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A Helping Hand

I have been a nurse almost 12 years. During those twelve years I have met a lot of wonderful and caring people. When I first graduated from nursing school, I went to work in labor/delivery, post-partum and newborn nursery. I found the birth of a child to be one of the most rewarding and beautiful moments to be a part of, but it can be one of the most frightening too.

I was working the night shift 7pm-7am one evening, when we got a call of a young woman coming in who had premature rupture of membranes. She was only 30 weeks along so this was a very serious situation. I called the physician on call because I knew we would need to be acting quickly. The young girl presented to the L & D suite in a wheelchair very anxious and concerned about her unborn child. Her boyfriend was equally concerned about his young girlfriend and their child.

We helped the girl out of her clothes and into a hospital gown. I placed the external monitors on so we could monitor the baby's heart rate and watch for any contractions that she might have. I noticed that the monitor was showing some ominous decelerations in the baby's heart rate. The physician came in at this time and started performing a pelvic exam on her. When he did this I could tell by his face that something was terribly wrong. He asked me to put a glove on and assist him. I donned the glove and knelt down beside him. He told me that as he was checking her that he had found a prolapsed cord. This can happen sometimes with ruptured membranes, especially if the baby is early. I reached around with my gloved hand and found the cord and held it in the birth canal. As long as I did this, the baby's heart rate remained in a safe range.

The physician explained to the young couple about the prolapsed cord and that he needed to perform a c-section. He also explained to them that I was going to be holding the prolapsed cord in the birth canal until the baby was born. A flurry of activity started. The anesthesia team came in. Nurses came in to insert the IV and Foley catheter. The OR nurses came in to have the consent forms signed and explain the procedure. During the entire time, I was sitting on the bed holding the baby's umbilical cord in place. We went into the OR and the c-section was performed, with me under the covers, still holding the cord in place.

The baby girl was born and had a weak cry. She needed to go to a neonatal intensive care unit because of the young gestational age. Our hospital did not have one so the baby was flown to a larger hospital, about fifty miles away that had the accommodations to take care of the infant. After the c-section was performed I stayed with the young mother taking her vital signs and monitoring her after the surgery. We talked about her baby and about her fears for her new daughter. I held her hand and tried to comfort her as much as I could. Finally, the NICU team that would be taking the infant to the larger hospital came in with the baby. She was so small and fragile looking. The baby was hooked up to

numerous monitors and lines. My heart broke for the young mother and father. I honestly did not know if they would ever see their child alive again. The NICU team let the mother reach through the opening in the incubator so she could touch her baby for the first time before they left. I could tell by the look on her face that this young mother treasured that moment.

After the team left with their daughter, I stayed with the young parents, talking and crying with them. It was a very emotional situation for all involved and one that I will never forget. The young woman felt a lot of guilt about what had happened. I tried to help her through that and to reassure her as much as possible. The baby was eventually released from the hospital with very few residual adverse effects. The mother would stop by the hospital from time to time and bring pictures of the infant. Once the baby was older she would even bring her in to see me. I have since moved away from that town and no longer work at that hospital but I still think about that young family. I hope that I provided some comfort to them in their hour of need and I pray that the infant, who is now almost a teenager, is doing fine.