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215-489-7000

Production Director
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Art Director
David Beverage

Designer
Christy Carmody

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and Technology**
Jonah Reynolds

Digital Design Manager
Michelle Welliver

PUBLISHED BY
HealthCom Media
259 Veterans Lane
Doylestown, PA 18901
Telephone: 215-489-7000
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Chief Executive Officer
Gregory P. Osborne

Executive VP, Sales & Operations
Melissa Warner

Finance Director/Operations
MaryAnn Fosbenner

Business Manager
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Moving ahead with your nursing education

Take advantage of the resources available to you.

By Deborah E. Trautman, PhD, RN, FAAN



Whether you're a newly licensed nurse or a seasoned professional, the time is always right to take the next step in your education. Returning to school opens new doors of opportunity for your career, as higher levels of education allow you to work in the settings of your choice and assume more responsibility for shaping care delivery.

Today's nurse employers are looking for clinicians with additional levels of education, and nurses are responding by enrolling in baccalaureate and graduate programs in record numbers. According to the latest annual survey conducted by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), enrollments were up across the board in 2016, with the greatest increases seen in doctor of nursing practice (up 15%), master's (up 8%), and baccalaureate (up 4%) programs.

Nursing schools are working to accept all qualified applicants by offering a wide menu of options to meet the needs of today's learner. In addition to traditionally paced, face-to-face classes, schools now offer degree programs completely or partially online, as well as accelerated programs for those looking to complete degree requirements at a faster, more intense pace.

As you begin planning your education, access the following resources to find out more about your options and available support services:

- **Johnson & Johnson's Discover Nursing:** www.discovernursing.com

Developed to interest new generations in nursing careers, this information-rich site provides clear advice on getting into nursing school, paying for your education, and selecting the nursing specialty that fits your interests.

- **ExploreHealthCareers.org:** <https://explorehealthcareers.org/career-explorer/>

This online clearinghouse gives students reliable information about nursing and the

health professions, including links to career profiles, enrichment programs, financial aid resources, and current issues in health care.

- **Your Nursing Career:** www.aacn.nche.edu/students/your-nursing-career

Housed on the AACN website, this resource features the latest facts about the nursing profession, links to schools of nursing offering baccalaureate and graduate degrees, and a directory of available scholarships.

- **NursingCAS:** <http://www.nursingcas.org>

Use the profession's centralized application service, called NursingCAS, to explore nursing program requirements and apply to multiple programs using one convenient application.

If you need financial assistance to complete your education, you'll find that federal, state, and local programs are available, if you know where to look. Your first stop should be your employer to find out what assistance is available in terms of professional development and degree completion incentives. Next, check with your local school of nursing and talk to the administrators about what programs working adults are using to pay for school. In addition, check with your state board of nursing and state department of education to see if assistance is available, including funding for advanced clinicians looking to teach after graduation. If you're seeking an advanced degree, consider applying for federal sources of aid from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education.

With a little advance planning, you'll soon be on the path to expanding your nursing knowledge and enhancing the quality of care you're able to provide to those in need. ☞

Deborah E. Trautman is president and chief executive officer of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing in Washington, DC.



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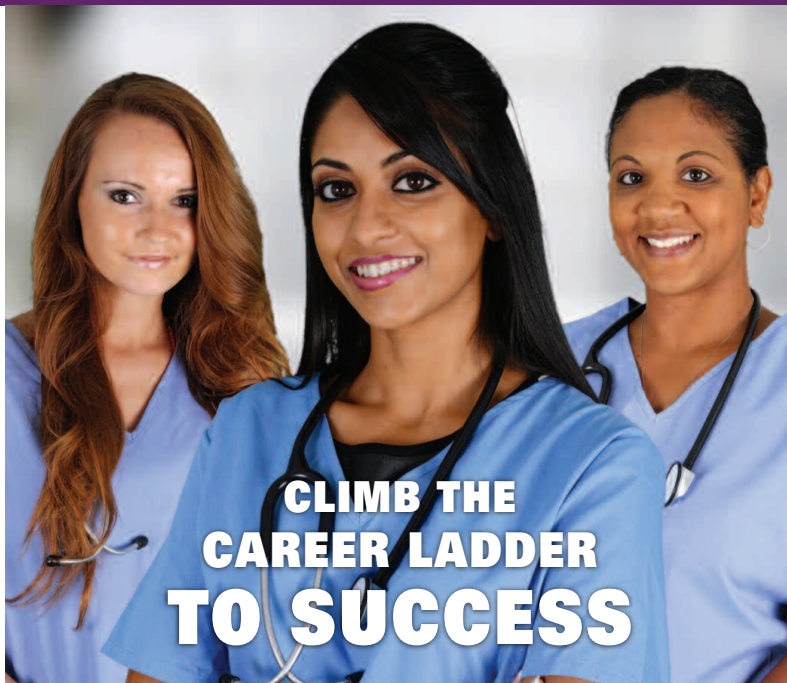
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With 79.6% of employers now requiring or having a strong preference for nurses with a baccalaureate degree and a growing demand for nurses, there's no better time to return to school.

Nursing is growing... and so are your opportunities!

16%
Projected increase in employment from 2014 to 2024 for nurses (7% average growth for all occupations)

The marketplace...where do you fit in?

61%
Percentage of RNs who work in hospitals (but opportunities in other settings are expanding quickly)

Average mean annual wages

\$72,180	RNs
\$102,390	Nurse midwives
\$104,610	Nurse practitioners
\$164,030	Nurse anesthetists


Average nurses' salary by education

\$79,000	Bachelor's degree
\$87,000	Master's degree
\$96,000	Doctorate degree

Don't forget to...

Set your goals
 Consider what you hope to achieve personally and professionally. (See page 4.)

Choose a program
 Decide if you want an online, onsite, or hybrid program and whether an accelerated option might be right for you. (See pages 8 and 10.)

Find funding
 In addition to the schools you apply to, check out Johnson & Johnson's The Campaign for Nursing at <https://goo.gl/GKuwa3>

Prepare yourself
 Be sure your computer skills are up to speed and organize your time. (See page 12.)

Be open to new learning strategies
 Like practice, education is becoming interprofessional. (See page 26.)

Balance your life
 Demands at work, home, and school will compete for your time. Take advantage of all your resources, delegate when possible, and take care of yourself. For ideas, visit <https://goo.gl/m7AFK7>

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016-17 Edition, <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>; American Association of Colleges of Nursing; Medscape survey http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/854372_5.



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Frontiers of nursing education

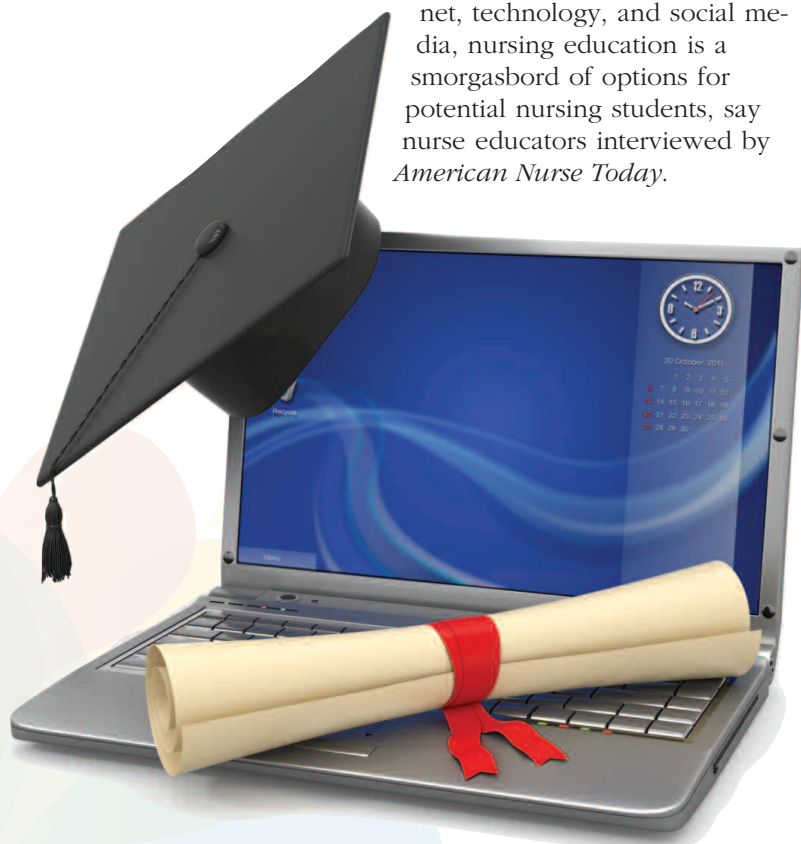
As student needs and priorities shift, education adapts.

By Janet Boivin, BSN, RN

In less than half a century, nursing education has advanced from a highly structured model to one with a wide menu of options designed to satisfy the diverse learning needs of today's students.

Now, in the first quarter of the 21st century, nursing education is an amalgam of traditional classrooms, innovative educational tracks, and technology-enhanced training. This new frontier is geared toward the learning and lifestyle needs of students and the changing healthcare environment in which new RNs will care for patients.

Accelerated and online nursing programs, once considered nontraditional, have proven effective and valuable to students and the nursing profession. Combined with the Internet, technology, and social media, nursing education is a smorgasbord of options for potential nursing students, say nurse educators interviewed by *American Nurse Today*.



Nursing education changing rapidly

“The use of the term ‘nontraditional’ as it relates to nursing programs has evolved over time,” says Robin Kirschner, EdD, DNP, RN, CNE, NEA-BC, CRA, Chamberlain College of

Nursing’s Dean of MSN Specialty Tracks. “At one time, nontraditional would have meant any courses that were presented outside of a brick-and-mortar standard classroom. Today, higher education uses technology to support access to many types of learning opportunities, including clinical practice, academic, and continuing short-course offerings.”

Changes in nursing education are driven by changes in society, the growing use of technology, and the profession’s need for more nurses. Accelerated programs, the first of the nontraditional programs, were designed for adults with an undergraduate degree in a non-nursing discipline who wanted to enter the nursing profession. They allowed students to become licensed nurses by completing shorter, more intensive programs. These graduates proved highly successful as RNs and are sought after by employers.

Online options suit advanced degree learners

Technology allows nursing education to adapt to the schedules of busy students with families and work commitments as well as tech savvy Generation X-ers and Millennials who prefer learning online and on screens, whether laptop, smartphone, or tablet.

“Our goal is to provide broad access to high-quality education in line with the evidence that more students are gravitating to online learning,” says Joan Shaver, PhD, RN, FAAN, professor and dean of the University of Arizona’s College of Nursing in Tucson. “With good instructional design, [online education] provides new ways to enhance learning and to be more efficient and respectful of students’ time, many of whom are working to cover the rising costs of education.”

Online education has helped fuel an increase in licensed RNs obtaining their BSNs, MSNs, and doctorate degrees. These options particularly suit working nurses with families, allowing them to choose when and where they want to learn.

When online nursing programs first became available, educators were skeptical of their value.

“The skepticism was related to fear—from fear of a loss of control to a sincere concern for whether a nontraditional educational environment would lead to content comprehension, mastery, and application,” Kirschner says. “Today, as we recognize the academic achievement equivalency between the online or nontraditional academic environments and traditional environments, we’re able to maintain a high level of education as we prepare nurses to meet the needs of their patients and the communities they serve.”

Increasing the number of advanced degree RNs

Both online and accelerated nursing programs have contributed to the increase of RNs with BSNs and advanced degrees that was recommended in the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* 2010 report. The report called for 80% of RNs to have a BSN or higher degree by the year 2020. It also said, “Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.”

Online BSN- and MSN-completion programs have fueled the race for BSN completion. The online completion rate of RNs to BSNs and BSNs to MSNs has doubled, says Juliann G. Sebastian, PhD, RN, FAAN, chair of the AACN board of directors and dean of the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Nursing. In addition, the number of RN to BSN programs increased from 152 in 2010 to 346 today, and completely online BSN to MSN programs rose from 60 to 220, according to AACN’s latest annual survey.

Accelerated nursing programs continue to be an important pathway into nursing for individuals with degrees in other fields who are looking to change careers, Sebastian adds. (See *Is an accelerated program right for you?* on page 10.)

Tina Gerardi, MS, RN, CAE, deputy director for Academic Progression in Nursing (APIN), a grant initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in partnership with the Tri-Council for Nursing and administered by the American Organization of Nurse Executives, says seamless academic progression and accelerated programs have indeed helped the numbers. In 2010, first-time NCLEX test takers with a BSN or MSN was 39.3%. In 2015, it was 44.9%.

APIN collaborates with state Action Coalitions and their partners to accelerate imple-

mentation of promising practices that will help states achieve the IOM’s goals.

Shaver believes that accelerated and bridge programs for those with either a community college nursing degree or with a degree in another field are conducive to bypassing the BSN and moving straight to a general master’s degree.


University of Arizona has a conventional BSN entry into nursing program and an MSN entry to the profession. In 2013, the college of nursing launched an online general master’s degree program in clinical systems leadership.

“This program is specifically designed for practicing RNs who have earned an associate’s degree from a community college (44 credits) by merging baccalaureate with graduate-level studies (31 credits). They graduate with a general master’s degree and not the more usual advanced specialty practice master’s degree,” Shaver says. “Since RN enrollees have learned basic nursing, the greatest emphasis is on knowledge and skills for practical clinical systems leadership.”

University campuses still an option

The educators interviewed agreed that brick-and-mortar classrooms will probably always be an option for nursing education. Clinical practice simulation and real patient field practice isn’t likely to be fully replaced with technology anytime soon.

“But even face-to-face programs use some online components or elements that augment classroom discussion,” Gerardi says. “This gives students an enriched learning environment and allows faculties to be more responsive to students’ personal needs.”

Says University of Arizona’s Shaver, “It is hard to know how long we will have students who prefer the on-campus intensive experience. I think it best for educators to be planning a shift in strategy to better match the evolving lifestyles of students and their use of technology now and in the future.” 

Janet Boivin is a freelance writer.

The online completion rate of RNs to BSNs and BSNs to MSNs has doubled. The number of RN to BSN online programs rose from 60 to 220.

Is an accelerated nursing program right for you?

This challenging approach to nursing education offers plenty of rewards.

By Janet Boivin, BSN, RN



Even with a 3.8 GPA from the University of Florida, Katrina Sherman, a junior majoring in English, harbored doubts that she could find a well-paying job when she graduated. So she began considering nursing as an option.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in English in 2010, Sherman searched for accelerated nursing programs across the country. She created a spreadsheet and systematically recorded program names, the types of credits each required for admission, and the deadlines for applying.

Sherman chose a newly opened accelerated program at Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing that included a nursing residency. For 12 months, her life was about nursing in-

formatics, research, statistics, clinical rotations, and not much else, she says. Clinical rotations and classes were held simultaneously.

The payoff was a bachelor of science in nursing degree (BSN), a guaranteed job at Johns Hopkins, and the expectation that she would eventually go on to earn a master's degree in nursing to become an advanced practice nurse.

"It was pretty intense," says Sherman, who lives in Austin, TX, with her husband and baby boy. She works as a labor and delivery nurse at Seton Medical Center Austin. "[An accelerated program] wouldn't be for everyone." Sherman is now enrolled in Frontier Nursing University's midwifery program based in Kentucky.

Is an accelerated program right for you?

Consider the following when deciding if an accelerated program is a good fit for you.

Benefits

- **Less time required before you can look for a job.** Fast-track baccalaureate programs take between 11 and 18 months to complete, including prerequisites. Fast-track master's degree programs generally take about 3 years.
- **Most states offer accelerated programs.** According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), accelerated programs are available in 46 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. In 2016, there were 272 accelerated baccalaureate programs and 69 accelerated or entry-level master's programs. In addition, 24 new accelerated baccalaureate programs are in the planning stages, and 9 entry-level master's programs are also taking shape. To locate accelerated programs near you, visit www.aacn.nche.edu/students/nursing-program-search.
- **Accelerated program graduates are prized.** Employers

value the many layers of skill and education that graduates of accelerated programs bring to the workplace. According to AACN, employers report that these graduates are more mature, possess strong clinical skills, and are quick studies on the job.

Challenges

- **High admission standards.** Admission standards for accelerated programs are high, with programs typically requiring a minimum of a 3.0 GPA and a thorough prescreening process, according to AACN.
- **Intense time commitment.** The time required to complete an accelerated program can interfere with personal or other time-consuming responsibilities. And students enrolled in accelerated programs are encouraged not to work because of the intensity and time commitment.
- **Organization and time-management skills.** To stay on top of accelerated program requirements, students must have exceptional organizational and time-management skills.

Many roads, same destination

The good news about nursing education today is that an array of options exists to suit your learning style, career interests, financial and time constraints, and lifestyle. You'll find accelerated programs, online programs, and various program tracks that lead to different degrees in a variety of specialty areas.

The challenging news is that sorting out all the options and deciding which program is right for you is ever more confusing. Nursing experts say that potential students need to do more research, ask more questions, and know themselves much better than nursing students did in the past.

Because accelerated programs condense a great deal of information into an 18-month time frame (or less), you need to be sure you can devote the time to the program and immerse yourself in the learning experience, Sherman says. You also need to be self-disciplined and have effective time-management skills, she adds. (See *Is an accelerated program right for you?*)

"Accelerated programs are generally those that require a full-time credit load that is beyond the number often assigned in the industry," says Robin Kirschner, EdD, DNP, RN, CNE, NEA-BC, CRA, Chamberlain College of Nursing's Dean of MSN Specialty Tracks. "For example, a full-time undergraduate student would be expected to complete 12 credits per semester in a traditional program; in an accelerated program, the number of credits would likely be about 18 per semester."

First, know thyself

Kirschner also advises potential students to consider what they're most passionate about. Is it technology? Is it leadership? Is it direct care? And you should consider how this passion can be continued as your career advances.

"We urge students not to work because of the amount of time and effort an accelerated program requires," says Juliann G. Sebastian, PhD, RN, FAAN, University of Nebraska Medical Center, dean and chair of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Board of Directors.

Accelerated programs offer a "wonderful return on investment because of the short time frame," Sebastian says. But you'll still need to figure out how to pay for tuition and other related expenses.

Despite the heavy demands of an accelerated program, once you have the BSN or MSN in hand, you'll be welcomed by health-care recruiters. Past accelerated program graduates have proven themselves to be quick learners, hard workers, and dedicated professionals.

For more information about and locations of accelerated programs, go to AACN's website www.aacn.nche.edu and search "accelerated nursing programs." Also, most large university schools of nursing offer accelerated nursing programs that can be found on their websites.

Janet Boivin is a freelance writer.

Returning to nursing school? Keys to success

Preparation will help ease the transition.

By Teresa Shellenbarger, PhD, RN, CNE, ANEF, and Meigan Robb, PhD, RN



Congratulations! You have decided to pursue additional nursing education and been accepted at the program of your choice. You're happy—right? But you also may be feeling a bit anxious, especially if you haven't been in school for a while.

To help ensure your academic success, take time to prepare for the demands that lie ahead. You can spare yourself much anxiety on your educational journey by:

- improving your technology skills
- becoming a better writer
- getting organized
- staying engaged.

These strategies can help ease your transition and lay a strong foundation for your success.

Improving your technology skills

Today, higher education uses digitally driven approaches, including electronic textbooks, mobile computing, collaborative editing, and learning-management systems. That means you'll have to be tech-savvy to complete your coursework and assignments.

Basic computer literacy

Students must have basic computer literacy skills—at least a beginning competency with word-processing programs, email, and electronic searches. Here are some ways you can hone your skills in these areas:

- Take a community-based computer course.
- Enroll in a workshop hosted by the

school you'll be attending.

- View online videos about computer skills, such as those on YouTube.com.
- Ask a tech-savvy friend or family member to give you a quick lesson or two.

If you'll be completing online coursework, get in touch with the school's tech support center in advance. Some schools offer free trial courses or orientation programs that give students the chance to practice course navigation, document retrieval, and form submission. (See *Digital literacy: Retrieving information online*.) The tech support center also can help you identify your technology needs.

Electronic storage options

Plan for how you'll save important computer documents and files you'll use in nursing school. Your nursing program may offer personal electronic storage space on a network drive, allowing you to save files to the campus server. Such network storage offers advantages over a portable device like a USB or flash drive because in most cases, campus storage is automatically archived. USB drives, in contrast, are convenient but easily misplaced and susceptible to viruses and damage. If you decide to use a USB drive to save your files, protect it from damage during and after use and during transport.

Another storage option is a cloud-based service, such as Dropbox, Google Drive, or Microsoft OneDrive. Accessible from any device with Internet access, they offer cost-effective connection convenience, sharing ability, and archived storage. An Internet search can help you locate free or trial-based online storage options that you can try out to see if they meet your needs.

No matter what electronic storage option you choose, consider what techniques you'll use to stay organized. Come up with a simple naming convention for documents, and create computer folders with course names or numbers to use when saving files to prevent your computer home screen from becoming disorganized and cluttered.

Computer security

Increased email and Internet use may make your devices susceptible to malicious viruses that can damage or destroy data on your computer. Be sure to take essential precautions to prevent disastrous loss of digital information. Use caution when downloading content from the Internet to a USB; rely on



Digital literacy: Retrieving information online

All students must have the skills required to retrieve information, whether online or otherwise. This means you need at least some degree of digital literacy. The American Library Association defines digital literacy as “the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information.”

Obviously, the Internet abounds with valuable information. But you also need to know how to locate, access, and evaluate other sources. These include scholarly databases, such as the Cumulative Index for Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), MEDLINE, and PsycINFO.

Become familiar with key nursing journals, most of which are now available online, and how to access them through your school's account. Consider touring the campus library, visiting the library's website, or talking with a campus librarian to get up to speed on information retrieval. If you'll be enrolling in an online nursing program, work with the campus librarian to identify available off-site resources.

ly on familiar and reputable sources. Also, install antivirus and Internet security software on all of your electronic devices; this software may be available free or at a low cost from your school. You can also purchase it online from stores that sell software or from antivirus companies. In addition, work with your campus tech support center on computer security issues.

Becoming a better writer

Expect to do a lot of writing as you pursue additional nursing education. Before starting an essay, report, or other writing assignment, plan carefully. Read the instructor's guidelines thoroughly, and review the scoring criteria. Think about the major points of the assignment. We highly recommend that you create an outline, use ordered bullet points, or design a concept map to help



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you organize your thoughts.

Begin your paper with a topic or thesis sentence that states the purpose of the assignment; this helps you focus your efforts. At the end of the paper, provide a conclusion that summarizes your key takeaway points. Finally, allow adequate time for revisions. Revising is the key to good writing, so once you've made a first draft, expect to revise and edit it several more times.

Writing resources

If you struggle with writing, look into your nursing program's writing resources. Many schools have writing centers or peer resources that can help identify your writing problems and offer editing suggestions. Distance-education programs may have online tutorial tools, such as Pearson Smarthinking service or eTutoring.org. If these resources aren't available, ask an experienced writer, such as an English teacher, to review your work for clarity, grammar, structure, and other problems. You also can explore apps or electronic grammar checkers, such as Grammarly ([grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com)), which detect errors. For a handy resource on grammar rules, consult Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. Or visit websites such as Grammar Girl ([quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl/](https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl/)), which give helpful tips on writing.

Formatting and style guidelines

Some students struggle to format their papers according to specific standards and guidelines. Many nursing education programs use the American Psychological Association (APA) style guide to ensure consistent presentation of written material, including punctuation, abbreviations, headings, references, citations, and other elements.

Make sure you have access to whichever style guide your program uses, and familiarize yourself with it before classes begin. If, like many students, you find the

guidelines difficult to understand, you can get help from an online resource, such as the Purdue Online Writing Guide (OWL) at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>, or online tutorials, such as [apastyle.org/learn/courses/index.aspx](https://www.apastyle.org/learn/courses/index.aspx). If you think you'll be using one of these resources, consider downloading the app or accessing the website in advance so you can practice before completing your assignment.

Getting organized

As a returning nursing student, chances are you'll have to juggle the demands of school, family, and work. So planning and managing your time effectively is vital.

If you're going to study at home, carefully protect that time for school work and don't get distracted by household chores.

To record important dates and deadlines, use a paper planner or calendar or, alternatively, an electronic calendar, so you can set automatic reminders. We suggest you establish a study routine and build it into your weekly schedule.

Don't forget to schedule time for course readings and studying. It may be helpful to spend time every day reading over class notes, or accessing the learning management system so that content is reviewed regularly. Using this technique may help you avoid cramming for exams. Regular review also ensures you have time

to ask for content clarification from your instructor.

Find the best location for studying. Does your schedule allow you to go to a library or coffee shop for uninterrupted quiet time, or will you study at home? If you're going to study at home, carefully protect that time for school work and don't get distracted by household chores. Use a notebook or folder for each class to help you organize important papers.

Plan your studying activities and techniques around your unique learning style. For example, some students use flash cards to help memorize content. And while traditional index cards work well, technology-savvy students may want to use electronic flash-card applications, such as Study-Blue, Cram, Quizlet, or others. Some students find it helpful to highlight their notes, while others like to take notes about their course readings or rewrite their class notes. Consider your learning style and use the approach or techniques that work best for you.

Staying engaged

During the first week of classes, carefully review the syllabi and course materials, including assignment guidelines, evaluation criteria and rubrics, and available course resources. Mark due dates and important assignments on your calendar. You might find it helpful to create a daily or weekly to-do list to keep track of important activities. You can record these lists on paper, in an app, or by setting reminders on your mobile devices.


Also take this first week to become familiar with school policies. Many programs provide you with a student handbook or have a web site that specifies rules such as an attendance policy, grade requirements, and social media rules. Refer to those guidelines, particularly if you're ill, can't attend class, or when preparing for a clinical experience.

Keep important school phone numbers and email addresses in your contact list so you can easily reach administrators and faculty. And be sure to check school communication daily so you don't miss important class or school announcements.

Strive to get involved with other students and the campus community as a whole. For example, take part in collaborative learning activities, such as study groups with other students. These activities can boost your motivation and enhance your understanding of materials while offering peer support.

Academic advisors and faculty members can make your back-to-school transition easier. Make an appointment to meet with your advisor when you start your program and periodically throughout your coursework. Research suggests proper academic advising promotes student persistence, enhances success, aids with the transition to school, and promotes appropriate decision making. Faculty members, for their part, can support your learning efforts, offer guidance on coursework, and serve as mentors.

Ready for success

Returning to school may present many challenges. Planning your academic program appropriately can promote your success. Boosting your tech skills, honing your writing skills, getting organized, and staying engaged can make your return to school a more productive and enjoyable experience. 

Teresa Shellenbarger is a professor of nursing at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Indiana, Pennsylvania. **Meigan Robb** is an assistant professor of nursing at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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Ready to change specialties?

Make sure you know yourself and what you really want.

By Janet Boivin, BSN, RN



Deciding to change your nursing specialty can require as much self-assessment and research as transitioning into an entirely new career. Or it can be as simple as moving to a hospital unit that requires similar nursing skills but has a different patient population.

I started my Baby Boomer nursing career in orthopedics. After a year or so, I went to a neuro-medical surgical unit in a Boston teaching hospital. I made the change not because I disliked orthopedics but because I thought neurology and caring for cognitively impaired patients would be more challenging. But I also knew I didn't want the level of complexity associated with patients in the neuro intensive care unit (ICU).

The challenge for today's nurses who want to change specialties is the growing array of new nursing and health disciplines from which they can choose. These areas, such as information technology, pharmaceutical sales, and nursing research are the outgrowth of rapidly evolving healthcare tech

and medical knowledge, as well as a national emphasis on providing more prevention, treatment, and end-of-life care in the home and community.

Where do I begin?

Start by knowing yourself and what you and your family need psychologically, spiritually, and financially, say career coaches Carmen Kosicek, MSN, RN, CNM, PMHNP, and Keith Carlson, BSN, RN, NC-BC. (See *Honest self-reflection*.)

"Do a deep self-assessment of who you are and what you like to do; what lights you up and makes you feel happy and fulfilled," says nursing career coach, nurse blogger, and podcaster Carlson. "For most people, that's a big deal."

Kosicek, who has an online coaching program and is CEO of Alay Health Team, a group of psychiatric prescribing providers caring for children and adults via onsite visits and tele-psychiatry throughout Wisconsin,

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Honest self-reflection

Switching nursing specialties requires honest self-reflection. Ask yourself these questions to ensure you make a change that best suits your interests, abilities, and needs.

- Why do you want to change specialties?
- Are you making the change for the right reasons or do you want to get away from your boss or uncooperative colleagues?
- Do you want a change from hospital nursing?
- Do you want less or more contact with patients?
- Do you want to work with patients only by phone or videoconferencing?
- Do you want an entirely new specialty requiring additional skills and training, such as intensive care units or the operating room?
- Do you prefer to work with colleagues as part of a team or to work on your own?
- Would you like a job that requires traveling, such as pharmaceutical or medical device sales?
- Have you ever considered the benefits of military nursing, such as free education and travel?
- Do you prefer working in a rural or urban setting? For example, working in an emergency department (ED) in a rural area may provide a broader range of experience than a city ED where residents, medical students, and physicians provide most of the care.
- Will changing to a new specialty require you to move to find a job? If so, will the cost of living, housing, and income levels of a new geographic area work for you and your family?

If you require deeper insight, read a book frequently used by career centers: *The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change Your Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success*, by Nicholas Lore. Another classic is *What Color Is Your Parachute? 2017: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*, by Richard N. Bolles.

agrees. “Think about what kind of work environment would be best for your personality and work needs. Do you like to be constantly busy with unexpected challenges? Or do you prefer a slower pace with a fairly predictable routine?”

Next, do your research

Once you understand why you want a change and what you think you want to do, then it’s time to research your areas of interest. You don’t want to move into a new specialty only to find it’s not what you expected.

“Some specialties are simpler to jump into than others,” Carlson says. “If you have worked in an emergency department (ED) or ICU, it would be easier to become a flight nurse because you already have many of the skills you would need, such as thinking quickly and working with trauma patients.”

Think beyond the clinical setting, Kosicek urges: “Focusing [only] on a hospital job is so 1980s and 1990s. Nurses don’t realize how many jobs can be found working in the community.” For example, she says, pharmaceutical companies hire nurses to work with providers and patients, demonstrating how to use new injectable medications. Psychiatric telemedicine, home health, and patient monitoring for chronic diseases are other growing areas. “You just have to open your mind and ask yourself, ‘What can I do?’” Kosicek says.

Do some digging on Google to discover these new roles as well as more traditional specialties through nursing blogs, websites, and nursing publications. From your research, determine what transitioning into the specialty takes. You’ll want to find answers to these questions:

- Do you need certifications?
- Will you need additional education or training?
- Does the specialty require a certain amount of previous experience? If so, how can you get it?
- What are the physical requirements for the specialty?

Talk to nurses you know in that specialty and ask them what they do and how they like it. Don’t be shy. People usually love to talk about themselves. Carlson recommends setting up informational interviews that involve asking an experienced nurse in a particular specialty to meet with you and talk about his or her area of expertise. “These types of

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Can you go back to school?

A career move may require going back to school. Ask yourself these questions to help you make sure it's the right move for you.

- What's your long-term career goal?
- What do you want to do with the degree?
- Do you have the resources to finance a new degree?
- Do you want the challenge of being an advanced practice nurse, such as a nurse practitioner or certified nurse anesthetist?
- Can you go back to school full-time or do you have family or work considerations to factor into the equation?

interviews are powerful tools," Carlson says. "I consider them a form of deep networking."

Take advantage of nursing organizations, such as the American Nurses Association. And most nursing specialties have a national association with local chapters. Their websites often contain a wealth of information. Take it one step further and call or email nurses who are listed as members of the local chapters and reach out to national association leaders and tell them you're interested in learning about their specialty. They'll be happy to talk about what they do.

You'll find a comprehensive list of national associations at the Illinois Center for Nursing website (<http://nursing.illinois.gov/nursing-specialty.asp>).

Remember the patients

Patients and their characteristics and particular needs can get overshadowed when you focus on the nursing or medical discipline in which you're interested. But the

patients you care for every day will affect your job satisfaction, Kosicek says.

We all know some patients are easier to take care of than others, whether it's because of their personalities or the type of illness, disease, injury, or disability for which they're being treated. If you're uncomfortable around serious illness or death, then oncology or hospice nursing probably isn't for you. Some nurses enjoy caring for individuals in the final stages of life. Others may be better suited for specialties focused on an earlier stage of life, such as neonatology or pediatrics.

If you prefer less face-to-face contact with patients, you might want to consider working for a call center, telemedicine provider, pharmaceutical company, or health insurance provider.

How do I find a job in a new specialty?

Network, network, network. Talk to every nurse you know working in the specialty or specialties in which you're interested and tell them you're looking for a job. Carlson is a proponent of using social media, such as joining Twitter or Facebook chats and nursing conversations on LinkedIn.

More traditional job boards, such as www.indeed.com and nursing websites, are also worth checking out and let you narrow your job search by specialty and geographic location. Visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics website (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/health-care/registered-nurses.htm>) for information about the areas of nursing seeing the most growth.

Is it time for educational advancement?

Maybe it's not a new specialty you want or need but more education to advance in your career or take it in a new direction. Deciding to return to school requires planning and a full understanding of your goals. (See *Can you go back to school?*) Several organizations and websites provide help. Two of the more useful sites are the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (www.aacn.nche.edu) and the Johnson & Johnson Campaign for Nursing's Future (www.discovernursing.com).

The sky's the limit

Whatever you decide to do, Carlson and Kosicek emphasize not limiting your choices by what you think you can or can't do with your nursing education, experiences, and skills. "Nurses can learn to do almost anything," says Kosicek. ☞

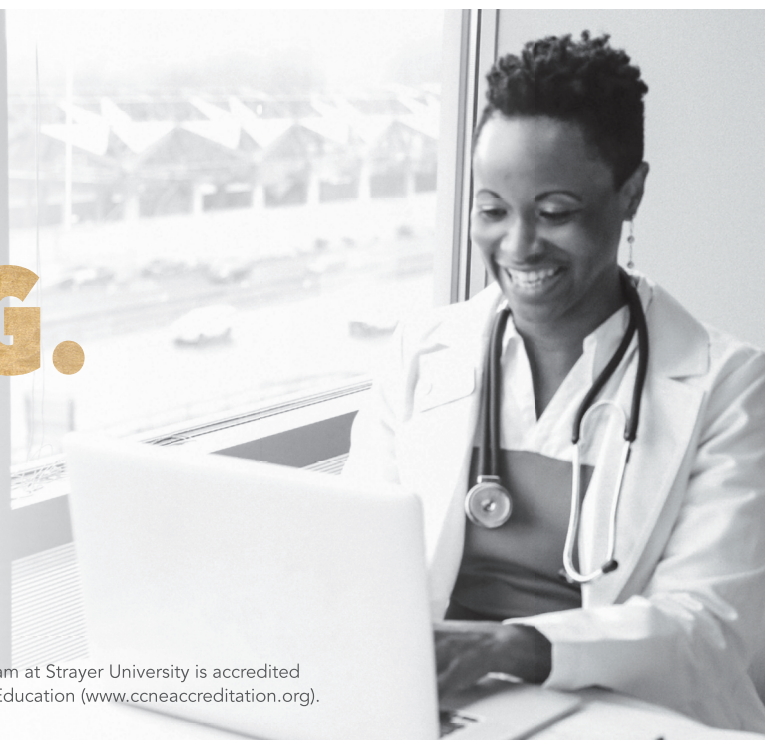
Janet Boivin is a freelance writer.

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Lifelong learning: Is a post-master's certificate the right option for you?

It may be the key to opening the door to new opportunities.

By Meigan Robb, PhD, RN, and Teresa Shellenbarger, PhD, RN, CNE, ANEF

As a professional nurse, you know the importance of embracing lifelong learning and the value of furthering education to enhance your career opportunities. The Institute of Medicine's 2010 report *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* suggests that to promote change and enhance population health, nurses must commit to advancing their knowledge and skills. One way to do this is to continue your education and seek a post-master's certificate—an educational option for both clinically focused advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) and nonclinically focused master's-prepared nurses.

Nurses pursuing post-master's certificates can continue their education in a new specialty or in a subspecialty of their current practice. Certificate programs are attractive because they build on previous academic success and leverage the nurse's professional experiences.

But before embarking on further education, learn more about your options so you can make an informed decision about whether this educational track suits your needs.

If it does, choose a program that works for you. (See *Types of post-master's certificate programs*.)

Is it the right path for you?

To determine if a post-master's certificate program supports your professional growth, you'll need to do some soul-searching. Make a list of your goals. Are you interested in changing your work focus and shifting away from your master's preparation into a new area? If so, consider whether you want to leave the bedside, enter the academic setting, or move into a different clinical role, such as nursing informatics. Or do you want to expand your current work role but obtain additional education or specialization? In this case, think about which role you would like to transition to (for example, nurse executive) or which specialty population you would like to gain expertise in (for example, pediatrics).

Next, ask yourself:

- What new skills do I need to acquire to meet my goals?
- How will completing a certificate program help me meet my goals?



- What new professional skillset do I want to obtain from completing a certificate program?
- How will I be viewed professionally after completing this additional education?
- Have I established a work history that adequately prepares me for a certificate program?
- Do I have the time it takes to complete the additional education?
- Do I have the funds needed to complete it?

Your answers to these questions will help you identify the best certificate programs for you and choose among them.

Which program is the best fit?

Once you've decided on the area in which you want to pursue a certificate, explore specific program options. Consider such factors as program length, course delivery method, financial considerations, admission requirements, and application process. To gather information, visit the academic institution's website or contact its program director. Also, ask professional contacts for their opinion on the programs you're considering. They may have personal experience and be able to provide information that's not widely available.

Program length

Certificate programs may vary in length depending on the student's enrollment status (full- or part-time) and number of credits required. Total credits required can range from 9 to more than 42, with clinically focused certificate programs typically requiring a higher number of credits. Time to complete the program can vary from two consecutive semesters to more than 24 consecutive months.

Course delivery options

Courses in certificate programs may be delivered in a traditional classroom only, online only, or in a mixture of both (hybrid); in the latter, students attend some classroom sessions while also completing online coursework. Traditional classroom and hybrid methods may work well if the program is located near you.

Online programs, which offer greater accessibility and scheduling flexibility, are growing nationally. To determine which type of course delivery best suits you, con-



Types of post-master's certificate programs

Once you've determined that a post-master's certificate program can help you reach your career goals, learn about the types of programs available. Internet searches are a good starting point, as are nursing program websites.

In general, these programs offer specialty education and skills training either in clinical areas, such as gerontology, or in nonclinically focused areas, such as nursing education.

- If you're seeking advancement in a clinical field, consider pursuing one of the advanced practice RN (APRN) specialties—certified nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, certified registered nurse anesthetist, and certified nurse-midwife. If you're already an APRN, you might want to specialize by enrolling in a program with a specific population focus, such as adult gerontology acute care, pediatric primary care, or psychiatric mental health.
- On the other hand, perhaps you want to explore a non-clinically focused certificate program that emphasizes other roles, such as nursing education, leadership, or informatics. Nonclinical post-master's certificate programs can help you expand your professional roles and opportunities.

Certificate program vs. certification

Be sure you understand the difference between a certificate program and certification.

- Completing a post-master's certificate program indicates you have successfully passed the coursework and earned the associated credits.
- To become certified requires you to pass an exam offered through a professional credentialing organization.

Keep in mind that some, but not all, certificate programs prepare you to take certification exams to earn professional credentials.

Be aware that most institutions require applicants to have a minimum graduate-level grade point average of 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale).

sider your learning preferences and needs. If the online program isn't based in your own state, verify that the institution is authorized to provide distance education in your state.

Also, find out if the program has residency or clinical practice requirements.

- Residency requirements could involve attending periodic onsite activities at the institution for program-related activities, such as workshops, skills lab activities, or evaluation sessions.
- Clinical practice requirements generally are associated with clinically focused certificate programs that require practice opportunities with an appropriately prepared preceptor in a healthcare organization.

Money matters

Can you afford to pursue a post-master's certificate? Cost per credit can range from \$300 to \$1,400. Additional institutional fees or charges may increase overall program costs. If needed, look for ways to reduce your expenses by exploring available financial aid opportunities, including military discounts,

corporate partnerships, scholarships, and tuition reimbursement from employers.

Admission requirements

Review the admission requirements for the certificate programs you're considering. Most require applicants to hold at least a master of science in nursing degree from an accredited institution. Also, your RN license must be current and unencumbered. And depending on the program's focus, you may need to document your work experience in a particular clinical setting or for a specific number of years in the specialty area. Finally, be aware that most institutions require applicants to have a minimum graduate-level grade point average of 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale).

Application process

First, check the program's application deadline. Some institutions use rolling admission,




reviewing applications when they're received and making admission decisions immediately. Others adhere to established yearly deadlines, reviewing all applications and making admission decisions all at once.

On the application, expect to provide information about your previous education, current and past employment experiences, and professional goals. Also, you'll need to show proof of previous academic success and provide official

copies of transcripts. Which transcripts you'll be asked to provide vary by institution. Some institutions ask you to supply all previous educational transcripts; others ask only for transcripts associated with your highest nursing degree obtained.

For some programs, you may have to write an essay addressing a set of questions about your background, professional goals, or perceived ability to succeed in meeting the goals of the certificate program. In others, you may also need to submit professional references describing your professional traits. Or you may be asked to submit a professional portfolio indicating your experiences, accomplishments, and professional goals.

Advancing your goals

A post-master's certificate program is a logical option for nurses interested in pursuing additional education. By carefully considering admission requirements, application process, program length, delivery method, and costs, you can identify which certificate program best aligns with your professional goals and personal circumstances. 

Meigan Robb is an assistant professor of nursing at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Teresa Shellenbarger is a professor of nursing at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Indiana, Pennsylvania.

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Interprofessional education

Combining skills and knowledge from different disciplines enhances patient care.

By Joanne Disch, PhD, RN, FAAN

In 2003, the Committee on Health Professions Education of the Institute of Medicine released a report recommending that “All health professionals should be educated to deliver patient-centered care as members of an interdisciplinary team, emphasizing evidence-based practice, quality improvement approaches, and informatics.” Thus, a common recommendation was directed to all health professions’ schools to ensure their graduates are competent in these five areas. Through its work in the Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) initiative, the nursing community divided quality improvement into two competencies, resulting in a sixth area—safety.

One of the most challenging of these competencies to master is teamwork and collaboration. Historically, students in one discipline learn the content relevant to their profession but have little experience interacting with students from other disciplines. For example, in a survey asking nursing faculty from 22 schools about their students’ experiences in interprofessional (IP) learning, results showed that only 18% of students had participated in IP courses. In many cases, when students from one healthcare discipline (for example, medical school students) do attempt to practice teamwork with another healthcare discipline (for example, nursing), the approach has been to have another medical student play the role of the nurse. The same is true for many nursing schools. What we’ve routinely seen, then, are new clinicians with little authentic experience communicating with, understanding, valuing, or partnering with colleagues from other disciplines.

Interprofessional education defined

Interprofessional education (IPE), as defined by the World Health Organization, occurs “when students from two or more professions learn about, from, and with each other to enable effective communication and improve health outcomes.” The benefits to students include the following:

- They learn about each other’s scopes of re-

sponsibility and roles so that the particular expertise that each brings can be used to improve patient care.

- They can identify strengths in other team members that may complement or enrich their own practice.
- They’re more likely to ask for help or speak up to help someone else if they’ve established an interprofessional relationship.
- They develop more effective problem-solving skills as a result of working with people with differing points of view.
- Their communication skills improve, which is particularly important in high-risk situations such as handoffs or a patient crisis.
- Their patient care is safer and more personalized as a result of sharing vital information.
- They enjoy their work more because they’re part of a team that values all members for what they bring and who they are.

IPE doesn’t take the place of nursing students learning to be excellent clinicians, but since health care is a team effort, students need to learn how to work effectively with colleagues. (See *Teamwork and collaboration competency*.)

What’s necessary for effective IPE?

Several schools have launched ambitious programs in an attempt to provide meaningful teamwork and collaboration experiences. These programs take various forms, including having students from different professions taking courses together, collaborating on shared projects, working together in interprofessional clinics, and conducting simulation exercises. Some programs are effective, some are not.

As Deborah Powell, former dean of the School of Medicine at the University of Minnesota, once noted: “Sitting together in a class does not an interprofessional experience make.” Barnsteiner, along with nursing and medical colleagues, provides a comprehensive review of the history of IPE and suggests six criteria essential for effective IPE. (See *Criteria for full engagement of interprofessional education*.)

(continued on page 28)



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How to get the most out of IPE

If you're a nursing student, what can you do to get the most out of learning with students from other professions or disciplines?

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Learn about the scope of their profession or discipline. What are the common patient and family problems your fellow students focus on? What are the particular content and skill areas that are essential for them to learn? Where do they see themselves practicing?

Engage fully in joint learning experiences. Your nursing curriculum is critically important, but in today's healthcare environment,

(continued on page 30)

Teamwork and collaboration competency

Cronenwett and colleagues identified the following knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within nursing and interprofessional teams to foster open communication, mutual respect, and shared decision-making to achieve quality patient care.

Knowledge

- Describe own strengths, limitations, and values in functioning as a team member
- Describe scopes of practice and roles of healthcare team members
- Describe strategies for identifying and managing overlaps in team member roles and accountabilities
- Recognize contributions of other individuals and groups in helping patients and families achieve health goals
- Analyze differences in communication style preferences among patients and families, nurses, and other healthcare team members
- Describe the impact of own communication style on others
- Discuss effective strategies for communicating and resolving conflict
- Describe examples of the impact of team functioning on safety and quality of care
- Explain how authority gradients influence teamwork and patient safety
- Identify system barriers and facilitators of effective team functioning
- Examine strategies for improving systems to support team functioning

Skills

- Demonstrate awareness of own strengths and limitations as a team member
- Initiate plan for self-development as a team member
- Act with integrity, consistency, and respect for differing views
- Function competently within own scope of practice as a healthcare team member
- Assume role of team member or leader based on the situation
- Initiate requests for help when appropriate to situation
- Clarify roles and accountabilities under conditions of potential overlap in team member functioning
- Integrate the contributions of others who play a role in helping patients and families achieve health goals
- Communicate with team members, adapting own style of communicating to needs of the team and situation
- Demonstrate commitment to team goals
- Solicit input from other team members to improve individual and team performance
- Initiate actions to resolve conflict
- Follow communication practices that minimize risks associated with handoffs among providers and across transitions in care
- Assert own position and perspective in discussions about patient care
- Choose communication styles that diminish risks associated with authority gradients among team members

Attitudes

- Acknowledge own potential to contribute to effective team functioning
- Appreciate importance of intra- and inter-professional collaboration
- Value perspectives and expertise of all healthcare team members
- Respect the centrality of patients and families as members of any healthcare team
- Respect the unique attributes that members bring to a team, including variations in professional orientations and accountabilities
- Value teamwork and the relationships upon which it is based
- Value different styles of communication used by patients, families, and healthcare providers
- Contribute to resolution of conflict and disagreement
- Appreciate the risks associated with handoffs among providers and across transitions in care
- Value the influence of system solutions in achieving effective team functioning

Source: Cronenwett L, Sherwood G, Barnsteiner J, et al. Quality and safety education for nurses. *Nurs Outlook*. 2007;55(3):122-31. Copyright 2007, reprinted with permission from Elsevier.



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understanding what all team members bring to patient care is equally important. Seek out classes or learning experiences with other students. If they're not available, talk with your faculty about creating some. (See *Criteria for full engagement of interprofessional education*.) The QSEN website (www.qsen.org) provides some excellent examples that faculty have developed and posted for others to use.


Seek to understand their special skills.

Using a case study about a complex patient situation with a diverse group of students often elicits solutions that any of the students alone wouldn't have identified. This is also true in the clinical setting among healthcare professionals, which is why learning with, from, and about each other is so crucial. For example, when nursing and occupational health students got together and examined how to transition a patient home after a stroke, the two groups focused on different concerns. The nursing students expressed concern about mobility and safety in preventing falls, while the occupational health students wondered how the patient would maneuver in the kitchen at home or even open up a can of soup.

Be open to creative learning opportunities. IPE can work well with students from any profession or discipline. Many nursing schools don't share a campus with a medical school, so for their nursing students, most IPE occurs by working with students from outside of health

care. However, any field of study can offer fascinating learning opportunities. For example, working with students from a college of design can provide insight into human factors and safety science; students of ergonomics can provide a new perspective on body mechanics. Learning is limited only by the creativity of those seeking to learn. What might you learn from students in a music school, a college of pharmacy, or a center for performing arts?

Facilitating patient care

Healthcare complexity requires active involvement and collaboration to facilitate problem-solving, enhanced care delivery, and quality improvement. No one profession or discipline has all of the knowledge or skills. By pooling our insights and experiences, we can improve patient care and our own performance. 

Joanne Disch is professor ad honorem at the University of Minnesota School of Nursing in Minneapolis.

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Criteria for full engagement of interprofessional education

To ensure an effective interprofessional education (IPE) program, Barnsteiner and colleagues developed these six criteria.

- 1 An explicit philosophy of IPE permeates the organization. The philosophy is well known, observable, and measurable.
- 2 Educators from the different professions co-create the learning experiences.
- 3 Students have integrated and experiential opportunities to learn collaboration and teamwork and how it relates to the delivery of safe, quality care.
- 4 IPE learning experiences are embedded in the curricula and are part of the required student course load.
- 5 Students demonstrate a single set of interprofessional competencies, such as those promoted by the Institute of Medicine.
- 6 The organizational infrastructure fosters IPE, including support for educator time to develop IPE options, incentive systems for educators to engage in IPE, and integrated activities across schools and professions for students and educators.

Source: Barnsteiner JH, Disch JM, Hall L, Mayer D, Moore SM. Promoting interprofessional education. *Nurs Outlook*. 2007;55(3):144-50. Copyright 2007, reprinted with permission from Elsevier.

Additional resources

- Agency for Healthcare and Research Quality. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Teamwork training. Last updated July 2016. <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/primers/primer/8/teamwork-training>
- Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC®). Core competencies for interprofessional collaborative practice: 2016 update. www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/IPEC-2016-Updated-Core-Competencies-Report.pdf
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Can nursing meet the 80/2020 goal?

Progress is slow but steady as RNs head back to school to get their BSN.

By Janet Boivin, BSN, RN

Will 80% of RNs hold a bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) degree by the year 2020? Not likely, say nursing experts. But not to worry, they add. For the first time in the decades-old debate over whether a BSN should be required for practice, RNs are heading back to school in record numbers.

The match that lit this educational flame was the release of the Institute of Medicine's 2010 *Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* report, which developed four key messages to help the nursing profession better meet the needs of a rapidly transforming healthcare system. One of those key messages was that "Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression." This message encouraged the profession to work toward 80% of practicing RNs having a BSN or higher degree by the year 2020.

The recommendation was immediately embraced by nurse educators, nurse leaders, hospital administrators, and most important, nurses themselves. "My message would be that most nurses in this country are working very hard to meet this goal," says Susan Hassmiller, PhD, RN, FAAN, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's adviser for nursing and the director of the Future of Nursing™: Campaign for Action. "The profession now has more BSNs than associate degree nurses, so we have jumped that hurdle, and the numbers are going up and up in every state. But we are far from the 80/2020 goal."

"The growth in RN-to-BSN graduates has more than doubled, from a bit below 23,000 to more than 56,000," says Joanne Spetz, PhD, a health economist at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF). She's also a professor at the Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies and associate director for research at the Healthforce Center at UCSF.

It takes a team to grow a profession

Tina Gerardi, MS, RN, CAE, deputy director for Academic Progression in Nursing, agrees. She credits the increased numbers of associate degree nurses returning to school for a BSN degree to community college nursing faculties' commitment to students achieving the BSN or higher degrees and the development of strong partnerships between community colleges, universities, and hospitals.

"The partnerships and collaboration fostered between associate degree programs and higher education has changed the culture about nursing education," she says. "The IOM report also encouraged collaboration between education and employers. We need to continue to foster those programs with a strong partnership between these entities."

Collaborators are breaking down roadblocks, such as financial, time, and distance constraints, that in the past deterred associate degree nurses from obtaining their BSN degree. Programs that allow direct entry into nursing programs for individuals with a non-nursing degree also have helped increase the number of RNs with a BSN degree.

Hybrid nursing programs use various tools—such as online courses and sharing of faculty between community colleges and 4-year nursing programs—to reduce costs and allow students to remain close to home so they can work and manage family responsibilities. "It uses the best of both worlds," Gerardi says.

Healthcare employers should be credited for pouring money into opportunities for nurses to gain their BSN degree and faculty members for taking on larger class sizes to accommodate more students, Hassmiller says. Building this educational infrastructure in the last 7 years is, in some ways, more of an achievement than the increased number of RNs with a BSN degree, says Hassmiller.

(continued on page 34)

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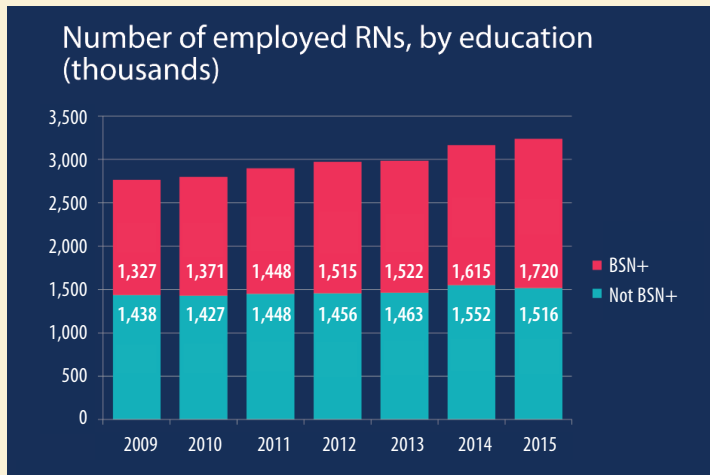
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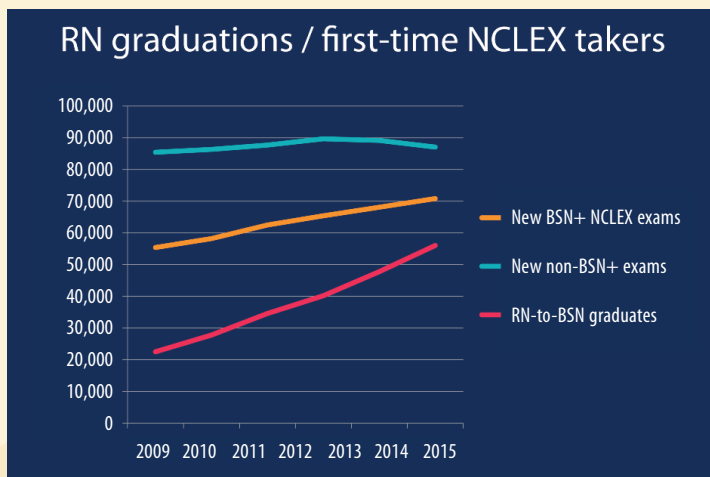
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Making progress

The number of employed nurses with a BSN or higher degree has increased since the Institute of Medicine's 2010 *Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* report, as shown below.



Steady growth has occurred since 2009 in the number of first-time test-takers with a BSN or higher entry degree, and the growth in RN-to-BSN graduates has more than doubled.



Source: Forecasting materials for RN workforce. <http://rnworkforce.ucsf.edu/news/forecasting-materials-rn-workforce>. Updated June 6, 2017.

“If I were to grade the infrastructure that has been built since 2010, I would give it an A minus,” she says. The progress toward 2020 has not caught up with the infrastructure, but this infrastructure will enable the profession to eventually reach the 80% goal.

Another motivator for nurses and the healthcare system is the mounting research-based evidence that patient outcomes are better when care is provided by RNs with a BSN degree, say the nursing experts. “That data resonates with nurses, whose concern for their patients comes first,” Spetz says.

Statistics can be deceiving

An examination of the most recent statistics indicates that the increased percentage of associate degree-to-BSN nurses is slight. But the change is more significant given that 3 million nurses are licensed in this country, Spetz says. “The percentage change masks big numbers. The number of RNs who are not at the BSN or higher level has grown 78,000. But at the same time, the number with a BSN grew nearly 400,000.” (See *Making progress*.)


Each year since 2014, the number of new first-time NCLEX test-takers with associate and diploma degrees declined a small amount while the number of first-time test-takers with a BSN degree or higher has steadily grown. Remarkable changes in RN education have occurred when looking at new graduates and RN-to-BSN graduates since 2010, Spetz says.

While changes in education—both entry level and RN-to-BSN—have been impressive, she says, progress is still too slow and will continue to be slow for the following reasons:

- The inflow of new RN-to-BSN graduates into the workforce is a trickle into a very large bucket.
- Some incumbent RNs aren't interested in going back to school.
- The profession continues to rely on associate degree programs to ensure an adequate number of RNs, especially in rural areas.
- Employers may give mixed messages; the preference for BSN degrees may fade as the labor market tightens.

Setting sights on 2025

Spetz says that while the 80% goal won't be achieved by 2020, it may be possible by 2025. She suggests that the profession gather data on nursing workforce and education, using a forecasting model developed to project BSN plus share over 10 years, and testing scenarios that might speed progress.

An online tool that forecasts the share of RNs who will have a BSN or higher degree based on current numbers and strategies, along with tools to test varying scenarios to accelerate progress, is now available to nurse leaders. It can be accessed at www.rnworkforce.ucsf.edu/news/forecasting-materials-rn-workforce. The tool and website were developed by Spetz for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Academic Progression in Nursing National Program Office. 

Janet Boivin, BSN, RN, is a freelance writer.




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Your doctorate and the path to persistence

Completing your doctorate requires support and more.

By Nancy Bellucci, PhD, RN, CNOR

High attrition rates for doctoral nursing students (reported to be as much as 50%) in the face of an increasing demand for PhD-prepared nursing faculty is a growing concern. So, what's at the crux of this problem and how do we solve it? When I was a doctoral student, I researched how other doctoral students balanced work, family, and school. The goal was to learn more about the strategies used by these students. (See *More about the research.*)

What's a doctoral nursing student to do?

Studying for an advanced degree is time-consuming and competes with the other demands of life—home, work, and professional responsibilities. Doctoral nursing students use various methods, often in combination, to manage their time and stress. Seeking support, planning, and creating schedules were described by the study participants as the most helpful strategies.

Seeking support

Participants identified help from a spouse or significant other with household responsibilities

as contributing the most to their success. Other sources of support came through mentoring and friendships. However, seeking support didn't guarantee receiving support. Some participants said they had limited support, which contributed to feeling isolated. These participants received most of their support from coworkers and family on an as-needed basis.

Many study participants said they often made compromises, forfeiting time with family and tending to household chores in favor of work and school responsibilities. But with the help of spouses, family, friends, and colleagues, the students were better able to persist in their graduate program.

Effective scheduling and planning

Study participants identified several tools that helped with scheduling, planning, and triaging their daily activities, including shared online calendars, scheduling books, sticky notes, and multiple alerts using electronic devices, as well as mentally making time for themselves. Time for self-care, while limited, came in the form of exercise, meditation, yoga, engaging in a hobby, quiet time, or simply watching a favorite show or movie.

Take a multipronged approach

No one method or strategy solved the challenge of balancing competing responsibilities. In fact, many participants revealed that they made adjustments day by day.

When you're working to balance multiple roles, you may feel isolated and alone in your efforts. The key to avoiding isolation lies in reaching out for support, relying on that support to be a resource and comfort, and being organized.

Nancy Bellucci is an online nursing faculty member at Galen School of Nursing in Louisville, Kentucky.

Visit www.AmericanNurseToday.com/?p=25723 for a list of selected references.

More about the research

My dissertation research study looked at specific strategies PhD nursing students used to achieve balance between work, family, and school. The participants represented nursing programs from around the United States. Data analysis revealed six major themes:

- 1 Multiple strategies and tools help to manage time.
- 2 Various approaches help to manage stress.
- 3 Support of a spouse, family, friends, and mentors is necessary to balance responsibilities.
- 4 Compromises are required to fulfill work and school responsibilities.
- 5 Many challenges interfere when working to find balance.
- 6 Most of the time in a given day is spent on work and school.

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