

## **My Path in Nursing: A Career Reflection and Looking Ahead**

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My journey into nursing has been somewhat unconventional, but I am grateful to be on the path that I am now. After closing a custom furniture business in 2023, I found myself at a crossroads – a seven-year endeavor had come to an unfortunate end, and at 32 years old, I needed to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. A conversation with a former co-

worker who had transitioned into nursing during his forties sparked my interest in the field. His account of the challenges and rewards of nursing school and the profession itself made me question why I had not considered this path sooner. That conversation, along with the support of my family and friends, set in motion a series of decisions that have shaped what will hopefully be a life-long career trajectory.

### **Entering the Field of Nursing**

With my focus on making an intentional transition, I took a hospital job as a Safety Partner on the same day I began taking prerequisite courses online at Virginia Peninsula Community College (VPCC). In this role, I provided one-on-one observation for patients requiring constant supervision due to mental health conditions, intoxication, or other altered states. Working 12-hour shifts, I had the opportunity to observe the dynamics of various hospital units, including the emergency department, medical-surgical floors, intensive care, and even pediatrics. This experience allowed me to witness firsthand the teamwork and direct patient care aspects of nursing that would later attract me to the field even more.

While working full-time as a Safety Partner, I spent 10 months completing my prerequisite and non-nursing coursework. I also completed a 16-week program through the hospital to become certified as a technician in the ICU. Toward the end of last year, I applied to VPCC's ADN program, as well as ODU's BSN program through a concurrent enrollment arrangement. If accepted, this decision would allow me to possibly earn my BSN in two years instead of four.

### **Education, Professional Growth, and Future Goals in Nursing**

After being accepted to both, I officially began the ADN and BSN programs in January of this year. Around the same time, I transitioned into my current role as an ICU technician. Balancing full-time work with nursing school has been challenging but deeply rewarding. My team and supervisors have been incredibly supportive, reinforcing my decision to pursue this career. The concurrent enrollment route admittedly seemed intimidating at first, but my prior semester gave me the confidence to move forward. Last fall, I successfully completed Anatomy and Physiology II, Microbiology, a Medical Terminology class, and a Community Health course—all while working full-time as a Safety Partner and completing the patient care technician program. I certainly explored the outer limitations of my workload capacity, but I am grateful for the experience, as it gave me confidence in my ability to handle an intense workload, further solidifying my determination to catch up on a career path I wished I had started a decade earlier.

As for looking ahead, my current work in the ICU has sparked an interest in critical care. As I continue through my ADN coursework, I very much look forward to those clinical rotations to explore potential specialty areas. If my passion for critical care remains strong, I plan to pursue certification as a Critical Care Registered Nurse (CCRN) and potentially consider a path toward becoming a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) after gaining experience in the field.

### **Challenges and Rewards**

While patient care is deeply fulfilling, one of the most gratifying aspects of this journey has been my academic success. My first attempt at college at age 18 was a wake-up call that I unfortunately ignored for three years before ultimately stepping away. Almost another 18 years

later, I feel that I have a second chance in front of me, and I am determined to make the most of it. My ability to excel in rigorous courses like Microbiology and Chemistry, despite their challenges, has reinforced my confidence. Managing the balance between work, school, and personal life has been – and I am sure will continue to be – an ongoing adjustment, but I have learned that prioritizing self-care is essential to sustaining success in this demanding field. In taking time to care for myself throughout this process, I am pleased to have found that doing so has led me to reflect quite a bit on the kind of impact I wish to have in the future.

### **Becoming the Nurse I Want to Be**

Empathy has always been a guiding principle in my life, whether in relationships, work, even interactions with strangers. Before owning a business, I worked in public schools, specifically in special education, where I found a tremendous amount of fulfillment in helping students who needed extra support, often tapping into that empathetic nature. My experience in public schools, combined with my own personal journey of self-improvement, has strengthened my belief that we cannot effectively care for others if we do not first take care of ourselves. Looking back, I cannot say that I am without regret for some of the decisions that I made in my early adulthood, but I am ultimately grateful that I took the time to focus on my own well-being first, as I now feel better equipped to dedicate myself to a career built on helping others achieve health and healing.

Reflecting on my nursing journey thus far, however short it may be up to this point, I am confident that I have chosen the right path. My experiences, from working as a Safety Partner to becoming an ICU technician while balancing a demanding academic schedule, have prepared me for the challenges ahead. As I move forward in my nursing education, I am excited about the

opportunities that lie ahead and the impact I know I can make in the field. My specific career goals may change over time, but I will always strive to continue growing, learning, and to ultimately become the best nurse that I can be.

### **Old Dominion University Honor Pledge**

"I pledge to support the Honor System of Old Dominion University. I will refrain from any form of academic dishonesty or deception, such as cheating or plagiarism. I am aware that as a member of the academic community it is my responsibility to turn in all suspected violations of the Honor Code. I will report to a hearing if summoned."

Electronically Signed: Patrick A. Russell

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