

The

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OUT OF THE BLUE

By Kathryn McFarland, MD



Canadian Thanksgiving always makes me think of the baseball World Series and those exciting years when the Toronto Blue Jays were winning. My mother continues to fume each year as another turkey dinner sits and gets cold waiting for the game to end. This time of year also makes me recall fondly a day in the office when I answered the door of my exam room and saw the panic in my nurse's eyes.


She had just taken a message from our office answering machine. One of my patients was rushing over with her son, David, to be assessed. She had received a call from his school teacher claiming that David looked blue, and the teacher didn't think he was well. My first thought was: "Why are they coming here? Why not the emergency room?" I waited, for what felt like an eternity, for David and his mother to show up.

Finally, I heard the knock on the door. I walked into the room to find David sitting calmly in the chair and his mother frantically recalling the story. It all started in the morning. She had left for work and David had not been up yet. He found his way to school on his own. His teacher called because she worried he was cyanotic. I looked at David and sure enough he was blue — lips and all. Eerily he just sat there and had normal vitals, good air entry and no obvious cause for his cyanosis. The history was unremarkable. I sat and stared for a few minutes and decided to reassure Mom and myself by sending him to the emergency room (ER) for an oxygen saturation reading.

For the next few hours I fretted. What had I missed? My head was confused over why he was cyanotic, but still looking so well. Finally, Mom called me back. I was surprised at the speed with which they had gotten through the ER. She laughed.

It appears David, on the way to the ER, disclosed to his Mom that he had put his new Blue Jay sheets on his bed the night before. His mother had wanted him to wait until she could wash them one time. Upon arrival at the ER, his oxygen saturation was normal and with this new piece of history, the ER physician diagnosed Blue Jay sheet discoloration syndrome — she had seen it before.

The best advice I received at the University of Toronto was from a wonderful pediatrician who said the minute you first walk in the room, determine if the child is well or not. I should have listened to him on this occasion, for even though David was blue, he looked fine.

In medicine, every day is truly a new school day! 

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