

Working in Cardiac Cath Lab – A Nurse's Advice

I work in a multi-specialty hospital in Srinagar, Kashmir. During last 17 years, I have worked in several departments of my Institute and finally, I have been working in cardiac catheterization laboratory for last two years. I have learnt several essentials regarding working in a cardiac lab which I want to share with my colleagues who want to come and work in this department. Based on my long experience, I want to advise all interested colleagues on how to give one's best in cardiac cath laboratory.

I want to give you an idea of what it is like working in the cath lab. First of all I would suggest that you work in a CCU (coronary care unit) for a year or so to get some experience of dealing with cardiac patients. I know it may seem useless to go there if that's not where you want to be. But the patients sometimes crash on the table and if the existing personnel in the cath lab don't know ACLS (Advanced Cardiac LIFE support), one may have to call for help from outside. Usually, an anesthetist has to be called from OT which can be time consuming. You don't have time to think and if you don't know your stuff, then you will be eaten alive by the nursing administration as well as by the cardiologists of your department.

I will tell you a hypothetical case of a nurse who went to Cath Lab from an unrelated department and almost ruined her career. A patient came from the emergency with unstable angina and received two stents in his left anterior coronary and was sent back to CCU. In the morning, the nurse passed on the orders written for him in the CCU. One of the drugs written was Enoxaparin, S/C, twice a day - an anticoagulant given to prevent blood clotting. Well, she (mis)interpreted the order and sent the patient up on anticoagulants. Why the nurse didn't question this order (the patient still had sheaths in) is beyond my understanding but, the treating physician immediately filled out an incident report. The patient ended up with a bleed so bad that he required emergency surgery and nearly died. I am not telling this to scare you but to recognize the volatility of the situation and to understand the responsibilities of nurse in Cath lab nurse which go beyond

than simply carrying out orders.

Some people look at the cath lab as a way to get out of working on night-shifts and weekends. But I must warn you that it is a very long eight hours shift when you are wearing 5 kg of lead and standing on one spot for hours and hours. Also, if you are a female and are planning to get pregnant then the cath lab is not the place for you as there is a risk of getting exposed to radiation. Besides, Cath lab is a happening place where things move quickly and you do not get much of a chance to know your patients.

Many hospitals offer emergency PCI programs which requires the physician and nurses to be on call during off hours as well. If you are called in on these times, you are still responsible for being there for your scheduled shift. The nurses in the cath lab have to be amazing; and working very hard. But, It is a very rewarding job and there is an opportunity to learn so much. By sharing this experience, I hope this will help you to be better prepared for working as nurse in cardiac cath lab.

For myself, I love working in the Cath lab and I want to continue working as an incharge supervisor. I also want to get training in ACLS and more experience in critical care, so that I can be the best nurse for my patients.

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