



Tiffany Staal, BSN, RN

## Chapter 13

# My Experience With the Esophagectomy Support Group

by Tiffany Staal, BSN, RN

My name is Tiffany Staal and I am one of clinical coordinators working in the Thoracic Surgery clinic at the University of Michigan Health System. I was asked to write a short piece on my experience working with the Esophagectomy Support Group. To discuss the Support Group I feel I should start with my first experience with the thoracic surgery patient population. This is a story I share often with the support group members when we reflect on the standard of excellence Dr. Orringer has set here.

The year was 2008 and I was a travel nurse working on 4-C. I had been there a few months and had deemed myself worthy enough to take care of a transhiatal esophagectomy patient. I had never cared for an esophagectomy patient so I, of course, looked up the operation and was truly blown away. As I continued to read I realized that the Dr. Orringer I was reading about was *this* Dr. Orringer.

So, after a couple of hours I felt confident enough to go into the room and start my morning assessment on this particular patient and in walks Dr. Orringer. After he rounded on the patient, he asked me to step out of the room and asked if I understood everything that was done to the patient. I said, “Yes,” (nervously, praying there wouldn’t be a pop quiz). He said, “Good,” and then proceeded to pick up a marker and draw the operation on the board for me. That was better than any website I could look up. After this I felt more confident and more excited about this unique patient population.

Fast forward five years to 2013 when I began working in the Thoracic Surgery clinic. At this point I had taken care of my fair share of transhiatal esophagectomy patients. I was asked to cover the

support group for the best predecessor a nurse could ask for, Lori Flint. She introduced me to the support group before she made her departure and although it was a mutual decision, I did not think I could ever be ready to fill her shoes.

My first group alone went well. I was anxious and nervous, hoping I wouldn't say something inaccurate and hoping (again) there wouldn't be a pop quiz. The group was as welcoming to me and all new patients as I could hope for. They have so much to offer to those newly diagnosed, scared people. I've learned a wealth of knowledge about the 'New Normal' and I apply it to my job daily. The members of the support group are exceptional, strong and great people. I am so glad I have been able to help keep the group going.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Staal, BSN, RN