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The days of female nurses in white uniforms, simply present to be an assistant to doctors, are long over. Nursing is now a competitive, versatile career that is attracting both female and male students across the country. With enticing education opportunities, salaries, job outlooks, duties, settings, specialties and more, a career as a registered nurse is looking better than ever. Students with "[t]he desire 'to make a difference, to do more than just have a job'" are attracted to nursing as well (Graduate qtd. in Vallano 10). Whether a career as a registered nurse interests you, or you simply want to learn more, continue reading this chapter to find out what it takes to become a successful registered nurse.

Nursing is a practice as old as time; caring for others is a part of human nature. However, the true founder of the modern profession of nursing is Florence Nightingale. The American Diabetes Association newsletter reports that Nightingale, an upper class British woman of the 1800s, "dedicate[d] her life to nursing the sick" (Mazur). While her career began by receiving "some medical training" and "running a small London hospital," her true success began during the 1854 Crimean War. During this brutal war between Britain, Turkey, and Russia, there were many deaths and "thousands [of soldiers] were wounded and dumped in a British military hospital in nearby Scutari, Turkey." The hospitals of this time were filthy and infested with rats, spreading diseases easily. Florence Nightingale was contacted to help this British military hospital in Turkey. She brought forty women with her, and created a new kind of hospital: "She looked into the smallest details, seeing that men, floors, walls, and bedding were cleaned, rats and bugs gone, and sanitation introduced. She found a real cook to prepare hot healthy meals and bought fresh vegetables with her own money." By reforming this hospital, she gained respect. Later on, Nightingale "opened the first nursing school" where nurses "wore clean uniforms, attended classes, read medical books, bandaged wounds, assisted in surgery, and even delivered babies." Florence Nightingale truly "made nursing a trained, respected, and valued profession" by reforming hospitals and opening nursing schools.

In the United States, the Civil War era in the late 1800s is what really changed the view of nurses. Hospitals became more prevalent during this time, employed by passionate, hardworking, women nurses. Following Florence Nightingale's lead, U.S. nurses worked to make hospitals more organized, sanitary, and respected. Doris Weatherford, writing for the National Women's History Museum newsletter, explains, "The war thus led to greater respect for nurses, something that Congress acknowledged in 1892, when it belatedly passed a bill providing pensions to Civil War nurses. More important, the war served as the beginning of moving the profession from the home to the hospital and clinic. The result was an explosion of nursing schools in the late nineteenth century." By starting nursing schools and providing pensions for nurses working in hospitals, nursing became an attractive professional career in the United States.

What exactly does a registered nurse do? A simple description of a nurse's job: "RNs provide and coordinate patient care, educate patents and the public about various health conditions, and provide advice and emotional support to patients and their family members" (United States… "Registered Nurses"). RNs work in many different settings and specialties, but most typically complete the following duties: "Record patients' medical histories and symptoms, [a]dminister patients' medicines and treatments, [s]ets up plans for patients' medicines and treatments, [s]et up plans for patients' care or contribute to existing plans, [c]onsult with doctors and other healthcare

professionals, [o]perate and monitor medical equipment, [h]elp perform diagnostic tests and analyze results, [t]each patients and their families how to manage illnesses or injuries, [and] [e]xplain what to do at home after treatment." Of course, this is just a basic description of duties; nurses can specialize to have more specific responsibilities.

In addition to duties, an interesting fact that not everyone considers is the important qualities a registered nurse should have: "Critical-thinking skills, [c]ompassion, [d]etail oriented, [e]motional stability, [o]rganizational skills, [p]hysical stamina, [s]peaking skills." These qualities are important because nursing is a difficult, demanding career. If these qualities describe you, nursing might be the right career for you.

One of the advantages of becoming a registered nurse is the versatility of the career. RNs can work in many settings: "Registered nurses work in hospitals, physicians' offices, home healthcare services, and nursing care facilities. Others work in correctional facilities, schools, clinics, or serve in the military" (United States…"Registered Nurses"). As well, there are many specialties including "critical care nurse, emergency nurse, hospice/palliative care nurse, labor and delivery staff nurse, neonatal nurse, nephrology nurse, nurse educator, nurse executive, oncology nurse, orthopedic nurse, perioperative [operating room] (O.R.) nurse, psychiatric/mental health nurse, [and] school nurse" ("Registered Nurse (RN)").

The following specialties of nurses typically work in fast-paced, emergency environments in hospitals: critical care nurse, emergency nurse, and preoperative O.R. nurse. A critical care nurse is a "specialty within nursing that deals specifically with human responses to life-threatening problems" (*Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow*). These nurses "practice in settings where patients require complex assessment, high intensity therapies and interventions, and continuous nursing vigilance." In a hospital setting, you may find a critical nurse in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) floor. Specializing as an emergency nurse involves "rapid assessment and treatment when every second counts, particularly during the initial phase of acute illness and trauma." Emergency nurses are found in the Emergency Room (ER) of a hospital. Perioperative operating room (O.R.) nurses "provide surgical patient care by assessing, planning, and implanting the nursing care patients receive before, during and after surgery." These nurses will work in the operating room. Of course, this is just a brief overview of some of the specialties possible for registered nurses in the emergency departments of a hospital. As a nursing student, specializing as an emergency nurse is what interests me. The combination of a fast-paced environment and never knowing what will come through the door seems like an exciting career.

Another important department that interests many nursing students is working with babies. Labor and delivery staff nurses "care for women who are laboring, having complications of pregnancy or have recently delivered" (*Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow)*. These nurses would be found in floors of hospitals that are dedicated to labor and delivery. Similarly, a neonatal nurse "works in a nursery" with newborns. These newborns are usually "small for their age, premature, or sick term infants who require high technology care, such as ventilators, special equipment or incubators, or surgery." Labor and delivery staff nurse and neonatal nurse specialties are also fast-paced environments in hospitals.

Not all hospital nurses work in fast-paced, emergency environment. The following are specialties that are in hospitals, but are not emergency departments: nephrology nurse, nurse executive, oncology nurse, and orthopedic nurse. To begin, "[n]ephrology nurses use the nursing process to care for patients of all ages who are experiencing, or at risk for, kidney disease" (*Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow*). In a hospital, nephrology nurses would work on a floor with only kidney patients, or be assigned to the rooms with these patients. Nurse executives are the bosses of other nurses, requiring skills such as "collaboration, coaching, mentoring, diversity, co-creating, communicating and coordinating outcomes management, and enabling the spirit of the community." Nurse executives may be in charge of an entire floor of nurses, or nurses within a certain specialty in

a hospital. An oncology nurse "encompasses the roles of direct caregiver, educator, consultant, administrator, and researcher" of cancer patients. An oncology nurse would work with oncologists, doctors specializing in cancer, and work on cancer floors of a hospital. Nurses specializing in orthopedics study "musculosketeletal health care by promoting excellence in orthopedic research, education, and nursing practice." Orthopedic nurses may work on various floors of the hospital including ER, surgery, pediatrics, adult, and more. While these specialties are not the emergency departments in hospitals, they are still very important.

In addition to hospitals, specialized nurses can be found in other facilities. A specialty in hospice/palliative care focuses "on comprehensive physical, psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual care to terminally ill persons and their families" (*Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow*). Hospices, or at home hospice care, are caring facilities for elderly people who are dying, with no chance of recovery. As a nurse educator, nurses "combine expertise and a passion for teaching into rich and rewarding careers." Nurse educators work for universities and colleges to teach nursing students. Also in the educational system are school nurses who work to "promote student and staff health and safety." They work with students at elementary and high schools.

Personally, a specialty that interests me is psychiatric-mental health. Treating patients with abnormal psychology disorders such as anorexia (an eating disorder) and addiction seems both challenging and rewarding. Registered nurses specializing in psychiatric-mental health "work with individuals, families, groups, and communities to assess mental health needs, develop diagnoses, and plan, implement, and evaluate nursing care" (*Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow*). Psychiatric-mental health nurses may work in rehabilitation centers for mental disorders, psychiatrists' offices, psychiatric floor of a hospital, and more.

A good education is an important requirement of today's nurses: "Registered nurses usually take one of three education paths: a bachelor's of science degree in nursing (BSN), an associate's degree in nursing (ADN), or a diploma from an approved nursing program" (United States…"Registered Nurses"). Many four-year universities offer nursing as a major to complete a BSN. Some community colleges, such as College of DuPage, offer an associate's degree in nursing. If you are thinking about becoming a nurse, make sure you are prepared for the course load: "In all nursing education programs, students take courses in anatomy, physiology, microbiology, chemistry, nutrition, psychology, and other social and behavioral sciences, as well as liberal arts" and participate in "supervised clinical experience." A BSN will take "4 years to complete; ADN and diploma programs usually take 2 to 3 years to complete."

So, which education pathway is best? It all depends on your future goals as a nurse, and your time frame. Personally, I am a nursing student working towards my BSN at Elmhurst College. I decided to pursue a BSN because I did not decide on nursing until my sophomore year of college, I want to earn a bachelor's degree, I plan to continue my education after my bachelor's, and because I believe that most employers would prefer a bachelor's degree to an associate's degree.

After graduating from your chosen program, it is time to complete your state's license, certification, and registration requirements: "To become licensed, nurses must graduate from an approved nursing program and pass the National Council Licensure Examination, or NCLEX-RN." Each state may have additional requirements regarding license and certification for RNs: be prepared.

After becoming a RN, nurses can continue their education. Once RNs have completed their BSN, they can continue to their master's of science in nursing (MSN) and even a doctor of philosophy (PhD) in nursing. An interesting fact is that with an advanced education, nurses become advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) which "is an umbrella term given to a registered nurse who has at least a Master's educational and clinical practice requirements beyond the basic nursing education and licensing required of all RNs and who provides at least some level of direct care to patient populations" (*NursingWorld*). The following is a list from the American Nurses Association

of typical specialties as an APRN:

> Nurse practitioner (NP) – Working in clinics, nursing homes, hospitals, or private offices, nurse practitioners provide a wide range of primary and preventive health care services, prescribe medication, and diagnose and treat common minor illnesses and injuries.
> Certified nurse-midwife (CNM) – CNMs provide well-woman gynecological and low-risk obstetrical care in hospitals, birth centers, and homes.
> Clinical nurse specialist (CNS) – Working in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, private offices, and community-based settings, CNSs handle a wide range of physical and mental health problems. They also work in consultation, research, education, and administration.
> Certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNA) – The oldest of the advanced nursing specialties, CRNAs administer more than 65 percent of anesthetics given to patients each year.

Registered Nurses and other advanced specialties are not the only types of nurses. Starting at the bottom of the nursing totem pole are Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs). CNAs work under the supervision of Registered Nurses (RNs), and typically perform the following duties: "Clean and bathe patients or residents, [h]elp patients use the toilet and dress, [t]urn, reposition, and transfer patients between beds and wheelchairs, [m]easure patients' vital signs, such as blood pressure and temperature, [s]erve meals and help patients eat" (United States…"Nursing Assistants"). To become a CNA, students "must complete a state-approved education program in which they learn the basic principles of nursing and complete supervised clinical work. These programs are found in high schools, community colleges, vocational and technical schools, hospitals, and nursing homes." The length of these programs vary based on the state's requirements, but can usually be completed in a few months. Once you have completed a program, "nursing assistants [CNAs] take a competency exam." After completing the program and exam, CNAs may begin working. If becoming a RN is not the path for you, perhaps becoming a CNA is a better fit.

With the bad economy, college students across the U.S. are worried about salary and job outlook for their future careers. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS), reports that "[t]he median annual wage for a registered nurse was $65,470 in May 2012" (United States…"Registered Nurses"). "The best-paid 10 percent of RNs made more than $94,720, while the bottom 10 percent earned less than $45,040," reports Jada Graves of *U.S. News & World Report* magazine. Even more exciting is that "employment of registered nurses is projected to grow 19 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than average for all occupations" (United States…"Registered Nurses"). This growth rate anticipates "526,800 new jobs" (Graves). With these positive statistics, students studying nursing can be hopeful for their futures.

Before deciding to become a registered nurse, students should be aware of the controversies in the field. A common controversy in nursing is the stereotype that all nurses are women, not men. Annette T. Vallano, MS, RN, APRN, BC, reports an interesting fact in her book, *Your Career in Nursing*: "According to the most recent National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses in 2008, 6.6 percent of the American RN work force was male" (105). Vallano explores possibilities of why there are so few men in nursing. She identifies the "public's image of nurses" as a "'her' in a white uniform and cap" (109). This image of a female nurse in a white uniform and cap is no longer prevalent in today's nursing world, but is still associated with the career because of the lack of nurses in media. The reality is that nurses are not portrayed in the news today. Doctors are cited for articles, journals, newspapers and news broadcastings instead of nurses. The evidence of this controversy is shown by the research project conducted in 1997 by Sigma Theta Tau International, the international

honors society of nursing:

> 1. On average, nurses were cited only 3 percent of the time in hundreds of health related articles culled from 16 major news publications.
> 2. In seven newspaper surveyed, nurses and nursing were referenced by only 4 percent of the healthcare articles examined. The few references to nurses or nursing were mostly in passing.
> 3. Articles examined during the study referred to both physicians and healthcare academics as doctors. No example was found where a nurse with a doctorate was referred to as doctor. (110)

Until the public's image of nursing as females in white uniforms and caps changes, men in nursing will continue to feel excluded, and female nurses will feel diminished.

As a demanding career, nursing has its downside. A career in nursing may leave you burnt out from your daily work, which involves long hours, difficult patients, draining paperwork, and more. In the article "Six Signs It May Be Time for a Nursing Career Change," Debra Wood introduces the possibility that nursing may not be the right career for everyone. Wood provides us with the "six signs that it might be time to look at some new career options" instead of nursing. She includes the following six signs: "1. Feeling burned out or exhausted…, 2. Hating the idea of going to work…, 3. Craving a change…, 4. Wanting to know you made a difference…, 5. Worrying about patient or personal safety…, 6. Harboring a burning desire to move up." These signs reveal that nursing does not always work out for everyone.

Working as a registered nurse can be stressful. Patti DeNichols, RN, BSN, M.Ed., works as a school nurse at Schiesher Elementary and Lisle Junior High School in Lisle, IL. When asked if she would describe her job as stressful, she replied:

> At certain times it is especially stressful like the beginning of the school year. My school year starts about one week earlier than the teachers' does because I need to have the appropriate health information ready for the teachers when their students arrive so they are prepared. This could include allergies, emergency plans, 504 plans [plans developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives accommodations that will ensure their academic success and access to the learning environment], and pertinent medical information. Various times throughout the year, many reports are due but the big day is Oct. 15th, which is mandatory state required exclusion day for any student not in compliance with the required physical exam and immunizations.

As you can tell, nurses have responsibilities that can make their jobs time consuming and stressful. DeNichols shows that the most stress comes from preparation: making sure teachers are aware of student allergies, creating emergency plans for students with health problems such as seizures or heart defects, making 504 plans to ensure disabled students are receiving accommodations, and other medical information.

Carol Schmidtke, RN, also works as a school nurse at Schiesher Elementary and Tate Woods Elementary in Lisle, IL. After being asked if her job was stressful, she mentioned, "It is not generally [stressful]. It was at first when I realized that I was often on my own with health decisions. After years of experience, it is better. It can be stressful with student injuries and parent conversations/meetings." Schmidtke shows that with time, a career in nursing will become second nature. While all careers can be stressful, be prepared to watch for the signs that nursing is not the

right career for you.

If you have made it this far in the chapter, nursing must be a career that interests you. Where can you find more information? The best place to start is by checking out the American Nurses Association, which is a professional association for American nurses. Founded in 1892, the ANA is one of the largest and most respected nursing associations in the United States. Membership costs $191 per year, which includes monthly publications of *The American Nurse*, *American Nurse Today*, and *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*. However, students can still use the site and access online information without a membership. Other benefits of joining this association include membership discounts from various companies, professional conferences in areas such as Orlando, Florida, and educational resources. Nurses, and students studying nursing, can learn more about this association by accessing this link: www.nursingworld.org.

After reading all of this information, are you still interested in becoming a nurse? DeNichols encourages students to "go for it! It [nursing] is a wonderful profession you can do the rest of your life in many different settings and in many different ways." Opportunities for today's nurses are limitless. With the aging baby boomer generation, jobs are opening up for nurses across the country. The future of nursing is looking bright: the predicted "U.S. nursing shortage will grow to 260,000 registered nurses by 2025" (Vallano 23). While this does mean that jobs are available for future nurses, it also may lead to an increased workload for all nurses. Nevertheless, nursing is still an interesting and exciting career. There are many specialties and opportunities for higher education that nurses of the past could only dream about. Nurses are not merely medical assistants; they are now diagnosing and treating patients. With advances in medicine and technology, we can only imagine what tomorrow's nurse has in store.

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