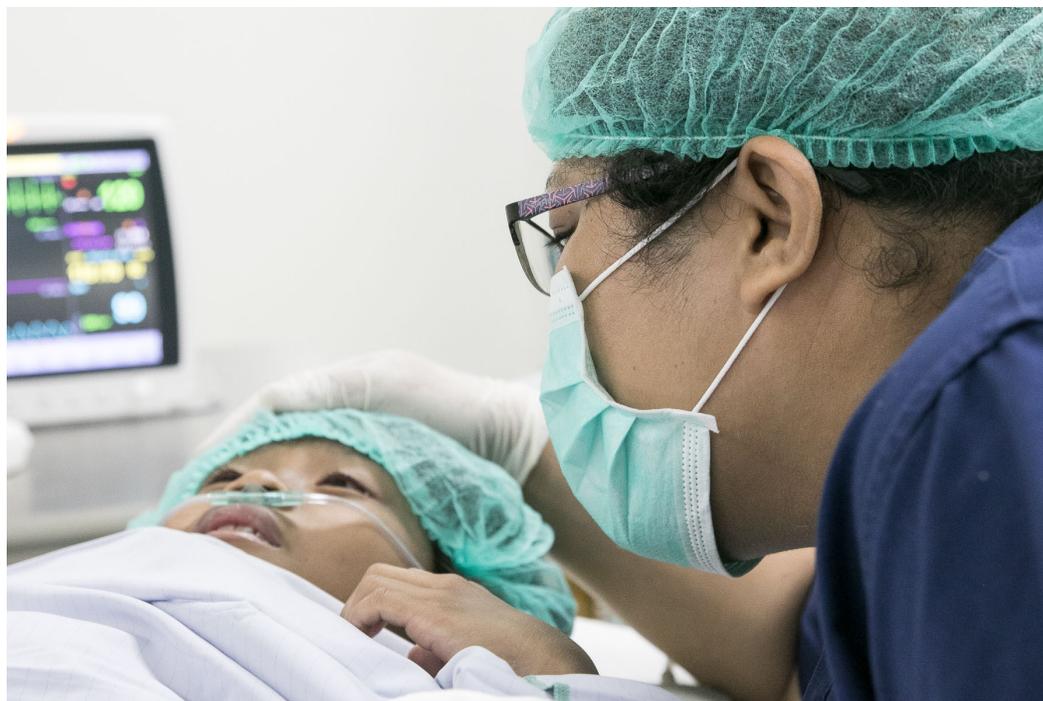


Making an impact: Two operating room staff take time out for parents, kids

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Elaine comforts Jasmin as she awaits surgery.

Interview by CUREkids Coordinator Hope Kim Doit. Introduction and photos by CUREkids Coordinator Marlene Bray.

Many of our patients have never visited a hospital, let alone been inside an operating room. Big machines, needles, staff members using big technical words that no one understands, their faces and heads obscured by masks and hairnets—it can be incredibly intimidating. Our nurses and doctors are amazing, and do what they can to calm our kids and their families, but they are also focused on a crucially important pre-surgical checklist.

Over the past several months, we started to notice two subtle figures in the operating rooms, reassuring parents and quietly chatting with the kids, distracting them from the bustling activities around them. Those two figures are Elaine and Dhang, our Operating Room (OR) housekeepers. As part of their jobs, they are required to sterilize the rooms before surgery and clean up afterward. Not an easy task to be sure, but there is nothing that requires them to have any contact with the patients. Yet, week after week, they dive head first into the middle of vulnerable emotional situations. In so many cases, they have a tremendous impact on the patient and the family's experience. We recently asked the pair what inspires them to do what they do.



Elaine and Dhang help keep the mood light for patients as they come to the operating room.

Elaine: When my son had surgery, it was at another hospital. None of the staff came up to me and said, "It's okay." That's really what makes the difference here at CURE. Even doctors comfort the patient and their families. When we were at the other hospital, [my son] Simon was so scared and the staff was yelling at him, telling him to stop crying. So, I gently told my son, "Just pray; it'll go quick. God is with you." At that time, I needed comfort, too, because you don't know what will happen to your child. That's why I apply it here during surgery.

Elaine: You can tell right when they come out of the elevator and give patient gowns to moms and dads that they are nervous. When the patients come, I comfort them and tell the parents, "It's okay. Your child will be okay. Don't worry because God is guiding the hands of the doctor. Don't worry. Just relax." Then, the parents thank me for it.



Elaine comforts a nervous mom before surgery.

Elaine: For the years that I've been in the OR, most of the moms come out of the OR cry and are nervous. I've only met one mom that I laughed out loud with because she said, "Why does my kid's face look like that? Is that how he really looks? Like he's on drugs?" We just both laughed.

Dhang: It's especially hard when the moms cry. They're nervous and scared. There was one cleft patient, I remember. The mom was so nervous and I told her "It's okay, ma'am. Don't worry about your child because they will just sleep." Kids always cry, so the parents wonder why.



Dhang talks with Joanna's mom, Joy, after surgery. Sometimes parents just need someone willing to listen.

Dhang: I feel like the emotions are the same whether it's the mom or dad. [A] dad earlier, he asked "Is my child okay?" He was wondering how long it'll take. So, I told him that we'll call when surgery is over. It helped him calm down a little bit. Like, I can just feel what he feels, you know? I'm not the parent, but I already know what they feel. If they can't insert the IV, I get nervous, too. I can pray for the parents, too, and I ask God the IV will go through, so the child will not have bruises.



Dhang prays for Jhonrey before surgery.

Elaine: No matter how busy it is in the OR, if there's time to spend with the patients, I really spend time with them to appease what they're feeling. It's good when you see them back in clinic and they remember you. Some will say, "Oh, Ate! You're the one who talked to me in the OR. What we talked about was fun!" Some don't remember our faces because we have masks.



Elaine and Kristian swap tree climbing stories. Turns out, they both fell out of the same kind of tree as kids! Unfortunately, Kristian's fall led to a trip to the OR, but the good news is he got to meet Elaine!



Elaine comforts Jasmin as she awaits surgery.



Jasmin and Elaine reunite a few days later in the ward.

Elaine: I remember when one patient just kept yelling and crying. I think he was in so much pain. Eventually, he calmed down. It's just sad to see, but good to see the progress. It's not easy to go through surgery. I complain when I get a small wound, what more if my bone got cut? I remember when Lyra, a ward housekeeper, saw a patient return with an infection because his parent didn't clean it properly. I saw her sobbing in the corner. She said, "My heart hurts because the mom didn't take care of the child." But when they come back all healed, we really get excited with them!

Dhang: After surgery, I get happy, too. Even if they cry loud, you become happy when you see their [straight] foot!



Joshriel was 100 percent relaxed during his second trip to the operating room. First of all, he said, "It was just a little surgery." Secondly, he got to see these two amazing women again!