



Roles Outside the Hospital

Nursing beyond the traditional four walls of healthcare **By Susan Stinson**

The nursing profession has a long history of selfless dedication to patients. Today, perhaps more than ever, nurses are critical for providing education, access and care to patients. Nurses are also counted on to be on the front lines of addressing non-adherence, delays or disruptions, and the complexity and specificity of treatments and the associated costs.

In response, the role of nurses has evolved beyond the typical work in hospitals, offices and clinics, or as I like to say, the traditional four walls of healthcare.

While there are more opportunities than ever before for nurses to practice their chosen profession and help patients continue to receive the highest quality of care throughout their treatment, nursing's core attributes of learning, education, the values of accountability, collaboration, patient focus, innovation, integrity and passion remain.

Telehealth, field education, management and operational roles, and travel nursing provide opportunities outside of traditional settings while continuing to offer the benefits of the nursing profession. Most importantly, these roles focus specifically on patient outcomes and give nurses the ability to interact one-on-one with patients or manage a system that keeps patients on the road to recovery.

Exploring Nontraditional Nursing Careers

I have the opportunity to work with nurses in a variety of roles beyond the traditional four walls of healthcare. Specifically, our nurses' concentrations include telehealth, field education, and management and operations roles.

Telehealth Nursing

Telehealth nurses deliver the same quality care as any other nurse, but do so remotely instead of in-person.

Telehealth nurses are often the first call for patients after they receive a diagnosis or update on their illness. Responsibilities of telehealth nurses include providing emotional support to patients and caregivers, assessing patients for compliance and adherence to treatment regimens, identifying barriers to care and referring patients to additional support services as necessary.

While telehealth nursing is not a substitute for face-to-face care, its role is no less important. The practice increases access to care for patients by removing barriers such as travel and time; a phone call is far easier than a trip to the hospital. As a result, hospital admissions decrease while patient adherence increases, both of which help contribute to limiting healthcare costs for patients and providers.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY LEESER

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Field Education

Treatment regimens can be complex and confusing, not only for patients, but also for healthcare professionals administering care. It is important to address this issue by recruiting and employing specialized nurse educators who go into the field and conduct training sessions for healthcare providers. By ensuring providers are able to properly provide treatments, nurse educators are able to increase patient access to life-saving care that may otherwise be unattainable.

Management & Operations

Nursing opportunities are not limited to positions with nurse-patient interaction. In some cases, a nurse can actually have a significant impact on patients by managing and guiding other nurses who provide the one-on-one care. By coordinating and overseeing programs and initiatives for a healthcare provider or third-party agency, a director of nursing or person working a similar position works directly with a clinical team. While physical patient interaction may not be the primary focus, a nurse working in a management or operational capacity can impact patients in meaningful ways by effectively training and developing other nurses, and implementing policies and practices that directly impact the care that they receive.

Travel Nursing

Another career choice for nurses that is quickly gaining popularity across the healthcare industry is travel nursing.

Working in the same hospital or clinic for an extended period of time provides stability that motivates many nurses. For others, however, change can be exciting and a way to grow professionally. Once viewed as a temporary solution to staffing shortages, travel nursing is now a viable career for nurses looking to expand their horizons.

Travel nurses typically take assignments that span two to six months, exposing the nurse to new environments that foster career growth and exploration. The downside is limited, as short assignment lengths mean an unenjoyable position won't last long.

The vast majority of travel nurses work through an accredited agency – there are several agencies nationwide – that help secure positions and handle logistics, including pay, housing and benefits. Most travel nurses receive free or subsidized housing, as well as a choice of where they'd like to work. Travel nurses step in at critical times when additional support is needed and have the opportunity to touch countless patient lives in varied settings.

Making an Impact

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Take, for instance, an example of how specialized nurse educators helped boost new product adoption. A biotech company developed and, in conjunction with a pharmaceutical company, launched a new product that could only be administered in the critical care setting. Not surprisingly, the medical education message was complex and medical professionals required training to become familiar with the medication and know-how to administer treatment.

To efficiently reach the large specialty healthcare audience, the companies looked to nurse educators who could speak on local, regional and national levels at a variety of professional symposiums and meetings. Fifty nurse educators were recruited within 60 days for the initial training program. After the successful completion of that first training session, they expanded the program by screening and recruiting 500 additional nurse educators nationwide. Twelve more training programs were conducted over the next 18 months to ensure proper and effective implementation.

As a result of these efforts, patients who otherwise would not have had access to this product were able to reap its benefits. While certainly not the traditional nurse role, the impact of nurse educators on patient care is just as significant.

Pursuing a Career

For individuals interested in a new career path, nurses have an abundance of options. In many ways, we've entered the golden age of nursing. Understanding the positions available and deciding which is the best fit for one's passion and lifestyle is the first step in the process.

Conducting research and networking with other nurses, especially those currently practicing in one's desired specialty, is important. Once an area of specialization is chosen, additional education and certifications are often required. Obtaining these credentials and marketing oneself as a specialist will help produce a desirable nursing candidate.

Healthcare doesn't end in a clinical setting and nursing careers that go beyond the traditional four walls of healthcare allow nurses to become true champions of health.

Now, more than ever, nurses can expand their role and connect with patients in innovative ways. Telehealth, field education, management and operational roles, and travel nursing give nurses the opportunity to play a vital role in providing additional support to patients along the continuum of care. ■

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Often filling critical vacancies, agency nurses are usually well received by overworked staff and anxious hospital administrators. Read more on this topic at www.advanceweb.com/Nurses.