

STORY HIGHLIGHT

HEIDI SANBORN'S "WHY I'M HERE" STORY



Heidi is President of the Arizona Nurses Association, and faculty at ASU. The experiences she had as a bedside nurse continue to guide her professional identity to this day.



Breaking protocol for human feelings.

So, there I was, explaining to this man, *I'll call him John*, that his wife was **already gone** even though her heart was still beating. She was unresponsive, and brain activity was minimal. He was the one who had performed CPR on her at home, and followed her ambulance to the hospital in his own car.

His only response to me was **that he needed her wedding ring**. She was no longer wearing it, and he wanted to have it with him as they withdrew care.

After reading the notes from the ER, I learned that before her husband arrived, security removed her jewelry and locked them for safe keeping as was our protocol. Because he wasn't there to take possession, he inadvertently gave up his rights to the ring until the patient claimed them back. **Those were the rules.**

But, I understood that his need for this ring was so much more important than protocol in that moment. It was **gut-wrenching** to think that I couldn't get him what he needed to gain the closure he so desperately wanted with his wife.

So, I made several calls, repeatedly being told that it was out of protocol, and there was nothing they could do. I ticked off a lot of people along the way. **But finally**, I was connected to the head of security for the hospital who was on when she arrived. I explained the situation, and what I was trying to do. I asked for him to come speak with the husband and I directly. I knew there was no way he **could see the palpable grief** in the room and not understand why protocol needed to be broken that day.

I had irritated a lot of people that day in my quest to break the rules. But seeing the ring on her finger, and in her husband's hand as she slipped away, was a stark reminder that we are in the business of caring for people rather than following emotionless protocols that were never meant to be at the center of the care we deliver.

I understand why this rule exists, and know that I likely didn't manage to change the protocols we follow. But hopefully, just hopefully, I taught a few people along the way why *sometimes*, **breaking protocol is the most important thing we can do** when we are caring for patients and their families.