



The Breakthrough to Nursing column presents ideas and perspectives about the importance of cultural diversity in nursing. Submit your activities to Irma Martin.

By Irma Martin

Redefining Nursing Perceptions: Becoming an RN

Since the days of Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton, the scope of nursing (and its image) has changed. As Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), medical assistants, and many other allied health professionals enter nursing school and change the image of nursing, nursing faculty have been challenged to address the needs of these students. I interviewed some of these transitional professionals and one of their instructors to get their perspective on the experience.



Nellie McCain is a third semester Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) student at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, CA. She has been a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) at the bedside, a case manager, and supervisor for the past twenty years. Nellie

always wanted to be a nurse so she became an LVN. Over time she realized that her scope of practice limited her role and that raising a family and devoting herself to her profession left her little time to change it. She saw nursing as a career of compassion, professionalism, and integrity, and she never saw any difference in the roles of the LPN and RN until she entered the RN program. “I realized that I had made the right choice because the RN role liberated me to advocate for my patients and manage their care in a way that the role of the LVN never allowed me to. I was confident that I could



use my professionalism and experience in the RN program and realized that I had lessons to learn in redefining my role.”

Walter Sosa, also a third semester student at Golden West College has had a similar experience. Walter has been a

Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) for over 5 years and had previously been a pre-med student. “I thought that being a doctor was what I wanted to do, but just as I was about to get accepted to medical school, I discovered that what I wanted to do was in the realm of nursing.” He decided to “test the waters” by becoming a CNA.

Five years of working at a skilled nursing facility changed Walter’s perception of nursing. “I am confident that being a nurse is what I need to do.”

I asked Walter what, if any, challenges he had faced in nursing school or as a CNA. “When I told my friends that I had dropped out of med school to become a nurse, I received many funny looks. I felt especially signaled out my first day of nursing school: I was one of five men in a class of 60. Now I feel more comfortable in my new role, and have found many men nurse role models in my community to identify with. Now, every time I meet a man interested in becoming a nurse, I share my story and hope that it will help him make his career choice.”



Nadine Davis, faculty at Golden West College, also has a unique perspective on transitional students. For several years, she has taught the transition class that “other health allied” professionals must take prior to being admitted to the RN program. She sees how students change

their views of nursing. “I knew that the role and function of the LPN, CNA, and EMT were different from that of the RN and hoped that my students would embrace that difference in order to become successful in the nursing program. The vast experience that these professionals bring to the classroom is invaluable.”

It’s evident that the scope and image of nursing is continually redefined and improved by the diversity of people that enter the profession. ☺