Focus on nursing as a career

Nature of the Work

Nursing plays a major role in health care. As important members of the health care team, registered nurses perform a wide variety of functions.

They observe, evaluate, and record symptoms, reactions and progress of patients; administer medications; assist in the rehabilitation of patients; instruct patients and family members in proper health maintenance care; and help maintain a physical and emotional environment that promotes recovery.

Some registered nurses provide hospital care. Others perform research activities or instruct students. The setting usually determines the scope of the nurse's responsibilities.

Hospital nurses - constitute the largest group of nurses. Most are staff nurses who provide skilled bedside nursing care and carry out the medical treatment prescribed by physicians.

They may also supervise practical nurses, aides and orderlies. Hospital nurses usually work with groups of patients that require similar nursing care.

For instance, some nurses work with patients who have had surgery; others care for children, the elderly, or the mentally ill. Some are administrators of nursing services.

Private duty nurses - give individual care to patients who need constant attention. The private duty nurse is self-employed and may work in a home, in a hospital, or in a convalescent institution.

Office nurses assist physicians, dental surgeons, and occasionally dentists in private practice or clinics.

Sometimes they perform routine laboratory and office work in addition to their nursing duties.

Community health nurses care for patients in clinics, homes, schools and other community settings. They instruct patients and families in health care and give periodic care as prescribed by a physician.

They may also instruct groups of patients in proper diet and arrange for immunizations.

These nurses work with community leaders, teachers, parents and physicians in community health education. Some community health nurses work in schools.

Nurse educators teach students the principles and skills of nursing, both in the classroom and in direct patient care.

They also conduct continuing education courses for registered nurses, practical nurses and nursing assistants.

Occupational health or industrial nurses provide nursing care to employees in industry and government and, along with physicians, promote employee health.

As prescribed by a doctor, they treat minor injuries and illnesses occurring at the place of employment, provide for the needed nursing care, arrange for further medical care if necessary and offer health counseling.

They also may assist with health examinations and inoculations.

Places of Employment

About 960,000 persons worked as registered nurses last year. About one-third worked on a part-time basis.

About three-quarters of all registered nurses worked in hospitals, nursing homes and related institutions.

Community health nurses in government agencies, schools, visiting nurse associations and clinics numbered about 65,000; nurse educators in nursing schools accounted for about 33,000; and occupational health nurses in industry, about 20,000.

About 100,000 more worked in the offices of physicians or other health practitioners, or were private duty nurses hired directly by patients.

Most of the others were staff members of professional nurse and other organizations or worked for state boards of nursing or research organizations.

Training, Other Qualifications

A license is required to practice professional nursing in all states and in the District of Columbia.

To get a license, a nurse must be a graduate of a school of nursing approved by the state board of nursing and pass a written state competency examination.

Nurses may be licensed in more than one state, either by examination or endorsement of a license issued by another state.

Three types of educational programs — diploma, baccalaureate and associate degree — prepare candidates for licensure.

However, a minimum of a baccalaureate degree is preferred for those who aspire to administrative or management positions, and those planning to work in research, consultation, teaching, or clinical specialization, which require education at the master's level.

Graduation from high school is required for admission to all schools of nursing.

Diploma programs are conducted by hospital and independent schools and usually require 3 years of training. Bachelor's degree programs usually require 4 years of study in a college or university, although a few require 5 years.

Associate degree programs in junior and community colleges require approximately 2 years of nursing education.

In addition, several programs provide licensed practical nurses with the training necessary to upgrade themselves to registered nurses while they continue to work part time.

These programs generally offer an associate of arts degree. In 1979, about 1,375 programs (associate, diploma and baccalaureate) were offered in the United States.

In addition, there were 102 master's degree and 12 doctoral degree programs in nursing.

Programs of nursing include classroom instruction and supervised nursing practice in hospitals and health facilities.

Students take courses in anatomy, physiology, microbiology, nutrition, psychology and nursing.

They also get supervised clinical experience in the care of patients who have different types of health problems.

Students in bachelor's degree programs as well as in some of the other programs are assigned to community agencies to learn how to care for patients in clinics and in the patients' homes.

Varying amounts of general education are combined with nursing education in all three types of programs.

Students who need financial aid may qualify for federally sponsored nursing scholarships or low-interest loans.

Those who want to pursue a nursing career should have a sincere desire to serve humanity and be sympathetic to the needs of others.

Nurses must be able to accept responsibility and direct or supervise the activity of others; must have initiative, and in appropriate situations be able to follow orders precisely or determine if additional consultation is required; and must use good judgment in emergencies.

Good mental health is needed in order to cope with human suffering and frequent emergency situations.

Staff nurses need physical stamina because of the amount of time spent walking and standing.

From staff positions in hospitals, experienced nurses may advance to head nurse, assistant director and director of nursing services.

A master's degree, however, often is required for supervisory and administrative positions, as well as for positions in nursing education, clinical specialization and research.

Public health agencies require a baccalaureate degree for employment.

Advancement may be difficult for nurses who do not have a baccalaureate or master's degree in community health nursing.

A growing movement in nursing, generally referred to as the "nurse practitioner program" is opening new career possibilities.

Several post-baccalaureate programs prepare nurses for highly independent roles in the clinical care and teaching of patients.

These nurses practice in primary roles that include pediatrics, geriatrics, community health, mental health and medical-surgical nursing.

Employment Outlook

Employment opportunities for registered nurses are expected to be favorable through the mid-1980s.

Some competition for more desirable, higher paying jobs is expected in areas where training programs abound, but opportunities for full- or part-time work in present shortage areas, such as some southern states and many inner-city locations, are expected to be very good through 1985.

For nurses who have had graduate education, the outlook is excellent for obtaining positions as administrators, teachers, clinical specialists and community health nurses.

Growth in employment of registered nurses is expected to be faster than the average for all occupations because of extension of prepayment programs for hospitalization and medical care, expansion of medical services as a result of new medical techniques and drugs and increased interest in preventive medicine and rehabilitation of the handicapped.

In addition to the need to fill new positions, large numbers of nurses will be required to replace those who leave the field each year.

MS. PATSY FLEMING is a 1980 graduate of the Helene Fuld School of Nursing at Coppin State College. She is now employed at Lutheran Hospital in Baltimore.

Nursing exams

Registered Nurses Examination Dates

1981: February 3-4 and July 8-9
1982: February 2-3 and July 13-14
1983: February 1-2 and July 12-13
1984: February 7-8 and July 10-11
1985: February 5-6 and July 10-11
1986: February 4-5 and July 15-16
1987: February 3-4 and July 14-15
1988: February 2-3 and July 12-13
1989: February 2-3 and July 12-13
1989: February 14-15 and July 10-11

Licensed Practical Nurses Examination Dates

1981: April 14 and October 20
1982: April 20 and October 19
1983: April 19 and October 18
1984: April 10 and October 16
1985: April 16 and October 15
1986: April 15 and October 21
1987: April 7 and October 20
1988: April 19 and October 19
1989: April 19 and October 17
1990: April 17 and October 16

Health careers are no longer separated by sex

"Career opportunities in the health field for qualified men and women have never been better," says Lois Carleton, Dean of Health Sciences at the Community College of Baltimore.

Starting salaries generally range from $11,000 to $14,000 per year for graduates. Nurses are in particularly high demand, and may get more money.

Graduates of CCB's health career programs get positions in public and private medical centers throughout Baltimore. Many work in hospitals, nursing homes, mental health clinics, government agencies, schools and laboratories.

Some graduates decide to open up their own businesses. Several former CCB students from the Dental Laboratory Technology Program now work directly with dentists in private practice.

Career options in the medical profession are many. Students at CCB can choose from programs in nursing, dental assisting, dental hygiene, medical laboratory technology, physical therapy and others.

CCB is the only college in the city to offer programs in respiratory therapy, medical records, dental laboratory technology, and dietetic technology.

Graduates from CCB's health sciences programs are awarded Associate in Arts degrees or certificates.

Health career fields are doing away with some of the old diter-stereotypes, too.

Many of the traditional, female-dominated professions, such as nursing or dental assisting, are not attracting men. And many of the male-dominated fields, such as dental laboratory technology, are now attracting women.

"Let me emphasize," noted Dr. Carleton, "that jobs are no longer identified by sex. Opportunities are just as good for women as they are for men, and vice versa."

Also, more and more students with bachelor's degrees are enrolling in health career programs, mainly because the employment prospects are bright.

To prepare students for employment, CCB's health programs place emphasis both on theory and clinical practice. Visits are made regularly to local medical centers.

Several departments also offer cooperative education programs with local medical institutions. CCB nursing students can take advantage of a special clinical arrangement with Mercy Hospital.

Students also learn patient-care techniques in special, up-to-date laboratories at Liberty Campus, at 2901 Liberty Heights Avenue. Students in dental studies have a unique opportunity to work directly with patients who visit the CCB Dental Clinic.

Special features of the health laboratories include a fully equipped operating room and a nursing learning laboratory with hospital beds and equipment.

The Nursing Building at Liberty Campus also has a special audio-visual center which has films and tapes of various nursing procedures.

Special financial assistance is also available to CCB nursing students. Nursing Loans are available to full-time or half-time nursing students who demonstrate need.

Nursing grants are also available, in addition to regular financial aid opportunities available to CCB students. More information about financial aid possibilities is available from CCB's Financial Aid Office, 396-0396.

Although admission requirements for each program vary, applicants should have some background in science. The nursing program accepts new students each spring and fall semester.

An entrance exam for nursing students will be given on November 30th at noon and again at 6:00 p.m. The test will be given also on December 10th at 4:00 p.m., in Room 201 of the Nursing Building, Liberty Campus.

The test is used to find out whether students need refresher courses before they can start the regular nursing program.

Students who are interested in finding out more about CCB's health career programs, or who want to take a nursing entrance exam, should call Thelma Clavon at 396-0415.

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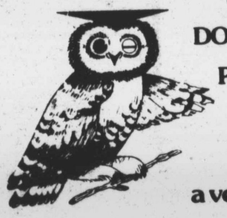

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