

This is a continuation of a story about working as a nurse practitioner in Kashechewan in Northern Ontario, Canada. Trudy, Shelley and I are all nurses there. This is my third day.

### Learning the Ropes

Trudy stood in the middle of the nursing station the day before she boarded her plane to Kingston. She was so excited to see her parents at Prescott, an hour and a half drive from the Kingston, airport. Not being able to think beyond going to bed and resting for days without interruptions from the on-call buzzers, she planned to stay in Prescott.

Trudy had been my mentor up until now, so I had a few questions to ask.

“Trudy,” I said, “I was wondering if I need to refer a patient with a blood sugar result of 9 mmol/L in mid-afternoon.

She looked at me with a vacant look, then attempted to answer the question. “You can have them come back for a fasting blood sugar tomorrow,” Her eyes closed as she continued to talk, “If it is high...” Then her words slowly turned to jibberish. I reached out as if to catch her in case she fell over. She had a serious case of burnout, and no energy left.

Trudy had truly become part of the North. She had two husky dogs that she allowed on her bed at night. One of the dogs was pregnant and Trudy was afraid her pups would be harmed by other dogs when she was on vacation. She spent her last day making a shelter out of timber scraps from the lumberyard so the dog could have her pups there. She instructed us to make sure she didn't get out, although she knew that was next to impossible. *Our encounter was brief, but I am going to miss her.*

This morning during the clinic, Shelley informed me that I was supposed to check my mail for the results of the blood work or swabs I had taken. If there were any abnormalities I needed to follow up or put the client on the doctor's list. I felt a flush of blood rise to my cheeks. *Was this on the brief orientation Shelley gave me? Did I miss it?*

As I walked into the mailroom, I noticed my little cubby hole was overflowing. *I am neglecting my duties and if found out I will be sent home in disgrace, never mind the problems I caused the patients. Phew, no blood work is critical and the results from the swabs had not come back yet. I will make sure I check it at the end of the day.*

I woke up Saturday looking forward to taking a walk around the community, but I had to check the Well Women's Charts first. I didn't want to be delivering a baby at the nursing station when they should have been flown out to Timmins Hospital, 425 miles south. I entered the room at the nursing station dedicated to charts. Opening the files I could see that everyone had a band number associated with their name. I sat at the desk and from my list in my scribbler, I took out the charts from the long grey filing cabinets and put them on a pile. As I went through them, I discovered that two women were due within the next two weeks and two had high-risk pregnancies that required monitoring. *I will arrange for their transfer out on the plane, Monday.*

After lunch, I sprayed myself with mosquito repellent before going for my long-awaited walk. I put on a cap and jacket for extra protection from mosquitoes. A ring dyke was built around the settlement in 1997, just three years before I arrived. The ten-foot dyke keeps the town and outlying community from flooding during the spring when there are ice jams on the Albany River. This was a good place to walk to see the pristine blue water of the river as it widens into a delta that flows into James Bay. As I stood there I realized that the view of the river from the town is now obstructed by the dyke. *What a loss!*

When I stopped droves of mosquitoes descended as my repellent wore thin. I ran down the trail that leads off the dyke, arms batting at the annoying insects. *Next time, I will bring the can with me.*

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