

The **New Nurse Guide** to a Successful Career



Congratulations on becoming a nurse! Now that you've achieved this milestone, we believe you're embarking on a wonderful journey in health care. But how do you make the right decisions now that will help ensure you look back on a rewarding nursing career 20, 30, even 40 years later? That's what this ebook is about. We've spoken with veterans and new nurses alike, both within Nebraska Medicine and UNMC, as well as with nurses from other health systems. This book is a distillation of their best advice on a variety of aspects geared to help you construct a successful nursing career.

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10 most critical soft skills for nurses

The role of soft skills in nursing cannot be overstated. To be the best nurse you can be requires not only superior clinical skills but also key soft skills that will allow you to be a more confident and effective nurse.

Most nurses have accomplished the hard skills of nursing – clinical skills or competencies like performing tasks such as taking vital signs, administering medications or performing an intravenous (IV) insertion. But just as important to quality patient care are the soft skills of nursing that can lead to a more productive work environment and higher job satisfaction.

The following is a list of the top 10 soft skills recommended by Nebraska Medicine nurses that will not only help you be a better nurse, but will foster a productive, collaborative and healthy work environment.

1. Communication

Effective communication with both patients and colleagues is one of the most important skills nurses need to learn in terms of providing good patient care.

Communicating with patients will help you develop trust and rapport, which will contribute to an effective working relationship and allow patients to become an active partner in their treatment. Active listening is an important part of communicating. Most patients want to be heard and know that you are interested and care about what they have to say. Making eye contact and listening without interrupting will go a long way in letting your patients know you respect them and acknowledge their concerns.

“Patients need nurses to remember that they are a person, not just a room number,” says Richard Villareal, BSN, RN, nurse supervisor for the Solid Organ Transplant Unit. “They need to understand the care they’re receiving so they can make informed decisions. When I first started nursing, I was very task focused. As a new nurse it can be hard to see how important it is to take the time to effectively communicate and connect with patients and other staff – skills that are under taught and not given enough attention during nursing school.”

Effective communication with your colleagues is also critical and will help you work more efficiently. There



will be times when communication and listening skills are critical when navigating through difficult conversations. Villareal suggests using the “read or teach back” method to confirm your colleague understands what is being explained to them. After you have provided them instructions, have them repeat it back to you. This is also an effective technique to use when teaching patients and family members, he says.

Communicating to doctors can be an intimidating experience for new nurses. “The key to ensuring an effective conversation with a physician when relaying patient information, is to do your homework first,” notes Villareal. “Make sure you have all the critical information you need to provide a comprehensive review of the patient’s condition. For example, if the patient’s blood pressure is out of range, do a manual check and evaluate the patient in person first. Talk to the patient to see how he or she is feeling.”

2. Showing empathy

“It’s soft skills like showing empathy that fill your bucket,” says Joshua Beerman, BSN, RN, nurse supervisor on the Solid Organ Transplant Unit. “While it’s definitely a juggling act trying to get everything done, making time to spend with your patients should be a priority. It may be necessary to reset occasionally and remember the reason you are in nursing.”

Beerman suggests using those spare moments throughout the day to sit down next to your patient and focus just on them. “This is a moment in their lives where they may need that kind word or a familiar face to get through the day,” he says. “When the doctor is in the room and is talking to the patient, sit with them and be there with them when he delivers the good or bad news.”

Derek McCroy, MHA, BSN, RN, ambulatory supervisor for Pre-surgical Screening and Surgery Scheduling, can’t stress enough the value of getting to know your patients. “Patients can be scared, alone and unsure of what is happening to them,” he

says. “Even if you only have a couple of minutes after you finish your tasks, pull up a chair next to their bed and ask them about their life. Patients love to have someone to talk to, especially in their most vulnerable time. They want to know you care. They want to know someone is listening and most of all, they need to have trust in you. Learn about their family too and be sure to take care of their visitors.”

Showing empathy and compassion to your colleagues is also important. “We all have bad days or times when we lose a patient and it hits us hard,” says Amy Moore, BSN, RN, clinical nurse on the Neurology floor. “Be there for your fellow colleagues. Listen to them. Give them a break and a chance to regroup. Helping each other when we can is what it’s all about. We’re all in this together.”

Showing empathy can be difficult when patients are disrespectful, difficult or even violent, says Villarreal. But for these patients, it is even more important to be empathetic and provide the best care we can despite their attitude or behavior. Villarreal offers these tips for dealing with difficult patients or situations:

- Don’t make assumptions. You don’t know the intent of someone’s actions. Use your communication skills to find out more information before you act
- Focus on facts. Things can get twisted and misinterpreted fairly quickly. When you are faced with a difficult and uncertain situation, focus on the facts and what you can do to help. Listening to rumors or things you can’t substantiate, typically make matters worse for everyone
- Don’t react to their anger. If a patient is personally attacking you, don’t take it personally and try not to react to their anger. Sometimes you just need to take a few minutes to listen to a patient’s frustrations. Acknowledging them may make all the difference in the world in terms of their disposition and many times you may find that you can help change the situation so they will have a better day tomorrow.”



3. Emotional intelligence

Nursing can be a challenging and emotional job. Emotional intelligence entails being self-aware of your own emotions and having the capacity to control them and express yourself.

“If you’re overloaded or burnt out, you need to recognize this and allow yourself some downtime to refresh and regroup whether that means taking a break or taking some time off,” according to Villarreal.

4. Teamwork

Teamwork is essential on every unit. “A single nurse cannot do it all alone,” Villarreal says. “It takes the entire team. There can be a lot of stress and emotion on a unit, but that can be reduced when we act as a team. If you are free, offer to help a colleague. If you need help, don’t be afraid to ask for help or delegate tasks to support staff. Acknowledge your feelings or concerns and remember we are here to help each other.”

5. Clinical judgement and problem-solving skills

“Critical thinking skills are the holy grail of nursing,” says Kylie Byman, MS, RN, who works on the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. “Thinking on your feet and problem-solving is what it’s all about.”

But this a skill that often takes time, knowledge and experience to develop. To foster these skills, “always be open to learn and watch new things,” says Byman. “Soak in every new experience because that’s how you’re going to develop these important skills. In nursing, you will learn more by doing than you will ever learn from just reading a book.”

6. Adaptability

No two days are ever the same, making adaptability critical for new nurses. “We have to be ready for anything and everything,” says Katelyn Keefer, BSN, medical/surgical nurse.

Having days where you have one patient who is not doing well can throw off your entire routine. It’s not uncommon, she says. “That’s where teamwork is really important. You need to be able and willing to adapt and delegate tasks to other nurses to help you.”

7. Initiative

As a new nurse, the ability to take initiative is something that will grow with time. “It can be hard as a new nurse, but as you care for more patients, you will develop a larger experience base that will allow you to be more confident in your knowledge and skills,” says Byman. “When in doubt, don’t be afraid to use other nurses to help guide you to build your confidence. We are all working toward the same goal.”

New nurses can offer a fresh set of eyes to how things are being done. “You are invaluable for providing feedback on current processes and procedures,” says Villareal. “Ask any and all questions that you have. Challenge the status quo. Just because the hospital currently does things a certain way, does not mean that it is the best and most efficient way to perform. Here at Nebraska Medicine, innovation is one of our values for a reason. We want to continuously critique how we perform and continuously improve.”

8. Attitude and confidence

“Attitude is everything,” says Keefer. “If you try to start each day with a positive attitude and optimism, the little things that go wrong won’t seem so bad. Negativism will lead to burnout and creates a toxic environment for everyone.”

Part of maintaining positivity requires dealing with your emotions. “It’s important to vent and acknowledge your feelings, but then you need to be able to pick yourself up and keep going,” she says.

Having the confidence to step up and take control of the situation when needed, is a crucial skill in nursing.



“We are the eyes and ears for the doctor,” says Keefer. “We are the patient’s’ strongest advocate and the doctor relies on us to keep them abreast of their condition.”

That confidence needs to carry over when talking to doctors and relaying important patient information. “If you’re unsure about a patient, talk to another nurse to get a voice of confidence,” she says. “Do your assessment, gather all the facts you need, write it down and rehearse it first, if necessary. Use the acronym SBAR – situation, background, assessment and recommendations to make sure you have all the information you need.”

9. Networking

Your relationships with other colleagues and ancillary staff can help you on both a personal and professional level.

Forming positive relationships with colleagues can help you provide better collaborative care. Getting involved in committees and other groups will broaden your horizons and may open the doors to other opportunities in nursing. Forging positive relationships with your peers and managers can serve as a resource for growth and advancement.

“I didn’t realize the importance of networking early on but I now realize that developing relationships with nurses throughout the institution helps develop trust and gives you more confidence in yourself.”

Kylie Byman, MS, RN

Remember that everyone is working in collaboration to care for patients. “If you have questions about respiratory medications or treatments, reach out to Respiratory Therapy,” says Villareal. “If you have questions about an MRI that one of your patients will have done, call MRI. They will be glad to help. Become comfortable talking to different departments throughout the hospital because they are all important resources that will help you throughout your entire nursing career.”

10. Organization and time management

Organization and time management will improve your efficiency and effectiveness.

Keefer suggests taking a few minutes in the morning to develop a basic plan for the day that includes a checklist of tasks for each patient. If you get off task, go back to your list and reprioritize, she says.

“I still write everything down to help me stay organized,” says Byman. “When I feel organized, I enjoy my job more, I’m more efficient and I feel less stressed.”

Staying organized also means being able to adapt and change as the day unfolds. “There will always be hiccups in your plan, so embracing the challenges and overcoming obstacles is an important aspect of time management and organization,” says Villareal. “Keep in mind that your plan is always fluid and in constant motion. Rarely are there nights that I have a plan and I am able to complete it without any changes.”





21 job survival skills they didn't teach you in nursing school

So you finally finished nursing school and you're ready to launch your new career. Yes, it's an exciting time, but keep in mind, you may need to adjust your expectations. Many nurses agree that their first year as a nurse was one of the most difficult and challenging times of their careers. While nursing school provides you a good foundation, it just can't fully prepare you for the day-to-day rigors of being a nurse. Several Nebraska Medicine nurses share their thoughts on some of the things they don't tell you about in nursing school.

1. It's a juggling act

"I knew I'd be juggling a lot," says Tiffany Whitney, BSN, RN-BC, nurse supervisor for the Medical-Surgical Unit at Bellevue Medical Center. "But I was surprised at how much I had to balance once I started full time as a nurse. It can be intimidating at first. But eventually you'll figure out how to prioritize and get your job done."

2. You might be sleep deprived

"I found shift work especially difficult to adjust to," says Michelle Schulte, MSN, RN-BC, ambulatory supervisor for the Dermatology clinic. "They don't teach you about how to adjust to new sleep schedules and working nights. You may find yourself very exhausted at times."

3. You may have to work holidays and weekends

When you take a job in the inpatient setting, everyone has to work weekends and holidays. "The first holiday I had to work was Christmas and it was devastating," says Schulte. "It was Christmas Eve and we were in the middle of a snowstorm. My shift was over, and I was anxious to see my family and celebrate that evening. But then I was told that if I didn't think I could make it back the next day, I should plan to spend the night at the hospital. I was so disappointed. It would have been the first



Christmas I'd miss in 23 years. Fortunately, my parents were able to come pick me up and took me back to work the next day."

4. How to cope with patients with mental illness

In nursing school, your exposure to psychiatric patients will likely be minimal. Schulte, who worked in a Medical-Surgical Unit, quickly found that many patients with chronic illnesses also have depression and anxiety. And then there was homelessness and the lack of mental health resources available. "I had to quickly learn how to have thicker skin," Schulte says. "It's rewarding to see someone with a physical condition get better. But you don't see those types of big changes in people with mental health issues. It's harder to find that silver lining."

5. Detecting changes in your patients' status may be more subtle than you think

"In nursing school, you learn about changes in vital signs that can indicate your patient is going downhill," says Amy Moore, BSN RN, clinical nurse in Neurology. "So you think it's going to be obvious, but that's not always the case. In most cases, I've found that a patient's status usually occurs in small, gradual changes. They might become more lethargic throughout the day or their oxygen intake or blood pressure may increase slightly. I've learned that you really need to be in tune to these small changes and not dismiss them."

6. You'll likely make mistakes

"You will make some really stupid mistakes, but so will everyone else," says Emma Warner, BSN, clinical nurse in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). "The important thing is that you learn from it. Even the expert nurses learn something new every day."

7. You just might enjoy it!

"No one tells you how much fun it can be," says Schulte. "Nursing school is so serious but being a nurse is actually fun and enjoyable. Your colleagues become your family and some of the most valuable people in your life."

While your first year of nursing can be challenging as you learn how to multitask and juggle multiple responsibilities, our seasoned nurses offer these tips to help you manage your first year more smoothly.

8. Prioritize

"You will have orders coming to you from all different directions," says Whitney, "so you will need to use your critical thinking skills and prioritize the most important tasks first." Take good notes and try to focus on completing one task at a time before you jump to something new.

9. Keep learning

"Take any or all classes that are available to you whether they are continuing education, learning lunches or online instructional seminars," Whitney says. "Depending on the area you are working, there will likely be classes offered that can help you perform your tasks better and more efficiently. I took anything possible, including how to run a ventilator, medication titration, etc. These helped me immensely and definitely helped shaped my abilities as a nurse."

10. Partner with a mentor

Every nurse should have a good mentor," says Mary Clarke, RN, PRN nurse. "Once you're done with orientation, you are basically on your own. Find someone who will be your teacher, whom you feel comfortable asking questions and can confide in throughout your early years. It will make a world of difference."

11. Ask questions

Many new nurses are afraid to ask questions. "It's okay to ask questions," says Clarke. "Every nurse knows what it's like to start your first year on the job."

Derek McCroy, MHA, BSN, RN, ambulatory supervisor for Pre-surgical Screening and Surgery Scheduling, clinic nurse in the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, couldn't agree more. "During my first year, I remember thinking, 'I don't want to be the new nurse that asks all the questions.' But then I thought, I also don't want to be



the nurse that makes a mistake and possibly causes harm to someone. So ask, ask away! You won't learn everything in nursing school, so there will be things you are unsure about. Asking questions will build your knowledge bank and help you to become a more confident nurse."

Warner remembers being pleasantly surprised to find that "doctors become your friends and look to you for advice just like we look to them. We're all in this together!"

12. Take notes

"I had a notebook that was dedicated to everything I was learning as a nurse," recalls Whitney. "You're learning a lot your first year, so this was very useful when I needed to refresh myself on certain skills or protocols."

13. Make lists

A nurse's job is never done. "But at some point, you need to go home," says case management nurse Katy Donner, BSN, RN, case management nurse, Village Pointe Health Center Plastics and Reconstruction. "I recommend making checklists and setting deadlines. This always gives me a sense of accomplishment and helps me feel confident that I've gotten everything done that has to be done, so I feel more comfortable about going home at the end of the day."

14. Try new things

"Don't be afraid to work in new areas or work in roles that may help lead to the end goal," says Whitney. "You have to get your feet wet. Every experience is valuable to help you become a better nurse, and determine what you're good at and what you really enjoy."

"Floating is a great way to try new areas and learn new skills," adds Schulte. "Nursing units like a medical-surgical unit or step-down unit will also expose you to a lot of different specialties and will help you hone your critical thinking skills."

15. Give it time

"When you start working in a new area, everything is going to naturally feel foreign," says Amber Seidl, BSN, RN, case manager for Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. "Give yourself at least six months to adjust before you decide to make a change."

16. Smile

Sometimes hospitals can be a very serious place. "But don't be afraid to smile," advises McCroy. "A simple smile can put someone at ease, including both your patients and coworkers." You might be surprised at how quickly it can change your attitude and disposition.

17. Get involved

Join committees, participate in meetings and leadership opportunities. "Forums like shared governance gives you the opportunity to do things that are can really make a difference in your profession," says Schulte. "Spawning a new idea that ends up being implemented and improving your practice can be extremely gratifying."

18. Embrace change

"Expect to be uncomfortable," says Clarke. "The way it is now is not the way it's going to be in a year or two down the road," says Clarke. "Technology is changing things so rapidly. Embrace it, expect it to change and grow with the changes. Every generation seems to introduce something completely new to the nursing practice."

19. Start saving early on

"It's exciting to get your first paycheck and even more exhilarating when you get your first few raises," says Clarke. "It's tempting to spend it right away, but instead, think about opening an IRA and start putting away money for retirement when you are young and you will be amazed at how fast it will grow. If you have it taken directly out of your paycheck, you'll never miss it but you will appreciate it later down the road!"



20. Do it now

One thing that Clarke learned as she navigated her nursing career, “if you’re curious, just do it! Life gets more complicated the longer you are out of school. If you want to advance your degree, work as a travel nurse or whatever that dream is, reach out and grab it before it’s too late. Step out of your comfort zone and push yourself. You never know where it will take you. I always wanted to work in the emergency room in Chicago but never did it when I was young, so I missed my opportunity.”

21. Take care of yourself

“You’re not good to anyone else if your own bucket is empty,” says Clarke. “Get a hobby, exercise, spend time with friends and family. You will be a happier nurse when you’ve given yourself a little TLC.” 🍷





8 nurses share their best first-year lessons

Your first year as a nurse is likely to be a whirlwind of new experiences. Many nurses recall a rollercoaster of emotions from fear, anxiety and nervousness to happiness and sadness. Almost every nurse has a story to tell or a lesson learned. And in some cases, it helped shape their career path. These Nebraska Medicine nurses share some of their most memorable stories.

Michelle Schulte, MSN, RN-BC, ambulatory supervisor for the Dermatology clinic, recalls her first year as challenging. She had just started working in a Medical-Surgical Unit and was still getting her feet wet.

One weekend while driving home from Western Nebraska with her parents, they witnessed a car full of teenagers veer out of control, cross the median and flip into oncoming traffic. Several of the teens were thrown from the vehicle.

“We pulled over to see if we could help,” recalls Schulte. “My mother immediately pushed me out of the car and told me to go help them. I was nervous. I had never treated a trauma patient in the field before.”

One of the teens closest to them had exposed bones and no pulse. All the basic principles of nursing care that Schulte had learned in school began to kick in. She had a CPR mask in the glove box and immediately started the steps. An ambulance arrived a few minutes later and asked who she was.

“When I told them I was a nurse, they asked me if I could start an IV,” recalls Schulte. “It was scary and nerve-wracking, but also an exhilarating experience.”

Unfortunately, the young teen did not survive, but the experience left an indelible mark on Schulte’s nursing career. “From that day on, I was a much calmer nurse when I went to work every day,” she says. “That experience helped me put it all in perspective.”

Several months later, Schulte found herself in another unfortunate situation. A young cancer patient whom she had been administering infusion therapy to, passed away after her shift. About a year later, a wrongful death suit was filed against Schulte and the hospital, requiring her to meet with hospital lawyers and defend her actions. Fortunately, Schulte had been very meticulous in her documentation and



followed all the protocols to a “T” and was eventually dismissed from any wrongdoing.

While it was another harrowing situation for a first-year nurse, it was also a learning experience. “My advice to beginning nurses is if you follow all the policy and procedures, document meticulously and don’t cut corners, the hospital will have your back and you’ll be fine,” she says.

In reflection, Schulte says, “If something bad happens, always make sure you have carefully documented it, then reenact it, double-check your documentation and make sure the incident is engrained in your brain in case something becomes of it later.”

Tiffany Whitney, BSN, RN-BC, nurse supervisor for the Medical-Surgical Unit at Bellevue Medical Center, says her first years as a float nurse were a great opportunity to be exposed to a broad number of areas in a short amount of time. “I loved the idea of working in a different area each day because I learned so much,” says Whitney.

Dealing with the loss of patients can be difficult no matter where you are at in your career, but it can be especially emotional during those first few experiences.

Whitney recalls an emotionally difficult first day of orientation in the intensive care unit. “I had a patient who coded on the medical-surgical floor and was transferred to ICU,” she says. “Everyone was running around getting labs, calling doctors and notifying family. When the patient arrived to the ICU, they coded again, sadly, we were not able to save them. An hour later, I got another patient with my preceptor who was not doing well. They were ventilated, on multiple drips and the physicians were doing their best to figure out what was going on. But even with all the life-saving efforts we made, this patient also did not survive.”

That day alone was the most exhausting and emotionally filled day Whitney had ever had. “I was very emotional,” says Whitney. “I could not wrap my

head around what just happened but the chaplain put it in a way that was understandable. As a new nurse, we want to save every life, he said, but sometimes that is not possible. The chaplain emphasized that throughout my career I am going to have many ups and downs and emotional cases but the one thing to remember, is why I became a nurse and that is to help others and support them in their time of need. This has not only stayed with me but has also been why I love what I do each and every day. I would not change my nursing career because I know that what I do makes a difference.”

Support and understanding from co-workers can make all the difference during difficult times, says **Emma Warner, BSN**, clinical nurse in the Neuroscience Intensive Care Unit. “I was in orientation when I experienced my first death,” recalls Warner. “It hit me really hard. I went to the break room to cry shortly after we called time of death. I was embarrassed with how upset I was, but I was completely overwhelmed with support from my manager, my preceptor and my peers. I was told I could take as much time as I needed and that a few other nurses would watch my patients until I was ready. I still think about that day and the amount of love I felt from my fellow nurses that barely knew me. We are all in this together and that makes the difficult time so much more tolerable.”

Getting a mentor made all the difference in the world, for **Derek McCroy, MHA, BSN, RN**, ambulatory supervisor for Pre-surgical Screening and Surgery Scheduling. “During my first year of nursing, I had periods of excitement, fear and stress,” he recalls. “I found a nurse on the unit, different from my preceptor, that I could confide in and bounce off ideas. It was nurse who been practicing for only a few years, so she could still remember back to when she was a new nurse. She helped me realize that I am not alone in my feelings of stress and fear and reassured me that they would soon pass. She was

right. One day I went to work and I remember it was the first time everything just “clicked,” and I thought to myself, I can do this!”



“I recognized the good nurses, watched them and learned by their example. I picked their brains and figured out who my mentor would be. You just can’t know it all in a year. Follow your gut feelings, bounce questions off co-workers and never act like you know it all. Older nurses are full of experience and knowledge!”

Karen Moran, RN

Kylie Byman, MS, RN, learned the value of following her intuition during her first year while working in a Medical-Surgical Unit. One of her patients had an arm fracture and kept complaining of pain throughout the night. When she couldn’t get it resolved, she escalated the complaint to the resident who suggested more pain meds. “I kept thinking something wasn’t right,” Byman says. “I remembered learning about compartment syndrome and its symptoms and thinking that their symptoms were very similar. When the additional pain medicine did not help, I contacted the resident again.”

The attending physician came to see them and upon evaluation, diagnosed the patient with compartment syndrome. “He congratulated me for saving this man’s arm,” says Byman. “It was a very pivotal moment for me. As a nurse, we often wonder if we are making a difference. This confirmed that we really are the first line of defense for our patients, and we can make a difference!”

Joshua Beerman, BSN, RN, supervisor for the Solid Organ Transplant Unit, remembers an incident during his first year that helped shape his nursing career going forward. A very petite patient was in the hospital waiting for a second multi-organ transplant. The patient was very ill so the staff helped organize a wedding on the floor with the significant other. “It was very touching and has had a lasting effect on me,” says Beerman. “It’s about being able to help people in moments like this that is why I got

into nursing.”

Mary Clarke, RN, A PRN nurse, remembers a few pranksters on the floor that helped lighten the atmosphere and bring laughter to the floor during her first year. They would put silly things in the dumbwaiter that would make you laugh, like your lunch. Other times, they would stuff themselves in the dumbwaiter to scare the heck out of you!”

Karen Moran, RN, remembers the benefits of being observant during her first year and learning from the older, wiser nurses. “I recognized the good nurses, watched them and learned by their example,” she says. “I picked their brains and figured out who my mentor would be. You just can’t know it all in a year. Follow your gut feelings, bounce questions off co-workers and never act like you know it all. Older nurses are full of experience and knowledge!”

She also remembers the playful antics that went on during the night shift to help them stay awake and alert. “Exercises like squats and push-ups in the nurse’s station, listening to music and singing,” recalls Moran. And then there was the time when she removed her powder-coated gloves and then put her hands on her behind. “My co-workers let me walk around with hand prints on my bottom all day long.” 🐾



How to spot a nursing unit with a great culture

There are so many things to think about when you're looking for your first nursing job. What specialty area of medicine should you work in? Are you more interested in pediatrics or adults, emergency medicine, the operating room or a medical floor? Do you want to work days or nights, eight-hour or 12-hour shifts? The decisions can be overwhelming. Another area of consideration that is sometimes overlooked, but can be just as important, is the culture of the organization and/or department.

Finding the right culture can lead to happiness in your job, say Katy Donner, BSN, RN, clinic nurse, Village Pointe Health Center Plastics and Reconstruction. Culture shapes the way you and your colleagues interact at the workplace. It can promote strong relationships amongst colleagues, and contribute to the quality of services, such as care, job satisfaction, safety and turnover rate.

It is known to have an impact on positive patient outcomes, like reduced mortality, length of stay, increased quality of life and decreased pain level.

Be aware of subcultures

Not only do your values need to mesh with the organization's, but you must also be aware of subcultures within different departments, says Donner. Consider shadowing in different departments during nursing school to make sure your personality meshes with the values of the areas you are considering.

If you don't have an opportunity to float or shadow in a specific area or unit first, try talking to others who work there. You'll likely get a pretty good sense of the culture and how happy the nurses are fairly quickly.



Quick questions to ask yourself:

When evaluating whether an organization or certain area of a hospital is a good fit for you, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you see yourself fitting in?
- Does the thought of working in this area or organization scare you?
- Do the people working there have a positive attitude and seem happy?
- Do you agree with how the patients are being cared for?
- What is the feedback from other nurses who work in the area?
- Is there a high turnover?
- Does there seem to be a lot of complaining?

The secret sauce

So what's the secret sauce to a positive workplace culture? Nebraska Medicine nurses agree that it typically embodies some essential values and characteristics that include the following:

Pride and respect for the organization

"This is essential," says Donner, who has been with Nebraska Medicine for more than 15 years and says she has never thought about working anywhere else. "I've always been proud to work for Nebraska Medicine. They are leaders in so many aspects of medicine and I agree with their integrity and morals."



Appreciation for colleagues

Donner says she loves working in the Plastic and Reconstruction clinic, and that is partly due to the relationship she has with other providers in the clinic. "There's a feeling of mutual respect," she says. "I feel like we're all appreciated for what we do and what we bring to the table. Everyone takes accountability for their responsibilities and does what needs to be done. We all have the patients' best interests in mind. For most of us, it's more than a job. There's a sense of belonging, purpose and satisfaction in what we do. We all want to be here."

Good communication

If there's not good communication, things can go downhill quickly, notes Donner. "The physicians in this clinic are good teachers, and we all communicate well with each other, so we know we're on the same page," she says.

Look for an organization that is open to communication, keeps its employees informed and encourages an open forum for new ideas to improve the workplace.

Mentoring

Is there a focus on mentoring, nurturing and doing things together? Most nurses agree that having good mentors will go far in helping you grow professionally and become more knowledgeable and confident in your skills.

Autonomy

Professional autonomy means having the authority to make decisions and the freedom to act according to your professional knowledge base. To gain autonomous practice, you must be competent and have the courage to take charge in situations in which you are responsible. It's something that most nurses develop and appreciate over time.

Being able to work independently was important to Donner. "I am allowed to manage my time and prioritize what I need to do," she says. "My skills and professional abilities are respected."

Commitment to innovation and improvement

Is the organization open to identifying areas of improvement and making changes when necessary? In today's rapidly changing health care environment, improving the quality and performance of health care practice should be vital to any organization to ensure the delivery of reliable, cost-effective and quality health care with the goal of enhancing patient outcomes.

As a nursing professional, you play an important role to help ensure that changes are made in a way that will improve processes and patient outcomes. Do some research to find out if the organization has a system in place to facilitate process improvement to maximize efficacy.

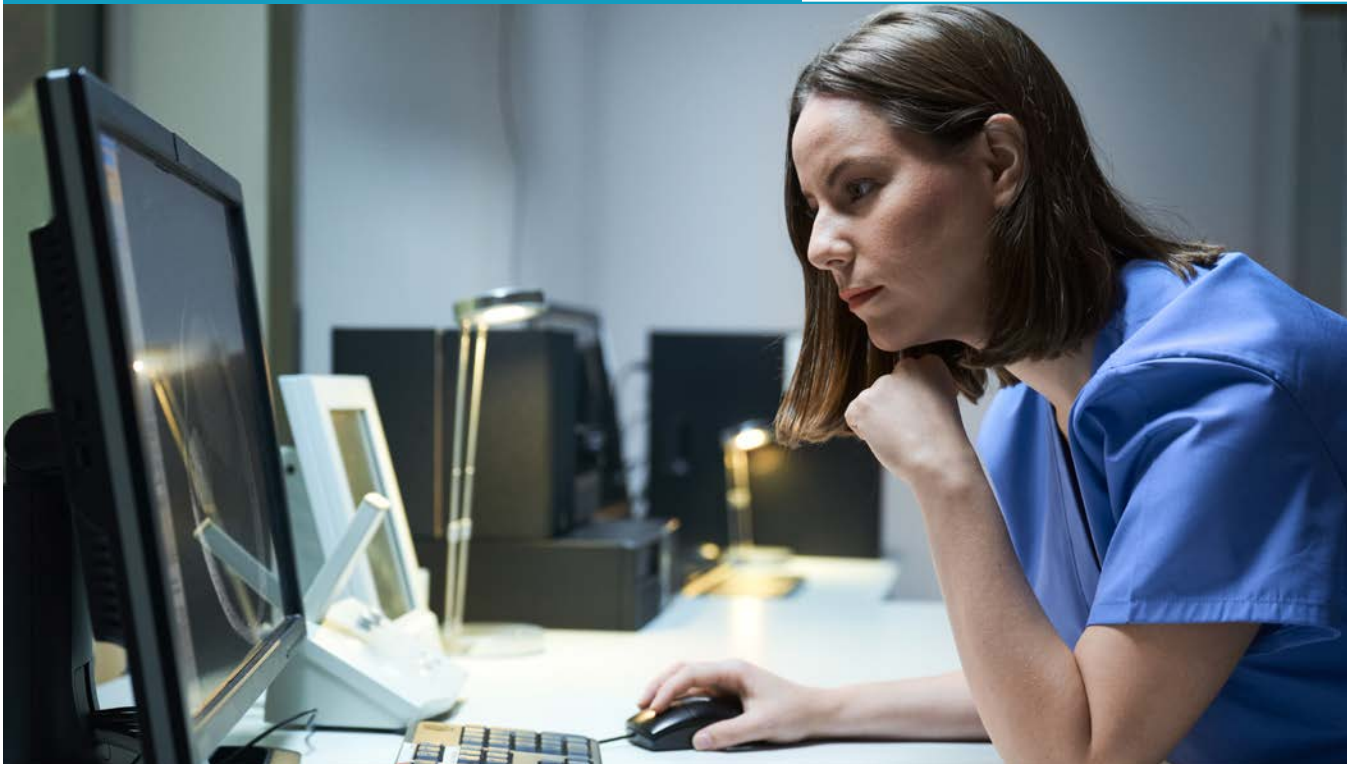
"Being in an academic medical center offers vast opportunities to be on projects and pilots which help facilitate major hospital changes," says Michelle Schulte, MSN, RN-BC, ambulatory supervisor for the Dermatology clinic at Lauritzen Outpatient Center. "Nebraska Medicine wholeheartedly embraces the values of innovation and teamwork on these committees and I believe nurses should take those opportunities by the horns and go with it! Our nursing voice is important!"

Is it time to make a change?

If you find yourself in an area that isn't working for you, Schulte recommends talking to someone about it first and let them know how you're feeling – whether that's a nursing professional development specialist, nurse supervisor or manager. "Keeping that open communication allows for more personal growth during transition times in a new job or career," says Schulte. "Give it some time. Don't give up too quickly. Give yourself six months to a year in a new area. Remind yourself that we continue to grow and mature from difficult experiences and that may include working with different types of people."

If it's still not working for you, the good news is, there are usually lots of opportunities to make a change and find a better fit. 🐦





How to be a One Chart inpatient nurse ninja

There's no way around it, nursing care often involves a lot of busy work. Checking medical charts, documentation, securing meds, tracking down doctors, turning a patient, fetching a pillow or extra blanket...the list goes on and on.

Richard Villarreal, BSN, RN, Solid Organ Transplant Unit, remembers feeling overwhelmed when he started his first year on the job as a nurse. Having a knack for technology, he decided to tackle the issue head-on by using the electronic medical records system at Nebraska Medicine – One Chart, to organize and prioritize his duties throughout the day to improve his efficiency.

"In my downtime, I spent a lot of time browsing through One Chart looking at all the different menus, options and columns available for patient lists," Villarreal explains. "I then personalized nearly every menu that is able to be personalized so that it fit my needs and helped me make the most of my time. Now when I open One Chart, I can easily see if any

of my assigned patients have new orders, new notes, new results, if any telemetry or isolation has been ordered, what their code status is and their fall risk. I can see all of this information without even opening a patient's chart."

Villarreal, now a supervisor in the Solid Organ Transplant Unit, says his tweaks to One Chart in addition to a few other time-saving techniques, have saved him much time and stress over the last few years.

"With the busy workload of most nurses, you want to make the most of every minute," says Villarreal. "These simple changes to my work day helped cut out many of the unnecessary back and forth trips and helped me become a more efficient provider. This in turn, allowed me to spend more time with my patients, which ultimately, is the goal."

Villarreal shares some of his time-saving tips that will allow you to prioritize and organize your tasks, and take more control of your day.



- **Pay attention during One Chart training.**

“During orientation, you will get a fairly comprehensive review of how to use the One Chart electronic medical recording system,” notes Villarreal. “Other than patient care, this is where you will be spending most of your time. So pay attention. It will pay off later”

- **Customize your One Chart lists.**

When you have some downtime, take time to sign in to One Chart, where you will see your list of patients. Next to the patients are columns that provide basic information about them, such as room number, attending physician, service team and admitting diagnosis. Villarreal suggests creating additional customized columns that show more details about each patient so you don't have to actually click into each patient record every time you log into One Chart. To do this, simply click on the properties button to see what your options are. Depending on what type of information would be useful for you, add new columns for things like unacknowledged or expiring orders, active Foley catheter, active central line, or any telemetry orders. There are features built into these columns that many people do not know about. For telemetry, for example, there are symbols that indicate whether the patient is actively being monitored on telemetry and if there is or is not an order for the patient to be monitored. It will also tell you if the patient should be on telemetry, but is not. Similarly, for one of the isolation columns, there is a symbol that pops up if the patient does not have the correct isolation ordered for their diagnosis or infection

- **Stay up to date on changes.** Occasionally check the Nursing home page where all changes to the One Chart system are listed and explained. It also includes who to contact if you need help or have issues

- **Share your ideas.** Write down your ideas on how to change or tweak the system and share them. Click on the One Chart enhancement tab and explain your ideas. A nursing advisory team reviews

all suggestions and determines if the change is significant enough to be made

- **Use The Brain.** This is a list of tasks that need to be completed for each patient for each hour on your shift. This will help reduce multiple trips for the same things, says Villarreal. “For instance, if several patients need meds, you can grab the meds for all of them at the same time. If a patient needs meds and vitals checked, you know to do them both at the same time”

- **Create a work list.** Like the “brain” concept in One Chart, Villarreal likes to use a physical work list that he can fill out for each patient during hand offs. “I prefer a physical list of what needs to be completed for each patient that I can refer to for quick reference throughout my shift, so I don't have to log into One Chart as often,” he says. “After the hand off is completed, I go through all the orders for each patient and add what medications, assessments and tasks are needed each hour in my work list. It takes a little extra time up front, but more than makes up for it later by allowing me to be more efficient throughout the day”

- **Prioritize your patients according to needs.**

Review each patient to determine who needs meds or other care first. If possible, save the more difficult patients for last as they will likely take more time. “Critical thinking must be used wisely in this situation, however, as a busier patient may have needs that should be addressed now, even though it might take a long time,” Villarreal says

- **Keep hand-offs to 30 minutes or less.** “The patient hand-off is not meant to be a time to get a comprehensive overview of each patient,” says Villarreal. “Save your questions. Use this time to get a quick overview and then go back to the patient's chart afterwards to review orders and get more details about your patients. Most of your questions will be answered there. Take good notes and develop your own shorthand to keep things moving along more quickly”



- **Use the “Quick Access” buttons.** These buttons are located above each patient name and will take you to specific parts of the patient record to save time. “When you’re in a hurry, you can forget about these time-saving techniques that add up throughout the day,” says Villarreal
- **Take advantage of refresher courses.** Nebraska Medicine occasionally offers refresher One Chart courses. “If you are struggling, or just want to learn to use the system more efficiently, take advantage of these classes or find someone to help you,” recommends Villarreal. “We spend a lot of time charting, so it’s important to learn how to use it well”

As you become more comfortable and efficient in your job, you’ll develop more techniques to save time and reduce stress, says Villarreal. While the beginning may feel like a whirlwind, things will eventually start clicking and that will allow you to devote more time to your patients and connecting with them, and that will make your job more rewarding. 🐦





How to become a treasured colleague

It's likely that you'll be "the new person" multiple times throughout your career.

Stepping into a new area and not knowing anyone can be challenging, especially when you're also learning how to care for a new type of patient or specialty.

Developing a good working relationship with your colleagues can make the most difficult job seem easier, and that requires building rapport. Rapport encompasses creating a close and trusting relationship with peers that involves a mutual understanding and respect for each other and effective communication. Without rapport, communication and collaboration can be significantly more difficult.

Michelle Schulte, MSN, RN-BC, ambulatory supervisor for the Dermatology clinic at Nebraska Medicine, offers advice on how to build valuable rapport among your colleagues that will make that transition go more smoothly and your job more satisfying.

Listen and learn

As the new person, you need to take a back seat for a while and listen and learn from your peers, says Schulte. "Everyone goes through the phases of reality shock when you start in a new area," she says. "Listen and learn from your peers. Be an open learner. Let them know you value their experience and expertise."

Share ideas in a team mindset

Focus on collaboration and teamwork, which helps bond everyone toward a common goal, notes Schulte. "Instead of I can do this on my own mentality, approach issues from a let's do this together attitude. When teams learn together, they grow together. It's about celebrating teamwork, not competition."

Respect each other's experiences and skill sets. Respect the experience and skills of the seasoned providers and interdisciplinary team members in the area. Go to them for advice and questions. Take advantage of their knowledge and let them know you appreciate them.



Share your skill sets

You will likely bring your own set of skills and knowledge that is different than your peers. Find opportunities to share these skill sets on a daily basis. Meetings, committees or peer work groups are also great ways to share knowledge, skills and ideas.

Find something in common

Find something that you have in common with a colleague. Sharing and talking about it can build an instant bond. This might entail something similar in your life experiences or upbringing, hobbies, sports or entertainment. This commonality will give you something to share and chat about outside of your work on an ongoing basis and will help build lasting friendships.

Be a team player

"We can all learn from each other, whether it's from a more seasoned or advanced practice nurse or from a patient care technician," says Schulte. "I've always taken the attitude that no job is below me. Take opportunities to learn from all of those around you including lab technicians, respiratory therapists or dietitians." Help your colleagues and let them help you.

Be proactive about building relationships

We all find ourselves overwhelmed at times. Be cognizant of your colleagues and how their day is going. Maybe they're having an exceptionally difficult day with their patients or they've experienced some emotional situations. Offer to help them or lend a listening ear when possible.

Get involved

"Raise your hand when help is needed on committees or projects," says Schulte. "Nebraska Medicine offers lots of opportunities to get involved that can help make positive changes in your practice." One of these is Shared Governance, a vehicle to collect the voices of nurses throughout the organization to discuss issues related to patient care and professional nursing practice in a department or unit.

"Within Shared Governance, there are numerous councils and committees a nurse can be a representative for in their area," says Schulte. "Being an academic medical center, Nebraska Medicine offers vast opportunities to be on pilots or help facilitate major hospital changes. Plus, it's another way to bond and collaborate with nurses around you."

Partake in professional development opportunities

Professional development means something different for each person but can include things like certification, formal advanced education, research, training or continuing education. Not only will you grow in your knowledge and skills, but it can also give you an opportunity to connect with fellow peers who are working toward the same professional goals and aspirations.

Engage in activities or social events outside of work

Getting to know your colleagues outside of the workplace can build more long-lasting bonds and allow you to get to know them on a more personal level. You may learn something about them that will provide insight into their work style or approach.

Start developing connections early on

You don't have to wait until you start your first job before you begin developing rapport with your peers and potential colleagues. Amber Seidl, BSN, RN, case manager for the Plastic and Reconstruction clinic at Nebraska Medicine, recommends developing rapport with your peers during nursing school as you'll likely be working with some of them at some point in your career. "Get involved in nursing school," says Seidl, who was a school ambassador. "Participate in school government. Start study groups. Get to know other students. Bounce ideas off of them. This has really helped me in my career because it helped me meet more people and see the big picture. I ended up going through orientation with lots of fellow students too." 🍷





One of our surgeons sporting his autoclavable shoes he wears in the OR.

The ultimate guide to choosing nursing shoes

As a nurse, you are likely on your feet for most of the day. Without the proper footwear, long days can wreak havoc on the feet, knees and hips. The bottom line – bad shoes can be your worst enemy.

“We often see nurses for a variety of foot issues including bunions, hammertoe, foot and ankle arthritis and plantar fasciitis,” says Alexander Sawatzke, MD, orthopaedic surgeon specializing in foot problems. “That’s where a proper fitting shoe comes into play. Over the long run, studies show that a good shoe that accommodates existing foot problems or imbalances can be very important in preventing foot issues, helping existing foot issues get better and preventing the need for potential surgery.”

Derek McCroy, BSN, RN, who has worked at Nebraska Medicine both as a patient care technician and registered nurse for more than 10 years, speaks from experience. “A good nursing shoe will have many benefits for your career. When I first started in health care I soon figured out that I needed to take care of my feet. My feet hurt at the end of the day, even my legs ached. A lot of nurses count their steps. And let me tell you, their numbers are

astounding. Your feet and legs will get tired and your knees will hurt if you do not take care of them. A good nursing shoe will help with your joints. If your feet are comfortable, your knees will be too.”

When looking for a shoe that is going to provide you the most comfort and support, Dr. Sawatzke and McCroy recommend these factors as key to helping you and your feet get through the day in the best shape possible.

The right fit

“Your shoe should fit snug but not too tight or too loose,” notes Dr. Sawatzke. “Extra space in the toe area or heel can result in slipping, whereas pinching in the heel area or toe can result in rubbing and blisters.”

Non-slip sole

Shoes that will accommodate quick turns and movements is an important consideration for nurses who are on their feet all day. Look for shoes with rubberized soles as well as great tread patterns, recommends Dr. Sawatzke.



Shock absorption

"The sole is the heart of the shoe," adds McCroy. "If the sole isn't supportive and functional, your feet will not last a 12-hour shift."

A shoe with a thick sole and padding will provide shock absorption and can help reduce knee, ankle and hip pain.

Wide toe box

Make sure the toe box is wide enough so that it doesn't push against the toes. This is especially important for people who have existing issues like bunions and hammertoe, explains Dr. Sawatzke. Hoka shoes are known for their wider shoe boxes, support and stability. A stretchy or mesh fabric will also place reduced pressure on bunions and hammertoes.

Stiff sole

For people with great toe arthritis or arthritis pain on top of the foot, a stiffer sole that doesn't twist will provide better support and help reduce pain, Dr. Sawatzke says. Look for a stiffer sole, such as a Vibram sole, which also provides good traction and durability. Dansko and Merrill are two shoe brands that typically offer stiffer soles.

Arch support or padded instep

Arch support or a padded instep is especially important if you have flat feet or any existing problems like plantar fasciitis. The degree of arch support you need depends on the height of your arches, explains Dr. Sawatzke. "If you use an insert, it is important to find one that fits the shape of your foot," he says. "Flat feet can generally benefit from greater arch support where someone with high arches might benefit more from a first ray cutout orthotic, which helps put the foot in a more neutral position to dissipate the shock of heel impact. I would not spend a lot of money on custom orthotics. The most important factor in treating plantar fasciitis is increasing flexibility in the calf muscle by stretching regularly. Shoes like Hoka, Dansko, Merrill and Vibram sole shoes typically provide more arch support."

Rocker bottom

Individuals who suffer from ankle arthritis should consider shoes with rocker bottom soles. This type of shoe has a thicker than normal sole with a rounded heel and toe area (toe and heel areas curve up) to reduce pressure in the center of the foot area by helping you roll through your gait, Dr. Sawatzke explains. Some Sketchers provide this type of shoe structure.

Easy to clean

You never know what you are going to walk into – a spilled bedside water, vomit or other body fluids, notes McCroy, so something that can be easily wiped down like leather or synthetic leather is important.

"I will never forget when one of my friends that worked on a medical – surgical inpatient floor with me came out of a room looking very defeated," recalls McCroy. "She had worn her new Nike mesh-covered tennis shoes for the first time. They were bright, colorful and looked great! I said, 'Anna, what's wrong?' and she responded, 'Oh my gosh, do you have another pair of shoes? I just got peed on and it soaked through the mesh in my new shoes and even down to my socks.'"

A popular easy-to-clean choice is the Crocs shoe, which are also odor resistant and have a wide toe box, says Dr. Sawatzke. However, they do not have a stiff sole, and therefore, are not a good choice for people with arthritis of the foot.

In addition to choosing the right shoes, a little tender loving care to your feet can also go a long way in helping prevent the development of foot and ankle problems. Consider these tips.

Change your shoes after noticeable wear and tear. Occasionally check the sole of the shoe and look for wear on the sides of the shoe and heel area to ensure you're still getting the support and stability you need. Also, if you start to notice an imprint of your foot inside the shoe, it's time to change them out.



Stretch and ice

“One of the best things you can do on a daily basis to help prevent problems like plantar fasciitis and Achilles tendonitis, is to stretch your calves before and after a long day,” says Dr. Sawatzke. Place your foot on a step with your heel hanging off. Push your heel down and keep your knee straight for a long even stretch. Night splints may also help chronic plantar fasciitis which helps stretch the calves throughout the night while you sleep. Icing can be helpful for arthritic feet. If you have Achilles tendonitis, plantar fasciitis or other foot pain that continues after four to six weeks of regular stretching and icing, consider seeing your doctor for medical advice, Dr. Sawatzke advises.

Give them a break

“Don’t forget to take care of yourself,” stresses McCroy. “I will be the first to admit, there were days when I didn’t go to the bathroom until 2 or 3 o’clock in the afternoon, let alone sit down for more than five minutes. Don’t be shy. If your feet and legs are aching and you feel yourself getting tired, ask if someone can cover your assignment for five to 10 minutes so you can sit down and take a break, stretch your legs, go to the breakroom and take off your shoes for a few minutes. Whatever you need to do, do it. Your feet will thank you!”

Consider compression socks

“I wear compression socks with a comfortable shoe and this does wonders for me,” says McCroy. “I was getting to a point where my legs were aching all the way up to my knees but now my legs aren’t tired and painful. Initially, I didn’t want to wear compression socks because I didn’t want to look like an old lady. But heck, now I don’t care. I often show off my compression socks because they have fun designs and patterns. Compression socks will also help with blood circulation.”

▶ See our **annually updated spreadsheet** which curates 14 lists showcasing the best shoes for nurses!

Mix it up

“I have three types of shoes that I wear regularly to work,” McCroy says. “I change them out every few days. If I feel an ache or pain coming on, I wear my hard sole Dansko, all leather nursing shoe. I will warn you though, they take some getting used to. They are hard leather and stiff when you first get them, so you have to break them in. Practice walking in them at home. Wear them for half shifts to allow your feet to get used to them.”

Another thing to consider when wearing a Dansko shoe – the heel is high, notes McCroy. “I have rolled my ankles just walking down the hallways more times than I can count!” he says.

McCroy saves his comfy tennis shoes for the afternoons. “I wear the type that are completely covered, so I can still wipe them down,” he says. “I usually spring for a running/athletic/training type tennis shoe – something meant for higher impact because the amount of time we are on our feet all day can feel like the equivalent of running a marathon.”

For desk days or low load patient days, McCroy pulls out his low back, all leather Klog. “They are slip-resistant, wipeable and comfy,” he says. “The back of the shoe doesn’t come all the way up the heel of the foot, so I don’t find them as restricting.”

Give your feet some TLC

“A good massage or pedicure can do wonders,” says McCroy. “Taking care of your feet means more than comfortable shoes. Trim your nails so they aren’t rubbing against the inside of your shoes or getting snagged when you’re putting on your compression socks. Help relax the muscles and tendons in your feet by soothing them with lotion and a nice soak. If you can’t afford a pedicure or don’t want to spend money, trim your toenails at home with clippers and soak them in your bathtub or kitchen sink (Rinse the sink out after please!) Again, your feet will thank you!” 🐾



How to protect your back and knees from the rigors of nursing

There's no doubt that a nurse's job can be challenging. In addition to the daily demands of treating a multitude of sick patients, documentation, troubleshooting and comforting concerned family members, you must also deal with the daily physical demands of the job. Standing on your feet for long periods of time, moving and lifting patients, performing repetitive movements and standing and twisting in awkward positions can result in injuries to the back, knees, feet and ankles.

According to the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, nurses experience more than 35,000 back and musculoskeletal injuries each year. This places nurses in one of the top fields in which they are most likely to be injured – ahead of factory workers, construction workers and other jobs involving physical labor.

That's why we've pulled together three physical therapy experts to provide their best advice for nurses or anyone with a job that requires a lot of daily movement:

- Jessica Niemann, PTA, M.Ed, physical therapist assistant program director, Clarkson College
- Jessica Wissink, PT, DPT, physical therapist
- Elisa Bowcott, PT, DPT, physical therapist

You can help reduce the risk of injury and protect the longevity of your career by following these on-the-job guidelines and tips.

Shoe wear

When selecting shoes that you'll be wearing on the job, realize that you will likely need to give up fashion for fit and comfort. A good pair of tennis shoes with a thick, flexible sole and arch support is my first recommendation. Avoid clogs and always wear



shoes with a back to prevent the foot from slipping in the shoe. Shoes designed for running offer the greatest variety of fit and support. Choose between three shoe categories to find the best fit for you.

- Cushioned shoes are lighter and will provide a good amount of shock absorption. If you don't need a lot of support through your arch to be comfortable or if you are having trouble with aching in your knees, hips and low back – these shoes might be a good choice
- Stability shoes are good for a large majority of people. They still offer a fair amount of cushion and shock absorption but also provide some mild to moderate support through the arch. This shoe may "hold up" better than a cushioned shoe. If someone is questioning what category of shoe to choose, this is a safe bet for most people
- Motion control shoes are good for those that have trouble with shoes breaking down too quickly or need a large amount of support through the arch to be comfortable. Typically, these shoes have less of a "cushioned" feel and are a heavier, more solid shoe. They are designed with extra support through the midline to improve stability of the foot and reduce pronation



Also, don't forget to change your shoes out as they begin to show signs of wear on the bottom tread to ensure they provide you the best support and stabilization possible. If you have specific foot concerns, consider seeing a physical therapist or podiatrist for specific shoe or orthotic recommendations to accommodate any existing issues.

Body mechanics

Proper body mechanics are critical when lifting or repositioning patients to conserve energy and prevent injury. If you are sure that you do not need the assistance of lifting equipment, adjust the bed so that the patient is near your center of gravity (in line with your belly button) and position your feet shoulder width apart to reduce the amount of strain on the low back. When lifting, maintain an upright posture and bend at the hips and knees, not at the back. Remember to tighten your abdominal muscles when beginning the lift and exhale as you progress through the lift to stabilize and protect the back.

Avoid twisting whenever possible to prevent sudden jarring of the spine. Instead, shift your entire body from left to right, similar to a lunging motion.

Also avoid heavy lifting and repositioning when you are physically tired and/or are near the end of a long shift. Muscle fatigue can result in the use of poor body mechanics and is a common cause of muscular and soft tissue injuries.

Use of available lift support devices

When you're busy and feeling rushed, it's easy to dismiss the use of help and try to do it all by yourself. But think about your longevity in the field. While you may be able to complete the task without noticeable injury, over time, constant lifting will create wear and tear on the joints and will eventually catch up with you.

Every time you lift, you also expose yourself to the risk of developing small tears in the discs and end plates of the spine. Over time, these tears will grow scar tissue, which can block the flow of nutrients. This can result in quicker deterioration of the discs, which increases the likelihood of injury such as muscle strain or herniated disc.

A good rule of thumb, when you need to lift 50% or more of a patient's weight, it's time to seek help. Of course, this rule will need to be adjusted depending on the weight of the patient.

Whenever possible, get someone to help you or use lifting assist devices that are available to you such as transfer boards, ceiling mounts and mechanical lifts. It may require more time, but in the end, taking a little extra care will pay off in avoiding the need to take time off to "nurse" injury later on.

Active lifestyle

The importance of taking care of your own health including your diet, sleep, drinking enough water, maintaining a healthy weight and exercising, cannot be overlooked. Being just 10 pounds overweight increases the force on your knees by 30 to 40 pounds with each step. In addition to getting 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise three to five times a week, you should also consider performing regular core and hip strengthening exercises, which will help reduce the stress on your back and knees. This [video \(www.youtube.com/watch?v=imM1CdW41A8\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imM1CdW41A8) describes two exercises that strengthen both the core and hips.

Remember, the key to good joint health is to prevent an injury from occurring in the first place. Once an injury occurs, this expedites the process of wear and tear on the joint and also increases the risk of reoccurring injury to the same area. 🍷





11 tips to balance empathy without burning out

There's no doubt about it, nursing can be both physically and emotionally draining. The constant stress of trying to complete all of your patient care tasks while balancing the need to provide support and empathy to your patients and family can become exhausting.

"While nursing in general can be very taxing, being there for your patients and providing support and empathy is what fills the bucket at the end of the day," says Joshua Beerman, BSN, RN, supervisor in the Solid Organ Transplant Unit at Nebraska Medical Center.

Getting to know your patients and being with them through the good and the bad is an important part of nursing, but it's also an aspect of nursing that can take an emotional toll and lead to burnout.

While there's not a lot you can do to make your job easier, there are some things you can do to help prevent burnout and keep your job satisfying and rewarding. Seasoned nurses at Nebraska Medicine offer these tips.

Remember why you're here

Don't sweat the small stuff and always keep in mind the big picture.

"When you start feeling overwhelmed, you need to stop and remember why you got into nursing," says Beerman. "It's bigger than ourselves. This can be an incredibly difficult time for the patient and we are there to help shoulder that burden for them while they are in the hospital. Taking time to connect with them by sitting and talking to them can make all the difference in the world. This is a moment in a patient's life where they may just need to talk to a familiar face for comfort and support and know they've been heard."

Find a purpose

It's important to remember that your goals for each patient may vary and sometimes may not be as significant as you'd like. Your goals may also need to change as your roles change.

"Sometimes you may feel like you're just a cog in the wheel," says Mary Clarke, RN, PRN nurse.



“It’s not always possible to save every patient or prevent them from dying. That’s why it’s so important to find ways to make a positive impact on your patients that will make you feel good about what you’re doing from day to day.”

As a PRN nurse, Clarke says she can’t always see the big changes she’d like to see in her patients since she is not there on a consistent basis, so she decided awhile back that it was time to change her goals. Her new focus is striving to be the best patient advocate she can be.

“I try to answer my patients’ questions, solve their problems or connect the dots,” says Clarke. “Knowing that I have helped them solve some of these puzzles is where I get my satisfaction now.”

Take breaks

Working for long periods of time without breaks can lead to stress and exhaustion. Taking breaks, even small ones, are essential to maintain your performance throughout the day.

“Taking breaks during the day is necessary to allow yourself to take a deep breath, collect yourself and regroup, especially if you’ve experienced an especially emotional or difficult situation,” says Richard Villarreal, BSN, RN, nurse supervisor for the Solid Organ Transplant Unit. “Allow yourself that time as it will help you be more effective for the remaining part of the day.”

Take care of yourself

Sometimes nurses are so busy taking care of everyone else they forget to take care of themselves. Getting enough sleep, eating healthy and exercising will help give your body more energy to tackle each day more successfully.

“You’re not good to anyone if your own bucket is empty,” notes Clarke. In addition to your personal health, Clarke also recommends taking time to do things for yourself away from work whether it’s pursuing a hobby, exercising or other interest. You

also need to allow time for a social life and nurturing relationships with friends and family to maintain a healthy balance in your life.

Don’t take it with you

Having a sense of closure each day will allow you to move on and enjoy the other parts of your life when you leave work each day.

“When you finish a shift, leave it there – knowing you did your best and move on with the rest your day so you can focus on the other important people in your life,” says Clarke.

Be aware of how you’re feeling and how it’s affecting your relationship with those around you, notes Villarreal. Sometimes it may be helpful to talk about your day with a someone, instead of keeping it all inside and shutting down completely, he advises.

Make a change

A change in environment can do wonders. If you’ve been on the same floor for a long time or maybe it’s just not a good fit for you, you may want to consider moving to a new area or unit, suggests Clarke.

“There are so many opportunities in nursing,” she says. “Don’t be afraid to try new things. Changing areas can be scary at first but it can also give you a fresh attitude and may help you find your special niche.”

Share your feelings

Connecting with others on your floor and sharing your feelings can not only help release pent up emotions, but it will help others understand you and can provide a sense of comfort and calmness.

“It takes a special person to be a nurse,” Beerman notes. “It’s definitely a calling. But some people can cope better with the stresses of the job than others. Still others try to pretend they have it all together. The important thing to remember is that you need to have those dialogues with other colleagues in the department to express your feelings. Knowing



that someone else has had similar experiences, challenges or feelings can help you get through a difficult time.”

Using your co-workers as a support system is an important part of the team environment we encourage at Nebraska Medicine, notes Villarreal. “Don’t try to shoulder the burden yourself. Remember that your colleagues are there to help you through the hard times and acknowledging your feelings will help take some of the burden off.”

Ask for help

Delegate when possible so you can be more effective. There are some things that can be done by a nurse assistant or tech to free up time for you to complete the bigger patient care tasks.

“Nursing is a team sport,” says Beerman. “Not asking for help doesn’t make you a better nurse. Instead, it may force you to take shortcuts and may jeopardize your patient’s safety.”

Likewise, you can be a support person to your colleagues as well. Check in with each other and be aware of others’ needs. “If you happen to have some extra time, offer to help another colleague who may be having a difficult day,” suggests Beerman.

Be realistic

Setting realistic goals about what you can accomplish will help keep you motivated and feeling good about your abilities and achievements at the end of each day.

“Some nurses think they need to be able to fix every patient and make them better,” says Villarreal. “But it’s not being realistic. Let your patients know that although you might not be able to take away all of their pain, you can try to make it better.”

Pair up with a mentor

A good mentor can facilitate your success and bolster your confidence.

“Having a mentor gives you someone to talk to when you are upset, frustrated or down,” says Amber Seidl, BSN, RN, case manager for Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. “Rarely does anyone as a first year nurse have all of the answers. Your mentor can help you when you are questioning your patient care decisions and it’s someone you can lean on who can guide you through the tough times.”

Recognize burnout

Working lots of hours and picking up extra shifts to increase your income can be tempting, but it can quickly lead to burnout too.

“You need to be self-aware and realize when you need to take some time off to refuel your body and your mind,” says Villarreal. “We have self-stress assessments you can fill out to help you identify stress and burnout.”

If stress seems to be a constant in your work life, consider taking inventory of your stressors. Write them down and come up with ways to alleviate or eliminate them.

In the end, “one thing nurses have is resilience,” says Clarke. “We have to be resilient in order to be able to bounce back and keep doing what we do every day. Most of us were drawn to nursing because we enjoy helping people and knowing we made a difference. If you don’t lose sight of that, it can help make even the most challenging days more bearable.” 🍀



Some keys to a long, deeply satisfying career in nursing

Most nurses agree that they didn't choose a nursing career because they thought it would be easy. Many say they chose nursing for the personal satisfaction it provides and it's that sense of fulfillment that keeps them going.

According to the 2017 AMN Healthcare survey, approximately 83% of nurses feel satisfied with their careers. In addition, two-thirds of those nurses also said they would encourage others to pursue a career in nursing.

These Nebraska Medicine nurses share their thoughts about what keeps them happy in their jobs

Connecting with patients and making a difference

For many, a career in nursing is all about the patient and helping others during some of the most difficult times in their lives. Some have even referred to it as a "calling."

Amber Seidl, BSN, RN, case manager in Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, says she has always felt a calling to care for others. During college, she nannied for triplets. Later, when she became a care tech and loved it, she knew nursing was for her. "It's all about caring for patients and their families," she says. "You've got to love it."

"Nursing is very satisfying because at the end of the day, no matter how hard your day has been, you know you're helping others in a special time of need,"



says Katy Donner, BSN, RN, case management nurse, Village Pointe Health Center Plastics and Reconstruction.

Tiffany Whitney, BSN, RN-BC, nurse supervisor in the Medical-Surgical Unit at Bellevue Medical Center, agrees. "As long as you feel like you're making a difference in a patient's life, that makes it all worthwhile. Your heart has to be in it. It's little things, like walking into a patient's room and seeing them smile at you. Or when you haven't seen them for a while, and they still remember you. Then you know you've had an impact."

Positive work environment

The culture in your work environment can play a big role in your satisfaction. "When you're in an environment where you really enjoy your providers and co-workers, it really makes a difference," says Donner. In her current role, Donner says "everyone takes accountability and does what needs to be done. You can tell that we all want to be here, and we all have patient satisfaction in mind and that makes for a very positive work environment."



A work environment that promotes positive feedback is also important. “Even after a long 12- or 14-hour day, having someone acknowledge your hard work can make all the difference in the world,” notes Donner. “When you feel appreciated – that’s what helps keep you going.”

Ability to work in a variety of settings

Whether it’s working in the hospital, a clinic or nursing college, nurses agree that the ability to move around and work in a variety of settings or specialty areas helps prevent burnout and keeps their jobs more interesting.

Seidl, who has worked in the Burn and Wound Unit, the operating room and Orthopaedics before landing in the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery clinic, says that the ability to move to different areas of the hospital depending on your interest and stage of life is a big plus in nursing. Also being able to customize your schedule to fit your personal and family needs is another valuable aspect of nursing.

“I really enjoyed working in the Burn Unit and OR, but when my two young children started school, I needed more stability and flexibility,” she says. “Working in the clinic gives me both the stability and flexibility I need to be there for my kids.”

Whitney, who loves to be challenged, says her multifaceted career in nursing has exposed her to multiple areas of nursing and has kept her career interesting and exciting.

Whitney started her career as a float nurse where she worked in multiple areas of the hospital. The adaptability required to work as a float nurse prepared Whitney for transitioning into a career as a travel nurse – a job that entails being able to step into new situations and learn on the fly. “The fast-paced nature of these jobs gave me the skills to be an expert multitasker and critical thinker and learn how to prioritize better,” Whitney says. “This has been invaluable in helping me in my job today as a nurse supervisor where multiple things are happening at all times.”

Before becoming a nurse supervisor, Whitney served as a professional development specialist, which entailed providing education to staff and developing continuing education programs. “This opened a whole new world to me,” says Whitney, who now says one of her goals is to pursue a master’s or doctorate degree to become a nurse practitioner or potentially go into teaching or research. “I love that nursing has so many opportunities for different types of careers and advancement opportunities as your interests grow and change throughout life.”

Finding your niche

Finding your niche – the area that you really feel comfortable in and passionate about, can make your nursing career significantly more rewarding.

Jennifer Rounds, DNP, APRN, an advanced lung disease nurse practitioner, encourages new nurses to move around to find their niche. “Keep your eyes open and don’t be afraid to try something new. You just don’t know where it’s going to take you.”

Many nurses find their niche by accident. “I had no idea I’d love working with cystic fibrosis (CF) patients,” says Rounds. After working in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) for several years, the CF department had an opening so Rounds decided to give it a try. She immediately discovered that she had found her niche in nursing. After completing her Doctor of Nursing Practice degree, she was thrilled to learn that the CF team was looking for an additional nurse practitioner, allowing her to return to an area she loved. This role has also allowed her to learn more about lung transplant, another very satisfying role, she says.

If you have the opportunity, Whitney suggests starting your career as a float nurse or in an area that exposes you to patients in multiple specialty areas like a medical-surgical or a step-down unit. “It will teach you how to critically think in different types of specialties,” she says. “It may also help you find your niche more quickly. I always thought I wanted to work in cardiology, but I discovered when I worked in



that area as a float nurse, it wasn't exciting enough for me."

Professional growth and advancement

Professional growth and advancement opportunities are rewarding aspects of the job that bring satisfaction to many nurses.

Michelle Schulte, MSN, RN-BC, ambulatory supervisor for the Dermatology clinic, who completed her Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree several years ago, says she has always had a thirst for advancing her knowledge and education. Completing her BSN is one of the most significant accomplishments of her life, she says.

"What you learn through this degree elevates you as a nurse. It also positioned her to move into a supervisory position. "I've always aspired to be a great nurse leader and getting my master's degree has given me the tools to be a stronger leader and a more critical thinker."

Michelle Schulte, MSN, RN-BC

After practicing for about 15 years, Rounds decided to go back to school and complete her doctorate degree. "I love the larger role in patient care I have now as an advanced nurse practitioner," she says. "My additional education allows me to review research and collaborate with team members on a higher level. I'm more involved in evaluating best practice guidelines and applying them to patient care and treatment plans. That's very rewarding and satisfying to me."

Eventually, Rounds says she would like to work in an academic setting. "I've always known that eventually I want to teach and a doctorate degree would allow me to do that. I love the fact that nursing is a profession that allows you to do a multitude of things and to grow professionally in your career. You can pick and choose what works best for your current stage in life."

Seidl agrees. "I started as a staff nurse and now I'm a case manager. "I feel like I'm in a good place right now, but I know there are opportunities to move up in the future if I desire to move into management. It's something I can look forward to." 🐦





Squeezing the most value out of your nursing professional development hours

Keeping up with continuing education, which is now referred to as professional development, is a necessary part of maintaining your nursing license. You know you need to complete professional development to stay abreast with current clinical skills and knowledge, but it can also be a challenge finding the time to fulfill the required hours.

And then there's the issue of where to complete your hours. Like many nurses, you are probably bombarded with a multitude of online options for all types of courses sponsored by a variety of organizations. How do you know which ones are legitimate and which ones are not?

First off, to ensure everyone is on the same page, some clarification may be in order as some language surrounding continuing education is changing. You may still see professional development referred to as continuing education units (CEUs) or credit. It is more accurate to use the term "contact hours" as this represents the amount of time spent in a course or professional development activity¹. A CEU is an older

term, which corresponds to 10 hours of instruction or contact hours. The American Nurses Credentialing Center (AANC) (www.nursingworld.org/ancc/) now refers to continuing nursing education (CNE) as nursing professional development (NPD).

Guidelines for professional development

The guidelines regarding professional development hours may vary from state to state and are published by your state board of nursing. What's acceptable and what's not, as well as the number of hours required, may also differ depending on what type of nursing degree you hold, and any certifications you have and wish to maintain. Information can be found at Online Continuing Education for Healthcare Professionals (www.aaceus.com/state_nursing_requirements.asp). Some states also allow completion of a recognized post-licensure academic course in nursing or related field from an accredited organization in place of professional development courses.



“It is incumbent upon a nurse to be familiar with these guidelines to ensure they complete quality professional development from organizations that will be accepted by your state’s accrediting bodies,” says Judi Dunn, MS, CPP, RN, NPD-BC, former director of Professional Development at Clarkson College and nurse peer review leader with the Midwest Multistate Division. “You should always verify whether your state or certification requires approval from specific accrediting bodies and what specific topics are required for professional development.”

Plan ahead

Dunn suggests you make a plan every two years as to how you are going to complete your professional development hours and what types of courses you want to take that will help you improve your nursing practice. “When you put it off until the last minute you may get yourself into trouble,” she says. “I’ve seen nurses whose licenses were taken away or suspended because they did not complete their professional development on time or correctly.”

Nursing professional development serves an important purpose, Dunn says. “Nursing practices and clinical guidelines are continually changing. Our nursing boards require continuing education because they want us to stay current on new knowledge and skills, so we can provide the best patient care possible. To get the most out of your continuing education, you should select courses that will enhance your skills in your specialty area and make sure you complete your hours from high-quality institutions.”

Additionally, notes Dunn, “Research substantiates that health care professionals who participate in accredited continuing education not only increase their knowledge, skills and attitudes, but also positively affect patient outcomes.”

Heidi Keeler, PhD, RN, director of Continuing Education at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) College of Nursing, agrees. “Professional development courses serve an

important purpose by arming nurses with the skills they need to be successful throughout their careers. This includes both clinical and professional skills such as leadership, teamwork, mental health and wellness, communication and systems change.”

When completing your hours, Keeler recommends that you consider what position you desire for your professional growth and then choose a mix of offerings to ensure you are ready for advancing in your current job or in taking the next step in your career. Use continuing education to grow your expertise and impact.

Steer away from quick completion online courses that are mass produced and don’t consider local nursing practices or the changing health care environment, she advises.

3 tips to determine quality professional development

To determine if the courses you are considering are quality courses, Keeler suggests you look at the funding source:


- Is it driven by a profit or nonprofit organization? (A for-profit organization may have competing priorities in creating and delivering quality evidence-based offerings.)
- Is it affiliated with a reputable nursing school or organization that is an authority on expert nursing skills and practice
- Is it offered by a peer reviewed provider, such as one accredited by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) or the Midwest Multistate Division (MSD)? The American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) is a division of the American Nurses Association (ANA), the largest professional nursing organization in the country. The Midwest Multistate Division is accredited as an approver and provider of nursing continuing professional development by the ANCC and is a collaboration of four Midwest states that include Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska



Still not sure? You can always check with the ANCC to find out what courses have been provided by accredited ANCC units or the approval statement required to be disclosed on all courses to find out if they have been ANCC-approved.

How to make professional development more affordable

Talk to your employer to see what type of professional development hours they may fund or discount. Also contact your local college or school of nursing. Many, like the UNMC College of Nursing, offer contact hours for free. Your local ANCC providers can help you find affordable options too.

A Becker's Healthcare article (<https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/quality/5-reasons-why-nurses-leave-your-facility-too-soon.html>) looked at why nurses leave their jobs, revealed that in most cases, it wasn't because of money, it was because they didn't have the opportunity to grow in their careers," says Keeler. "One way to grow is to develop skills that will make you more marketable and you can achieve that, in part, by choosing your professional development courses wisely." 

¹ NE DHHS: <http://dhhs.ne.gov/licensure/Pages/Nurse-Licensing-Renewal-and-Continuing-Education.aspx>





How to decide if getting an advanced nursing degree is worth the effort and expense

At some point in your career, you will likely ponder the decision whether to pursue an advanced nursing degree to take your career to the next level. Is it worth the time and expense? Will it pay off both monetarily and in terms of professional growth and satisfaction?

Since this will require a large investment in time and money, there are definitely a lot of factors to consider before you make the decision to take the next step.

Here are some questions to consider when deciding if the timing and investment in time and money is right for you.

Is an advanced degree right for me?

As a new nurse, you will be busy focusing on making the transition from school to being a successful clinician, says Heidi Keeler, PhD, RN, director of Continuing Education at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) College of Nursing. "But

as you become comfortable in your new role, you should start asking yourself what you want to be doing in the next three to five years. How am I going to grow and what are the next steps to help me get there? And on a larger scale, what do I want my personal contribution in nursing to be? If you're not asking yourself these types of questions, you are not going to be eligible or prepared to move forward should you decide to do so. Remaining stagnant can lead to dissatisfaction in your job or even burnout."

Determining what your new role or career path should be may require some personal reflection and exploration, says Keeler.

Try working in new areas of the hospital. Talk to nurses you admire and aspire to and adopt them as a mentor. Talk to other professions and ask what they consider the most admirable qualities in you and other nursing professionals. Talk to current students and discuss opportunities with the staff at UNMC and/or Clarkson College of Nursing.



If you're still not sure how you'd like to advance your career, another route to consider before you commit to an advanced degree is certification in a specific area of nursing.

"A certification is considered a higher level of competency by your peers and might be a good way to advance without getting a degree or it could end up being your entryway to an advanced degree," says Keeler. Certifications are offered in clinical specialty areas such as oncology, critical care, gerontology, medical/surgical, as well as for nurse educators, leaders and managers.

The bottom line is, you need to be happy with your nursing career. "If you're someone who is not content without growth and you want to contribute to making the profession better, advancing your formal education will open new opportunities for you," says Keeler.

Will it open new career doors?

If you want to expand with your current nursing practice scope and are looking for more autonomy, management or administrative type positions, an MSN or other degree might be what you need to help you move up the ladder.

A Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) can be acquired to advance knowledge in clinical and administrative nursing practice.

NPs can specialize clinically, entering into acute or primary care roles, or specialty practice, such as a psychiatric nurse practitioner or certified nurse anesthetist. Other positions that an MSN can prepare you for include a clinical nurse specialist, someone who helps develop patient education, workflow and processes and policies that affect the delivery of care; a nurse educator, someone who trains the next generation of nurses; or a nurse manager position.

It will also give you the tools to advance to positions such as a clinical nurse specialist, who helps develop patient education, workflow and things

that affect the delivery of care, a nurse educator, nurse anesthetist, psychiatric nurse practitioner or a managerial role.

A PhD in nursing is designed for those who want to focus on research, discovery and generating new knowledge. A Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) is more suited for those interested in applying that new knowledge by using data and analysis to achieve quality improvement in clinical practice. And a doctorate degree in education (EdD) may appeal to someone who is interested more generally in the science of instructional nursing.

The changing health care environment has opened up new opportunities for nurses. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the demand for nurse practitioners (NP) and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) is expected to grow by 31% by 2026. That is faster than the national average of other health care related professions. In 2016, the United States had approximately 203,800 working nurse practitioners. That number is expected to grow by 64,200 by 2026. Advanced practice nurses specializing in geriatrics is one area where the demand is expected to boom.

Jennifer Rounds, DNP, BSN, APRN, advanced lung disease nurse practitioner in Pulmonary, Critical Care, Sleep and Allergy at Nebraska Medicine, says she sought the autonomy and larger role in patient care she would be able to offer as an NP. "I've always enjoyed learning and expanding my knowledge so going back to school was always part of my plan," she says. "I decided to go for the doctorate because I also have an interest in teaching and this would allow me to transition to that role later down the road."

Rounds says her nursing experience has been very valuable in enabling her to be a better NP. "I recommend you work a few years as a nurse clinician before going back to school," she advises.

"That real life clinical experience will help you in your coursework in school and provide the foundation you need to become a confident nurse practitioner."



Completing an MSN degree is one of Michelle Schulte's proudest achievements. Schulte, MSN, RN-BC, ambulatory supervisor for the Dermatology clinic at Nebraska Medicine, says she has always aspired to be a great nurse leader and her MSN degree laid the path for her to achieve that. "I learned leadership skills and how to use statistics and evidence-based research, which allowed me to become involved in quality improvement projects at the hospital," she says.

When she applied for the supervisory position she holds now, her MSN degree boosted her to the top of the candidate list. And one of the best parts, she notes, the hospital paid for the majority of the tuition through their tuition assistance program.

"If you have any desire to advance your knowledge, you should definitely give it a try," says Schulte. "There were a lot of late nights, but in the end, it is extremely rewarding."

What is the potential to earn a higher salary?

Your salary potential will vary greatly depending on your specialty, area of the country in which you work and type of position you are pursuing.

According to a 2015 report issued by Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, nurses with graduate degrees earned 33% more than those with undergraduate degrees. In Nebraska, the average salary for a BSN nurse is approximately \$79,000 a year. That aligns with figures provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics that estimates nationwide, nurses with an MSN make more than \$100,000 a year. A nurse anesthetist can expect a median income of about \$111,000 a year, with some making much more than that. DNP-prepared nurse practitioners earned an average of \$136,000 a year.

Will I have the support and time commitment needed?

Completing an MSN will typically take about two to four years depending on if you go to school part-time or full-time.

Courses at Clarkson College of Nursing are all online while UNMC College of Nursing offers a combination of classroom and online classes to meet your needs. Representatives from both colleges explain that they are very flexible and will do everything they can to accommodate each student's schedule and special needs.

"We do require that you complete your degree within seven years," says Layna Himmelberg, EdD, MSN, CNE, director of Graduate Nursing at Clarkson College of Nursing. "We also ask you to continue working while you are pursuing your degree as we want you to be obtaining nursing experience and developing those critical thinking skills."

One of the biggest factors to consider if you have decided you want to pursue higher education, is whether you will have the support of family and friends as this will be a big time commitment, says Laura Thayer-Mencke, director of Student Financial Aid at Clarkson College of Nursing.

She recommends doing some long-term planning before you commit. "You need to think ahead and determine how long you will be in school, the time commitment that is involved and whether your personal and/or family commitments will allow for that, in addition to the financial responsibility."

Another suggestion, "Consider reaching out to the supervisor on your floor to let him/her know your plans so you will have their support as well," suggests Himmelberg. "Discuss opportunities for advancing and let them know if there is a particular position you are interested in so they can help you achieve that goal."



How will I manage the financial investment?

Pursing an advanced nursing degree is definitely a big investment and something you need to consider. According to US News, depending on the school and degree focus, an online master's degree in nursing typically falls in the range of \$35,000 to \$60,000.

While the potential to earn a higher salary will help offset that investment later down the road, coming up with the funds or taking out loans may present challenges.

Do your research first, advises Thayer-Mencke, as there are lots of opportunities for tuition assistance by many employers as well as loans, scholarships and partnership programs. Nebraska Medicine will reimburse full-time employees up to \$5,000 a year with a cap of \$20,000, depending on what type of degree you are pursuing. This tuition reimbursement can be used at any school as long as the employee is in good standing.

Also be aware that there is a limit to the amount of loans you can take out from a federally funded loan program. If you have already taken out a loan for your BSN, you may have already reached your limit or may be close, notes Thayer-Mencke.

"Our cohort default rate is 2%, which is the percentage of students who have borrowed money and have defaulted," says Thayer-Mencke. "From this data, we can infer that our students are graduating, getting jobs and are able to pay their living expenses as well as their loans."

Is my school of choice accredited?

You will want to make sure the school you will be attending is accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). Earning a degree from a school that is not accredited will not be recognized by most hospitals and employers.

Will I be accepted into the program?

Depending on the program, there can be a lot of competition to get a spot. Some programs require a GPA of 3.0 or higher and still others limit the number of students they will accept each semester.

The certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) at Clarkson College, for instance, limits the number of students it accepts and only admits students once a year.

"Make sure you start doing your research plenty of time ahead so you can make sure you have time to get your application in, transcripts, apply for loans, scholarships or tuition assistance programs," recommends Thayer-Mencke.

If you are considering nursing education, the Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP) is a funding program offered by the federal Health Resources & Service Administration to increase the number of qualified nursing faculty. It is available only to students enrolled in advanced education nursing degree programs such as MSN or EdD degrees at accredited schools. Students who complete their degree and become full-time nurse faculty will get up to 85% of their loans forgiven. Not every school offers this program so students should check before applying and enrolling.

While completing an advanced nursing degree will definitely require a large commitment of time and resources, most nurses will find that the personal growth and development as well as the opportunities that will become available, will help you achieve a more satisfying and rewarding career, notes Keeler. 🗣️



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