

Tip of the Month

It's a Wonderful Life

It was Christmas Eve and George was pulling a double as the lone phlebotomist at Bedford Memorial Hospital. A small facility in the middle of nowhere, Bedford was about million miles from where George thought life would take him. But phlebotomy allowed George to forge a career in healthcare without creating a financial burden for his family. However, tonight George questioned why he had ever become a phlebotomist in the first place. He felt like an invisible, unappreciated spirit wandering the hospital's hallways. On a phlebotomist's salary, George couldn't buy his family all the things they deserved. Feeling like a failure, George was about as low as a man could go, despairing that the world would be a better place had he never existed. It took a visit from his guardian angel, Clarence, for George to find the right perspective.

First, Clarence took George to Bedford's Emergency Department six years earlier. A pileup on I-40 sent several critically injured victims to the hospital. George remembered how chaotic the ED was that night. George learned had he not been on duty, a mix-up in samples would have occurred causing a fatal transfusion reaction. Because of George's "no exception" policy to properly identifying patients and labeling tubes, a young mother recovered from her injuries instead of being misdiagnosed.

Next, Clarence guided George back in time to the bedside of a little boy with appendicitis. Without George skillfully locating his hard-to-find veins and offering gentle reassurance, the draw would have instilled a lifelong fear of needles and an avoidance of medical care. Instead, the patient is living a long, healthy life.

One by one, Clarence showed George all the patients he had positively impacted and the countless medical mistakes he had prevented, but never knew. A surgical patient's low potassium was detected pre-op because George didn't allow the patient to pump his fist; a debilitating nerve injury never happened because George knew how to prevent it; monitoring the volume of blood he drew from the most fragile infants in NICU protected several from iatrogenic anemia; a patient on Coumadin therapy wasn't mismanaged due to an erroneous result from an underfilled coag tube.

Thanks to Clarence, George was given a gift: the realization that his life as a phlebotomist was rich with purpose. Just like a guardian angel, he learned how many catastrophes he averted, how many medical mistakes he prevented, how many injuries didn't happen... all because *he* was the phlebotomist, not someone else who took a cavalier approach to drawing blood. Most of all, George learned the life of a good phlebotomist is generally without applause or recognition, but it's a wonderful life all the same.