Adrienne Gonzalez

When my academic career first began as a kindergartener, I had the ability to learn quicker than most students. I could spell more complex words compared to other students at a younger age. I could read faster, write legibly, and color between the lines. For most of my elementary school learning, no academic subject seemed to give me any struggle or difficulty. I was deemed as “the perfect student.” But trouble always comes to paradise no matter what age; specifically for me, the almost never-ending challenge was my Health Sciences class. From my freshman to my senior year of high school, the health sciences course set me off with life-changing experiences, eye-opening lessons, and an even greater understanding of what profession I choose to pursue in the future.

Life-changing experiences first began during my freshman year. We learned how to do everything correctly, from error-free hand washing to correctly administering CPR, and even learning medical terminology and working in military time. Scratching the surface of any healthcare career was really what we were participating in. On the other hand, my junior and senior year was really where things started becoming more challenging. I did not realize I was on the road to becoming certified as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) during my junior year. We learned everything from bedside care to cleaning dentures, foot care, proper terminology to use with residents, cleaning beds, and even perineal care. Due to COVID-19 during this time, in-person clinicals were never an option, so to substitute, we were provided mannequins that would act in place as the resident.

Senior year came around the corner, and I ended my junior year with no clinical experience but only obtained CNA and CPR certifications. I knew the upcoming year would be more challenging than the previous years because we were starting clinicals with actual patients in real-world healthcare settings, and the first stop was the nursing home. With only four mandatory clinical day rotations, excitement was rarely shown through some students. Still, I believed that maybe if I tried this particular activity with a little enthusiasm, it could open a gateway to a future and stable career as a CNA.

Life-changing could be one way to describe my four days at the nursing facility, but it was truly eye-opening how much care the patients need. COVID units were blocked off and isolated. Patients could not roam the halls without masks, which some refused and had to be sent back to their rooms. Perineal care was needed in almost every room. Patients needed to be showered and bathed, and most needed help feeding or drinking, moving from the beds to wheelchairs, getting dressed, and brushing their teeth. There were even some physically aggressive residents. Every single healthcare skill I had ever learned was needed in this one clinical setting. Never would I have thought that at the ripe age of eighteen, I could be responsible for someone who wasn’t me.
The first resident I ever had to help was a woman with dementia. She needed a shower and a clean bed. As we took her to the shower, I realized she was once just like me, young and enthusiastic, eager to learn. The closer we got to the shower, I realized she probably felt deep down we were there to invade her privacy or we weren’t trying to help her. As we passed by, room residents would make noises, and some would scream saying the CNAs were trying to hurt them, but the CNAs are care providers, people who are supposed to help. Talking to the residents made the experience much easier, but I knew choosing this path was not suitable for me. We still had more clinicals to do at Midland Memorial Hospital. Since the nursing home help did not feel right, maybe the right path for me was to be a Registered Nurse (RN).

Hospital clinicals came around in February of 2022, and other students and I were assigned to real registered nurses at the hospital; our job was to shadow them, learn as much as possible, and even do a few basic skills we felt confident we could do. As my assigned RN told me about her patients and her care team, I realized that the hospital isn’t that much different from the nursing home setting.

More clinicals came around, but for this time, phlebotomy. In class, we learned about all the additives in phlebotomy tubes, how to stick patients with actual needles, and having to practice on each other. The challenge of phlebotomy negatively reflected on my grades as the year ended. My grade in health sciences was dropping, and with phlebotomy clinical and end-of-the-year exams, the pressure seemed to rise every day. Phlebotomy challenged me with the practice of studying material, working, watching, learning, and listening. Through this experience, I knew I had to make a routine to better myself and ensure I was ready for college.

The health sciences program put me through many experiences at an early age. I’ve learned to treat others how I want to be treated, to know I have more responsibilities than myself, and always to be confident in what I do. No healthcare worker works in doubt or can second guess themselves, even when it’s too late. Through these experiences and clinicals numerous times, I’ve decided to stay in healthcare but continue my career as an oral surgeon. Bedside care and the hospital setting didn’t seem like the right fit for me, but to know that, I was put to the challenge, learned it, accomplished it, and graduated in Health Sciences as a certified CNA, EKG Technician, Patient Care Technician, and Phlebotomy Technician. The challenge of being in the Health Science class and learning all of the material was hard enough, but at the end of the road, it gave me a chance at a real job and a real future.