that this is indeed a challenge. “No matter how many times I have seen a certain injury,” he says, “I need to remember that, for each person, this is most often his or her first time dealing with something like this, and losing control over one's body is a scary thing. So even though we're the trained professionals, I try to allow patients to take part in decisions about their bodies – even small ones. Asking a child what color Band-Aid he or she would like can make all the difference in the world.”

On a busy night like tonight, West, Stanley and their colleagues are putting all their skills to work, patching up patients and trying to make everyone feel even just a little better.
Fill-in-the-Blank – complete each sentence with the correct word suggested in the list. You may have to change the word form to fit the sentence.

| laceration | catheterize | patch | concussion | desensitize |
| CAT scan   | beta-blocker IV | abdominal | hip | unique |

1. The doctors suspected that he had a tumor in his bowel, so they sent him for a ____________.

2. Paramedics, police and firemen are in occupations where it is easy to become ____________.

3. The lady was unable to void, so the nurse had to ____________ her.

4. A ____________ might be used in an emergency situation involving a heart problem.

5. The motorcyclist was unconscious because he suffered a ____________ in the crash.

6. The patient had to have a lot of stitches to close the ____________ in his thigh.

7. No person is exactly the same; each one of us is ____________.

8. The nurse was occupied at the time, ____________ up a wound.

9. His ____________ pain was eventually diagnosed as appendicitis.

10. She was unable to walk for weeks until her fractured ____________ began to heal.
Comprehension Exercise

Multiple Choice – Answer the questions or paraphrase each sentence/underlined phrase with the best choice.

1. There is a child with a face laceration
   a. bruise
   b. sore
   c. cut

2. An older man suffering from an intense pain in his lower back.
   a. severe
   b. sudden
   c. constant

3. ER nurses typically work a 12-hour shift with three 15-minute breaks plus a half hour lunch break.
   a. 350 minutes in total
   b. 45 minutes in total
   c. 75 minutes in total

4. Especially when hospitals are becoming increasingly understaffed.
   a. have more nurses
   b. have fewer nurses
   c. have too many patients

5. Various cutbacks to health care.
   a. decreasing budgets
   b. decreasing business
   c. increasing problems

6. It is hard to remember that each person's experience is unique.
   a. health care worker’s
   b. patient’s
   c. everyone’s

7. I need to remember that, for each person, this is most often his or her first time dealing with something like this. This is because
   a. I have treated the same injury before.
   b. I know I am not a sympathetic person.
   c. I don’t want to become desensitized.
Practice the conversations with a classmate. Pay attention to the words in bold face. Check a dictionary for new words or idioms and add them to your reference notes.

1. **Ambulance Attendants**, performing CPR as they wheel the patient in on a stretcher: Five-year-old girl apparently beaten by her father.  
   Charge Nurse in the ER: We are ready for her. Room No. 1, please. Thank you for calling ahead. Are the police here as well?

2. Nurse, as she runs for the crash cart: Code Blue!  
   Charge Nurse runs for the phone, sends another nurse and a doctor into the room to help: I’ll make the call!

3. Charge Nurse in the ER at the change of shift: We have here on the blackboard 10 patients. In room No.1, Mary Chow, an unconscious five-year-old undergoing CPR, a victim of child abuse. In room No. 2, Mrs. Smith with an asthma attack has just arrested.  
   Nurse in charge of the newly arrived staff: Ms. Constino and Ms. Lee, will you relieve the nurses in room No.1? Ms. Kim, will you take over in room No.2?

4. Nurse: I’ll gently wash the gravel out of your scraped knee.  
   Patient: Will it hurt?  
   Nurse: Don’t worry, I will be very careful. I’ve got to be sure to get every bit of foreign material out of here.
5. Doctor: We will need to call the next of kin to identify the drowning victim.  
Nurse: They have been called, doctor. They are on their way.

6. Doctor: Would you please irrigate his wound with sodium chloride stat?  
Nurse: Will he be needing stitches?

7. Nurse: I have nitroglycerin, which the doctor ordered for your angina. It needs to be placed under your tongue.  
Patient: Thank you. I feel miserable.
Main Ideas

Read the text thoroughly. Memorize the main ideas and try to fill in the blanks from knowledge acquired from the text. Search for the keywords in the text only after you have finished your first try.

1. ___________ ____________ nurses are usually among the most skilled nurses in the hospital. They have to act ____________ while remaining ____________.

2. In a 12-hour shift, Nurse West may have to ____________ a patient with an abdominal injury, start a ____________ IV in a heart attack patient, and prepare a concussion patient for a ____________.

3. ER nurses typically work a ____________ shift with three 15-minute ____________ and a half-hour ____________. They must remain in one place for their entire ____________.

4. The nurses’ job is made more challenging by ____________ in the budget and ____________ in the work place.

5. Emergency room nurses need to remember that the patients are usually dealing with their respective problems for the ____________ time and are naturally ____________.

6. The nurses have to avoid becoming ____________ no matter how many terrible situations they see day ____________ and day ____________.

7. It’s important that nurses treat patients as people with ____________ rather than only as diseases or ____________.

8. To help patients feel they have some ____________ over their bodies, staff should try to involve them in as much ____________ as possible, even if only in small ways.
Writing exercise:

1. Would you like to be an ER nurse? Why?

2. Do you think it is good to see patients as people and not just as their injuries? Why?