



Entering the Nursing Profession Successfully

By Janice E. Hurley



Congratulations! You are on your way to receiving your degree! At last you will be ready to leave the classroom to serve as a professional nurse. This is cause for celebration! Nursing faculty have supported you and helped you master the skills you need to succeed as an RN. Yet, you might be concerned: you've heard that "real" nursing is more than the theory learned in school, that job demands may be unrealistic, and that the stress may be overwhelming. But remember, you are not alone in your concerns.

As you reflect on your learning, growth, and readiness to undertake your first position as a registered nurse, you will have feelings of anticipation, excitement, and anxiety. DeBellis, Glover and Longson (2001) write that beginning nurses have reported that these feelings are compounded by the following stressors:

- "There is little time to think and prioritize, so I often respond reflexively."
- "It's difficult to feel like a registered nurse when I lack experience and support."
- "Orientation doesn't teach me how to be connected to and feel accepted by my peers."

- "When my preceptor is not available because of illness, vacation, or working other shifts, I feel isolated and deserted."
- "My questions sometimes seem inappropriate because of negative responses."
- "At times, I doubt myself and feel incompetent."
- "I don't always get accurate evaluations and don't know where to turn for counsel."
- "I sometimes cut corners to finish my assignment, and I know that is unsafe."
- "Stress affects me emotionally. I have trouble thinking clearly. And, I have little time left for myself."

These situations compel you to reflect on the realities of health care and to plan not only to survive, but to thrive in your chosen profession. To attend to these situations, consider the following assumptions: our circumstances as registered nurses have changed, but our values-based calling has not; creativity, conversation, and



connectedness are essential in addressing health-care demands; and patient-centered care and self-care are essential outcomes if nursing is to remain relevant.

There is hope! As you enter the workplace, see yourself as a gift. Porter-O'Grady (2006) reminded senior baccalaureate nursing students that they are right where they are supposed to be: novice nurses with novice skills, not five-year veterans. And the reciprocal "promise" with your employer acknowledges your rights as well as your responsibilities. You deserve to be respected, to be heard, to be part of processes that affect you, to have a reasonable work load, to practice in a toxic-free environment, and to implement the institution's mission (Hurley, 2008).

Remember the Lessons of the Past

Jean Watson suggests that any profession that has lost its values is heartless; that any profession that is heartless is soul-less; and that any profession that is soul-less is worthless (Ray and Turkel, 2008). My RN students journal on "The Nurse Who Influenced Me the Most." They write about the values that the nurse embodies in the workplace. Competent task attainment was matched by empathy, caring, and advocacy.

So what values should you now intentionally implement in the workplace to grow as a professional and view patient-centered care as a commitment and a privilege? On your clipboard, list three professional values

that should influence your decision making and refer to them throughout the day (Kellogg, 1999).

Practice being present, connecting with your patients, engaging them in dialogue, encouraging their voice, and sanctioning their self-determination. Commit to "Caring." Roach identifies the six C's of caring as compassion, competence, confidence, conscience, commitment, and comportment cultivated within a [spiritually] connected relationship (as quoted in Berman, Snyder, Kozier, & Erb, 2008). Kenneth Schwartz (1995), a lawyer who succumbed to lung cancer, asked nurses to remember that health care "is not merely about performing tests . . . or administering drugs. . . . For as skilled and knowledgeable as my caregivers are, what matters most is that they have empathized with me in a way that gives me hope and makes me feel like a human being, not just an illness."

Face the Present with Optimism

Consider working at Magnet® hospitals where nurse excellence, nurse education, dual-preceptorships, and servant leaders are the norm. Look for creative orientation programs that use clinical narratives for reflective problem solving, where you can practice advanced critical thinking and intervention skills (Krugman, Bretschneider, Horn, et al., 2006). Ask nurse managers how the institution's mission and nursing's philosophy are implemented on their units, about the potential for shared governance among staff, and how peer relationships are nurtured.

Since nursing is an interpersonal profession:

- Dialogue with your peers, asking questions to benefit from their expertise.
- Look for opportunities to learn and continue your education.
- Join committees. Be seen. Be heard. Contribute to nursing's vision and success.
- Post a relevant journal article on the unit's bulletin board.
- Recognize, value, and show gratitude to the "seasoned" nurse.

- Maintain civility in your interactions and promptly address any concerns.
- Keep your sense of humor intact.

Since nursing is also patient-centered:

- Leave a tablet at the bedside for the patient's questions.
- Nurture and educate the patient's support system.
- Practice good hand hygiene.
- Attend to the patient's environment.
- Perform those fundamental yet often neglected basic skills – mouth care, foot care.
- When documenting, include caring and spiritual needs, and ask: "What do I need to know to care for you today?" (Boykin, 2007); "What is the meaning of this situation to you?" "What do you hope for?"
- Become connected with those for whom you care (Hood, Olson, & Allen, 2007). To quote Mother Teresa, "You are not called to do great things. You are called to do small things with great love."

You Can't Give to Others What You Don't Have

Self care relies on connectedness – vertically (your own beliefs) and horizontally (your support systems) to promote meaning, purpose, and hope in all areas of your life. Care for yourself – otherwise, how can you care for others?

Recognize that you are the one responsible for your life choices. What will they be? Will your on-duty break consist of a doughnut or fruit? Play in healthy ways. Rest. Honor your strengths and work on improving your weaknesses. Growth and its rewards are contagious.

Use these guidelines to become empowered and start these behaviors while you're still in school. Then speak out against injustice, contribute to the profession by joining and participating in professional nursing organizations, and mentor others. As a nurse, you can and will make a difference.

Best wishes. I am looking forward to your touch when I need care. ☺



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