Coming Soon: The Family Holiday Gathering

Every year, people in the United States (and elsewhere) gather to celebrate various holidays. In November, some families gather for Thanksgiving. In December, the holidays that precipitate family gatherings are Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and the one most of us have in common, New Year’s Eve. We may travel hundreds or even thousands of miles to reconnect with family during these holidays. We think about the connections with others—who is related to whom, what fun times we had when we were young, or how much we like to eat a specific holiday meal. And for those of us family members who are nurses, we have a very specific opportunity.

Picture a family holiday gathering. Someone is always oohing and aahing over the infants and children. Someone is trying to be the overseer of the host family—is the place clean, does the food smell appealing? And we make an effort to say hi to the elders and people we haven’t seen since the last family holiday gathering.

Now, let us think about how nurses may approach those events. While we ooh and aah over the infants and children, we decide whether they look healthy and developmentally appropriate. We scan the environment to be sure that it is relatively safe—no obvious contamination, no stumbling hazards, and so forth. Then we consider the elders. We have the opportunity to observe whether these members of the family are sufficiently physically and mentally alert to continue independent living. We assess their movement, such as rising from a chair and walking across a room. We determine whether the person can carry on a relevant conversation and whether their senses are impaired to the point of concern. In other words, we nurses have the opportunity to do a quick assessment of the family’s health status.

So, instead of the second helping of food this year, take the time to do another scan of how everyone is doing. We are never really “off duty.” We have a gift to share with those we care about, at least enough to endure holiday traffic! Happy family gatherings early to those of us who need to prepare for these gatherings, at least from the viewpoint of a nurse.

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