

I've been thinking...



Taking a Snooze
May 2012

I've been thinking about taking a snooze.

The hungry Bermuda Triangle is out my window to the west. I'm on a nine-hour flight between Washington DC and Sao Paul to address *I Simpósio Internacional de Farmácia Hospitalar e Clínica*. My title is "Traceability and Patient Safety in the Drug Dispensing and Administration Processes Using Barcodes"—a real snoozer. Napping passengers surround me.

Six or seven flights ago, a young woman holding a Costco-sized jar of earplugs stood up as I approached my row.

"Would you like a pair?"

"No, but thanks."

"You sure? We have an infant."

People who say they sleep like a baby probably don't have one. Thank God this baby napped from takeoff to touchdown. Not a peep. *Precious* child.

For me, babies screaming are nails on a flight's chalkboard. So are men snoring. So far this trip so good. Knock on aluminum.

I suppose parents have an appropriate time to defend a child's obnoxious behavior with, "He needs a nap." But I feel this overused defense is generally a lame justification for inexcusable behavior, especially as the kid grows older. Some of us retain the right to offer the excuse into our adult years as if we are under no obligation to be nice when we don't get a full eight hours.

I've never worked in a hospital, but I understand fatigue from long shifts, back-to-backs, double shifts, and understaffing can incubate some challenging social interactions.

Somewhere along the line, I was taught that we can and should learn to be nice even when we are tired. However, no matter how nice we may be, we still owe it to others, not just to ourselves, to make sure we get adequate sleep. Truck drivers owe it to travellers on the highways. Pilots and flight crews owe it to passengers on their flights. Doctors, nurses, and pharmacists owe it to patients in their hospitals.

I've been blessed to meet and interview Eric Cropp, RPh, and Julie Thao, RN, two phenomenal people, each involved in a medication error that took the life of a patient. Eric and Julie entered their professions to make a difference, to care for patients, to do no harm. In addition to a confluence of human and system errors, both tragedies involved multiple-shift weariness

Truthfully, I'm tired. April included a heavy consulting load with lots of travel. Add preparing for The unSUMMIT for Bedside Barcoding, which concluded a few days ago—our best of seven, by the way. Yesterday I flew five hours from Seattle to Washington

DC. Equipment failure forced us to stay overnight near Dulles before boarding a rescheduled flight to Brazil. Though I've grown weary from well doing, I need some sleep.

My favorite *New Yorker* cartoon depicts a collie standing by a man who has fallen and can't get up. In the first frame, the man cries, "Lassie, get help!" In the second frame, Lassie is lying on a psychiatrist's couch.

Unfortunately and fortunately, I've flown enough miles to be upgraded to a business-class seat, which transforms into a flat bed. There's a chance my presentation in English to a Portuguese-speaking audience will make better sense if I lie down and steer clear of the Bermuda Triangle of meals, mojitos, and movies.

Someone is counting on my rest. I just hope I don't snore. Someone's counting on your rest, too.

Assuming you are still awake, what do you think?

Mark Neuenschwander (a.k.a. Noosh)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MNU' with a long, sweeping underline.

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