

CHAPTER 7

Advancing and Managing Your Professional Nursing Career

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Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, the student should be able to:

1. Discuss the difference between a job and a career.
2. Articulate the importance of proactively managing his or her nursing career.
3. Discuss the benefits of a mentoring relationship.
4. Explore the impact of work-related stress.

Successful management of your professional nursing career does not occur by accident or default. Rather, it is a deliberate, purposeful, informed process requiring self-appraisal of your need for further professional growth and development, attentiveness to projected trends in healthcare delivery, dialogue with nurse colleagues who have demonstrated success in advancing their careers, exploration of nursing education programs that will support your career advancement, consideration of how to balance work and study demands and remain healthy, and investment of self to pursue these professional nursing career options. Be reflective and proactive in seizing opportunities to shape and refine your professional nursing career.

Key Terms and Concepts

- » Career management
- » Professional portfolio
- » Mentoring
- » Burnout
- » Compassion fatigue

Nursing: A Job or a Career?

Your initial motivators for choosing to become a professional registered nurse (RN) may be far different from the reasons why you stay in professional nursing practice. Over time, nurses begin to appreciate that the practice of professional nursing as a career is a serious, sustained, and rewarding undertaking, dedicated to “the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, facilitation of healing, alleviation

of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations” (American Nurses Association [ANA], 2015b, p. 1). Further, many seasoned nurses come to realize that a career in professional nursing requires academic preparation at the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree level or higher, engagement in lifelong learning to expand knowledge and clinical and management competencies, willingness to translate research evidence into practice on a continuous basis, and commitment to advance the health of patients and the profession of nursing.

Professional nursing is a career to be managed and not just a job where you “punch in and punch out.” **Table 7-1** compares two views of nursing as a job and as a career. In advocating for **career management** in nursing, Daggett (2014) notes:

A degree and a nursing license might be the ticket that gets you started on the journey, but without a destination, an itinerary, and a map, you will not travel very far. Like any important journey, a career requires research and planning; otherwise, you risk missing opportunities and critical milestones along the way. One should always assess the current location before planning future directions. Just as you track progress with a map while on a road trip, you should have a plan for managing your career, lest you find yourself wandering in the wilderness without making any true progress toward your career goals. (p. 168)

Purposefully manage your career—no one else can do this for you! Do not rely on healthcare employers to manage your career. Your best interests are yours and yours alone. Your career management and your short- and long-term goals are yours. For the career-oriented nurse, goals usually include: (1) pursuit of an academic program to obtain a BSN degree or graduate-level nursing education for advanced practice, administration, teaching, or research within a specified time frame, and/or (2) assuming a new position within a healthcare organization that has more responsibility and accountability in order to advance his or her nursing career.

Direction is needed to accomplish these goals. Without such a career map, nurses may wander aimlessly. Where am I going? How am I going? Part of career management is having the map to accomplish goals. Career mapping provides nurses with a clear direction including short-term stops to accomplish goals and a realistic time of arrival at the ultimate career destination. This may include position changes within an agency or a change in agencies. The map includes the skills obtained, the skills needed, and the resources needed to obtain skills (Hein, 2012). The pathway usually includes yearly goals as well as long-term goals. Without goals, nurses may leave the profession or risk beginning to view nursing as only a job that pays the bills.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS *

Do you view nursing as a career or a job? What are your professional goals related to nursing? *

TABLE 7-1 Do You View Nursing as a Job or a Professional Career?

Factor	View Nursing as a Job	View Nursing as a Career
Academic preparation	Obtains the least amount needed for nursing licensure	Obtains a BSN and often pursues an advanced nursing degree: Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), and/or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Continuing education	Obtains the minimum continuing education (CE) units required for licensure and/or the job	Engages in formal and informal lifelong learning experiences across the nurse's professional career in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen and broaden knowledge and skill competencies • Improve the delivery of safe, cost-effective, quality-based patient care • Improve patient outcomes
Level of commitment	Continues with the job as long as it meets his or her personal needs; expects reasonable work for reasonable pay; responsibility ends with shift	Actively and joyfully engages in practicing the art and science of professional nursing as a member and, possibly, leader in professional nursing initiatives within the nurse's healthcare agency and in professional nursing organizations (local, regional, state, national, and/or international levels)

Trends That Impact Nursing Career Decisions

Healthcare agencies are constantly changing, with the goal of providing care to the community while containing costs. Although there is sufficient evidence demonstrating a professional nursing shortage in many areas across the United States, healthcare agencies are confronted with escalating costs, stringent cost containment initiatives, streamlined reimbursement systems, and a plethora of state and federal regulations that often constrain how well or poorly these agencies are able to deliver health care. In response to these budgetary constraints, many hospitals have responded by moving traditional inpatient care to outpatient settings, hiring fewer professional nurses, training more unlicensed assistive nursing personnel, cutting nursing salaries, hiring more RNs to part-time positions to avoid providing health and retirement benefits, and relying on fewer RNs to cover unfilled positions.

As you consider how to advance your nursing career, it is critical to examine projected trends in health care, particularly as they apply to (1) where health care is delivered, (2) the type of practitioners needed, and (3) the nursing educational preparation required to provide this care. The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) reported that 90% of RNs worked in the following areas:

- 29.73% in general medical surgical hospitals
- 23.6% in specialty (except psychiatric and substance abuse) hospitals
- 15.43% in psychiatric and substance abuse hospitals
- 15.33% in outpatient care centers
- 13.46% in home healthcare services
- 8.99% in skilled nursing care facilities
- 7.47% in physicians' offices

In forecasting the future needs of the U.S. healthcare delivery system, the Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2010) projects that by 2020, the profession of nursing will need to double the number of nurses with a doctorate and increase the number of nurse practitioners in hospitals, home health, hospice, and nursing homes. In addition, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2015b) reports that the nursing shortage may be easing in some parts of the country, but the demand for RNs prepared with baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees continues to increase (p. 2).

Investigate where the shortages are in the location where you will be practicing, what types of practitioners are needed to meet these needs, and what type of advanced nursing education is required for these positions. Remember, you are in charge of making choices that best fit your short- and long-term career goals. You are your own best advocate in planning your nursing career!

Crafting the direction of your professional nursing career and executing the plan is transformational. The IOM (2011) report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, provides a blueprint on how the entire profession must be transformed in order to advance the health of patients and simultaneously direct needed changes in the healthcare delivery system. In setting the agenda for nursing's future, the IOM Committee on Nursing identified four key messages and eight related recommendations that have potential for the greatest impact and for accomplishment within the next decade. The four key messages are:

- Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training.
- Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.
- Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other healthcare professionals, in redesigning health care in the United States.
- Effective workforce planning and policy making require better data collection and an improved information infrastructure (IOM, 2011, p. 4).

The eight recommendations are:

- Remove scope of practice barriers
- Expand opportunities for nurses to lead and diffuse collaborative improvement efforts
- Implement nurse residency programs
- Increase the proportion of nurses with a baccalaureate degree to 80% by 2020
- Double the number of nurses with a doctorate by 2020
- Ensure that nurses engage in lifelong learning
- Prepare and enable nurses to lead change to advance health
- Build an infrastructure for the collection and analysis of interprofessional healthcare workforce data (IOM, 2011, pp. 9–14)

The IOM report on the future of nursing is a great starting point for setting your professional nursing career goals and planning your career trajectory. Careful deliberation on these initiatives and recommendations provides insight into the questions that you might ask in setting your own professional nursing career goals. See **Box 7-1** for a list of questions to ask yourself as you plan your career goals.

BOX 7-1 QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU PLAN YOUR CAREER GOALS

- What is the *future of nursing* for me?
- Am I currently practicing to the *fullest extent of my nursing education and training*? (IOM, 2011, Initiative 1)
- What *changes* need to occur in my current practice in order to actualize this personal vision of my career?
- What are the projected employment trends and opportunities for nursing in my area?
- Have I achieved the *highest level of education and training* (IOM, 2011, Initiative 2) to support my desired career goals?
- What career path am I best equipped for and motivated to pursue to *lead change and advance health*? Should I pursue a BSN, MSN, DNP, or PhD, and if so, what specialization should I consider: a nurse practitioner, a nurse educator, a nurse anesthetist, a nurse–midwife, a nurse researcher, and/or a nurse executive?
- Have I sought out and had a dialogue with seasoned colleagues who have demonstrated success in advancing their nursing careers and elicited their input on trends in nursing practice and nursing education options?
- Have I explored nursing education program options at accredited academic institutions that will support my career advancement interests?
- Have I pursued ways to pay for advancing my nursing education through reimbursement at work, state and federal scholarships and traineeships, and/or public and private foundations?
- How will I balance work/family/study demands and remain physically, psychologically, and financially healthy?
- Lastly and perhaps most importantly, am I ready to take action in advancing my professional nursing career?

Showcasing Your Professional Self

Showcasing your nursing story is an important aspect of career management and includes how you present yourself in your **professional portfolio** and in the interview process. A résumé and cover letter will assist in getting an interview, but a complete professional portfolio may be what secures you the new position. A portfolio provides several advantages, including self-enlightenment, career enhancement, a record of growth and development, a record of performance over time, and a tool for planning, and it can act as a resource for others looking to create one (Masor, 2013, p. 41).

A professional portfolio, whether a print or electronic version, contains a cover letter; a résumé; examples of accomplishments cited but not elaborated upon in your résumé; selections of quality projects, papers, presentations, teaching tools/programs, patient or nursing care forms, policies, or procedures that you may have developed or co-developed across your career; and copies of licensure, certifications, awards, and professional organizational membership cards. In today's culture, being bilingual can be a definite advantage. Each language and dialect, if appropriate, should be included in your portfolio including competencies in reading, understanding, speaking, and writing. Awards received can be a testament to your diligence in a position and willingness to go beyond the job requirements. Being an officer in an organization shows leadership abilities (Schmidt, n.d.).

The portfolio will look different depending on the position you are seeking and the competencies you wish to showcase. Examples of some differences in the portfolio based on experience and desired position are below.

- If you are applying for a first-time position as a new RN, the portfolio can be used to showcase your competencies, intellectual skills, and teamwork while a student. New graduates, in particular, have to showcase themselves to stand apart from other applicants (Health eCareers Network, 2012).
- If you are applying for an advanced practice position, the IOM (2011) recommends that the portfolio be used as a means to document competencies and experience with patient populations.
- If you are applying for a staff position, you may consider providing a short case study describing the types of patients you have cared for and the specific skills and competencies you demonstrated in caring for this patient population.
- If you are applying for a management position, you may consider providing examples of leadership/management situations you have been engaged in, such as decision-making situations, schedules completed, and quality improvement initiatives.

Your cover letter should be directed to the human resources director, one page in length, word-processed, and printed on white stock paper with black ink, and should clearly identify the correct title of the position you are

seeking, the length of time you have been an RN, a request for an interview, and your contact information.

Your résumé provides a brief overview of your professional career. Most résumés contain the following sections: identification, education, licensure and certifications, professional nursing employment history, professional committee engagement, and professional nursing organizations. Most résumés are one page in length and order entries from most recent to distant. See **Figure 7-1** for an example résumé.

First impressions made during the interview are also important. Arriving early and dressing professionally are a good beginning. Being prepared with answers for potential questions will only enhance the impression you make. Information concerning the job requirements, including duties, patient census and type, salary, and benefits, should be provided by the interviewer. Your follow-up questions assist you in understanding the expectations of the position. In “What Every Nursing Student Should Know When Seeking Employment: An Interview Tip Sheet for Baccalaureate and Higher Degree Prepared Nurses,” the AACN (n.d.c) discusses characteristics of the organization that the applicant should assess. These eight hallmarks or characteristics are in the following list. Prior to your interview, refer to the brochure, which is available on the AACN website, for specific questions under each of the categories. The brochure is available at www.aacn.nche.edu/students/career-resource-center.

- Manifest a philosophy of clinical care emphasizing quality, safety, interdisciplinary collaboration, continuity of care, and professional accountability.
- Recognize the value of nurses’ expertise on clinical care quality and patient outcomes.
- Promote executive-level nursing leadership.
- Empower nurses’ participation in clinical decision making and organization of clinical care systems.
- Demonstrate professional development support for nurses.
- Maintain clinical advancement programs based on education, certification, and advanced preparation.
- Create collaborative relationships among members of the healthcare team.
- Utilize technological advances in clinical care and information systems.

It is illegal for employers to ask certain questions. Knowing those questions and, more importantly, knowing the questions that are allowed are key in preparation for the interview. HR World (2015) is a helpful website that can be used in preparing for your interview. Many interviewers use silence as a tool to evaluate the candidate. Use the silence to gather your thoughts and let the interviewer break the silence. At the conclusion of the interview, thank the interviewer for his or her time and ask about the timeline in filling the position. Send a follow-up note thanking the person for the interview and state that you are looking forward to a response.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTION*

What kind of first impression do you make when searching for a new position? *

Figure 7-1 Example résumé

NAME	
123 Street Name	
City, State, Zip Code	
(area code) phone number	
email address	
EDUCATION	
2013	<u>Bachelor of Science in Nursing</u> (BSN), College of Nursing, Name of University, City, State.
LICENSURE AND CERTIFICATIONS	
2013–2015	<u>Registered Nurse</u> . Multi-State License, Mississippi Board of Nursing.
2013–2015	<u>Advanced Cardiac Life Support Provider</u> (ACLS). American Heart Association.
2010–2015	<u>Basic Life Support Provider</u> (BLS). American Heart Association.
PROFESSIONAL NURSING EMPLOYMENT HISTORY	
2013–2015	<u>Primary Care Nurse</u> , Adult Medical Intensive Care Unit, Memorial Hospital at Gulfport, Gulfport, Mississippi. Responsible for providing comprehensive and rapid assessments and management of critically ill adult patients requiring intravenous and central lines, ventilator, tracheostomy and wound care; member of Rapid Response Team.
PROFESSIONAL COMMITTEE ENGAGEMENT	
2014–2015	<u>Member</u> . Electronic Health Record—Nursing Implementation Committee, Memorial Hospital at Gulfport, Gulfport, Mississippi.
2013–2015	<u>Member</u> . Infection Control Committee, Memorial Hospital at Gulfport, Gulfport, Mississippi.
PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP	
2013–2015	American Nurses Association
2012–2015	Gamma Lambda Chapter, Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing

Mentoring

The IOM report on *The Future of Nursing* (2011) recommends **mentoring** to assist in increasing the readiness and retention of nurses to improve patient outcomes. Mentoring is a relationship between two nurses in which the more experienced nurse provides leadership and guidance to the nurse with less experience, often referred to as the “mentee” (Minority Nurse, 2013). Preceptors and mentors play different roles. A mentor provides counsel regarding career management, and the mentoring relationship may take place in the beginning of a nursing career, when changing positions, or when a nurse is furthering his or her education. The mentor–mentee relationship may be a long-term relationship. In contrast, a preceptor provides direct short-term coaching to a new graduate nurse, a newly hired nurse, or a nurse who transfers to another unit and orients the nurse to roles and responsibilities on the unit and within the organization. A mentor may also serve as a preceptor; however, a preceptor is not a mentor. It is not uncommon for mentees to become mentors guiding others in their pursuit of professional growth and development.

Being a mentor takes time and requires patience. The mentor must be reasonable, competent, committed to assisting the mentee in being successful in his or her career, adept at providing feedback, and open to sharing knowledge. Professional growth should be the outcome for both mentor and mentee. It is the responsibility of the person seeking career mentorship to find a mentor. The mentor may be a nursing faculty member, an experienced nurse within a healthcare organization or nursing school, or a nurse from a professional nursing organization. This relationship has benefits for both. The mentor receives confirmation from witnessing the career development and advancement of the mentee in professional nursing. The benefits of being mentored are many and include:

- Increased self-confidence
- Enhanced leadership skills
- Accelerated acclimation to the culture of the unit/facility
- Advancement opportunities
- Enhanced communication skills
- Reduced stress
- Improved networking ability
- Political savvy
- Legal and ethical insight

Problems with mentoring may occur with either person (Minority Nurse, 2015). The mentee may outgrow the mentor in knowledge and in the profession. The commitment in time and energy of the mentor may become overwhelming. The relationship may even become toxic if the mentor becomes inaccessible or harmful to the mentee and may even block the learning and progression of the mentee. If any of these become evident in the relationship, both must communicate and discuss the situation. They may agree to a separation or to repairing the relationship.

KEY COMPETENCY 7-1

Examples of Applicable
*Nurse of the Future: Nursing
Core Competencies*

Professionalism:

Attitudes/Behaviors (A4b)
Values the mentoring
relationship for professional
development

Skills (S8g) Develops
personal goals for
professional development

Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. (2010). *Nurse of the future: Nursing core competencies* (pp. 13, 15). Retrieved from <http://www.mass.edu/currentinit/documents/NursingCoreCompetencies.pdf>

Education and Lifelong Learning

The profession of nursing needs a more educated workforce for the sake of increasing healthcare quality and patient safety. The ANA standards of professional nursing practice, Standard 12, indicate that it is the responsibility of every nurse to seek “knowledge and competence that reflects current nursing practice and promotes futuristic thinking” (2015b, p. 76). The competencies associated with this standard reflect commitment to lifelong learning, the maintenance of a professional portfolio, and a commitment to mentoring. Every state board of nursing should require mandatory continuing education for all practicing RNs, but not all do. The call for a more educated professional nursing workforce to lead change and advance health has been mandated in the initiatives of the IOM (2011):

- “Increase the proportion of nurses with a baccalaureate degree to 80 percent by 2020.” (Initiative 4)
- “Double the number of nurses with a doctorate by 2020.” (Initiative 5)
- “Ensure that [all] nurses engage in lifelong learning.” (Initiative 6)

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, Health Resources and Services Administration reported that the distribution of RNs by highest nursing or nursing-related educational preparation was as follows:

- 13.9% were diploma-prepared RNs.
- 36.1% of RNs had an associate degree in nursing (ADN).
- 36.8% had a BSN.
- 3.2% had a master’s or doctoral degree.

In 2013, the ANA noted that of our 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 2 territories:

- 34% (18) had no mandatory continuing education (CE) requirement for RN licensure.
- 66% (35) had a mandatory CE requirement ranging from 14 to 30 CEs every 2 years or, in some cases, only if the RN was not engaged in practice during the previous renewal time.

The profession of nursing expects that nurses will practice the science of nursing with care. At the core of ADN and BSN academic programs are foundational science courses in biology, anatomy, physiology, microbiology, chemistry, pathophysiology, pharmacology, and statistics. These courses serve as the basis for translating research evidence into the science of nursing practice in courses such as adult health, pediatrics, obstetrics, psychiatric-mental health, and community health nursing. Although we readily acknowledge the essence of nursing as “caring for patients,” we often do not embrace that nurses are also scientists committed to practicing the science of nursing with

care and compassion toward patients. Caring is not enough. Science is not enough. Nursing is both an art and a science that is continuously evolving based on research findings, resulting in a deepening and broadening of the knowledge base fundamental to professional nursing practice. As nurses, we must be committed to and actively engaged in lifelong professional learning across our careers. Ongoing nursing education through CE programs, certification programs, and/or formal academic programs to pursue a BSN, an MSN, a DNP, and/or a PhD must be an expectation of professional nurses if we are to keep pace with the science of nursing, have credibility as a profession, and maintain our commitment to patients. It is only in this way that the profession of nursing will actualize the IOM mandates for leading change and advancing health.

Advancing your nursing career often means returning to school. In an unprecedented move advocating support for academic progression in nursing, the American Association of Community Colleges, the Association of Community College Trustees, the AACN, the National League for Nursing, and the National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing issued a powerful joint statement calling for nursing to work together in order to facilitate

unity of nursing education programs and advance opportunities for academic progression, which may include seamless transition into associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral programs. Collectively, we agree that every nursing student and nurse should have access to additional nursing education, and we stand ready to work together to ensure that nurses have the support needed to take the next step in their education. (AACN, 2015a, para. 3)

At the core of a seamless academic progression in nursing is respect for the academic integrity of educational programs provided by community colleges, colleges, and universities and efforts made to enable nursing students and nurses to readily progress from ADN to RN-BSN or RN-MSN to DNP or PhD programs. The AACN (n.d.a) website provides a user-friendly search engine called Nursing Program Search for academic programs in nursing at every level, such as RN-BSN, RN-MSN, LPN to BSN, entry-level BSN, accelerated BSN, BSN to DNP, BSN to PhD, entry-level MSN, MSN, CNL, MSN to DNP, DNP, and PhD programs.

If you are contemplating or have decided to return to school to pursue a BSN or an advanced graduate degree in nursing, be sure that you consider and investigate the following:

- Possess certainty about the specific courses that will successfully transfer and knowledge of the specific courses and their associated credit hours that need to be taken prior to admission.

- Prepare for and take any preliminary test required, such as the Graduate Record Examination, and know the expected scores for admission.
- Adhere to the application process, including admission dates.
- Be knowledgeable of the cost of the program in its entirety: tuition, books, and fees, such as online fees, clinical fees by course, and fees for validation credits of previously earned coursework that has been successfully completed. Some programs advertise that they give “life experience” credits. Be sure you receive in writing what these experiences are, whether you meet the criteria or if additional courses need to be taken or papers written describing these experiences, how many credit hours are awarded, and what the fees are for transferring these credits into your program of study.
- Be aware of tuition reimbursement options through work and the expected time commitment in return for tuition assistance.
- Be cognizant of and investigate opportunities and requirements for scholarships, loans, and/or traineeship programs awarded by the state government, the federal government, private foundations, and/or professional nursing organizations.

Information is power! In appraising your nursing career options, be informed about specialty areas available and of interest to you. The BSN degree is the sole academic portal of entry for graduate studies in nursing (MSN, DNP, and PhD) for such roles as nurse practitioner, nurse anesthetist, clinical nurse leader, nurse executive, nurse educator, and nurse researcher. There are several nursing career paths supported by graduate-level academic programs for you to consider:

- An *expert clinician* is an advanced practice registered nurse prepared at the graduate level, such as an adult, family, geriatric, or psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner, nurse anesthetist, or nurse-midwife who provides safe, evidence-based, cost-effective care to a specific patient population (academic level: MSN, DNP).
- A *clinical nurse leader (CNL)* guides nurse colleagues and interdisciplinary teams in direct patient care situations to implement clinical practice guidelines and enable these patient populations to achieve positive outcomes (academic level: MSN, DNP).
- A *nurse executive* directs the infrastructure of the practice of nursing within an organization on clinical and fiscal levels and represents and advocates for nursing within the context of the business of health care (academic level: MSN, DNP, PhD).
- A *nurse educator* works in academic settings, guiding students to deepen and broaden their knowledge and practice of safe, quality-based professional nursing practice (academic level: MSN, DNP, PhD).
- A *nurse researcher* is dedicated to executing and translating evidence-based research into practice and expanding the body of knowledge fundamental to the art and science of nursing (academic level: MSN, DNP, PhD).

The Graduate Nursing Student Academy, established by the AACN (n.d.b), has established a series of webinars to inform you of areas of specialization and graduate degrees that may be of interest to you as you plan your career.

Professional Engagement

Professional engagement is a characteristic that discriminates between a person employed in a job and one pursuing a career. A professional nurse who is managing and advancing his or her career will actively engage in professional nursing initiatives within the nurse's healthcare agency and in professional nursing organizations.

Engagement in Your Healthcare Organization

As you are planning your nursing career path, seize opportunities now to actively engage in quality improvement activities that are currently underway within your healthcare organization. Examples of quality initiatives include, but are not limited to, committees within your agency that address nursing policy and procedures, quality improvement, core measures, clinical practice guidelines, safety, the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems Hospital Survey of Customer Satisfaction, and the Medicare and Medicaid Survey Process for Nursing Homes or Home Health Agencies.

Engagement in programs to improve quality for patients, staff, and your organization will help you gain experience in clinical problem resolution, aid you in translating clinical practice guidelines and research evidence into practice, assist you with co-contributing to the creation of a milieu of safety and quality, and connect you in a collegial manner with the quality champions in your organization. If you are not sure how to get connected with these committees, start by meeting with your nurse manager and/or chief nursing officer and express your interest in serving on one or more of these committees. You will learn from your participation on these committees and you will maximize your visibility as an engaged, motivated employee.

Engagement in Professional Nursing Organizations

Engaging in professional nursing organizations connects students and RNs with membership and leadership opportunities. Some of the benefits of participating in these organizations include ongoing growth and development pertinent for your career and areas of specialization, receiving mentorship and guidance from seasoned members, obtaining reduced membership rates

KEY COMPETENCY 7-2

Examples of Applicable
Nurse of the Future: Nursing Core Competencies

Professionalism:

Knowledge (K4b) Describes the role of a professional organization in shaping the practice of nursing

(K8a) Understands responsibilities inherent in being a member of the nursing profession

Attitudes/Behaviors (A8a)

Recognizes need for personal and professional behaviors that promote the profession of nursing

Skills (S8i) Assumes professional responsibility through participation in professional nursing organizations

Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. (2010). *Nurse of the future: Nursing core competencies* (pp. 13, 15). Retrieved from <http://www.mass.edu/currentinit/documents/NursingCoreCompetencies.pdf>

for students, and accessing scholarship and grant opportunities for members to supplement tuition in academic programs.

You may join many professional nursing organizations as a student or as an RN. These organizations include, but are not limited to, the ANA and its affiliate state nurses associations; Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing; American Organization of Nurse Executives; American Association of Nurse Practitioners; American Association of Nurse Anesthetists; American Association of Critical-Care Nurses; Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses; and American College of Nurse-Midwives. A more thorough list of professional nursing organizations at national, state, and international levels is provided by the ANA (n.d.).

Expectations for Your Performance

Assessment of your performance as an RN is conducted on several levels, such as self-appraisal, work performance evaluations conducted by nurse managers on behalf of healthcare organizations, and collegial evaluations. Many performance appraisals for nurses and nursing students have their roots in professional documents such as *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice* (ANA, 2015b), *Nurse of the Future: Nursing Core Competencies* (Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, 2010), *The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice* (AACN, 2008), and *The Essentials of Master's Education in Nursing* (AACN, 2011), as well as criteria established by specialty-based professional nursing organizations.

The core questions in most of these assessments are: “Am I currently practicing competently?” and “Am I currently practicing to the *fullest extent of my nursing education and training* in my current position?” (IOM, 2011, Initiative 1). It is important to know proactively the expectations of professional nurse competency in your specific setting so that you can meet and exceed them and continuously use them as indicators for identifying your strengths and areas that need further professional growth and development. Assessment of your performance as an RN is your own personal quality improvement program and is essential for professional growth and development. This should not be just an annual event, but an ongoing process of improving one's practice. Here are some suggestions for the evaluation of your performance as an RN:

- Conduct your own self-appraisal first in order to have a more informed dialogue with your nurse manager.
- Identify your areas of strength and areas in need of growth.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS*

Do you plan to be a part of a professional organization after graduation? Why or why not? What do you anticipate will be your level of involvement?*

- Pursue continuing education to both enhance your strengths and narrow your limitations.
- Accept constructive feedback with respect, gratitude, and civility.
- If feedback does not make sense to you, ask the person to clarify what he or she said.
- Develop an ongoing plan of quality improvement for yourself.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS*

Do you have the courage to ask for honest feedback? Do you have the courage to give honest feedback to a friend or colleague? How do you respond to negative feedback? *

Taking Care of Self

A nurse is a person who is present at birth, at death, and during the entire life span. A nurse makes life and death decisions. A nurse interacts with everyone in the healthcare community. A nurse interacts with people from every walk of life. A nurse must multitask during every shift. A nurse works every shift, weekends, and holidays. A nurse experiences stress unknown to most other professions. To prevent overwhelming stress, a nurse must take care of him- or herself by:

- Eating a balanced diet
- Getting enough sleep
- Avoiding addictive substances
- Exercising on a regular basis
- Paying attention to mental and spiritual health
- Being vigilant in coping with stress triggers at work and at home

Seig (2015) notes that “more than 40 percent of hospital nurses today suffer from the physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion characteristic of burnout. The result of unmanaged stress, burnout accounts for what is often a negative perception among nurses of their work and workplaces” (para. 1). Managing time is essential to preventing **burnout** and **compassion fatigue**. Francisco and Abarra (n.d.) present the following 12 tips for time management. Nurses can use these tips at work and during off time.

- Be organized.
- Make a list of the tasks you will need to do and post it in a place that you can easily see.
- Before making your rounds, make a checklist of the things you need to do for each patient.
- When doing rounds, always see your most critical patient first.
- Don't do other tasks when giving medications.
- Pay attention to time.
- Learn how to write quickly.
- Always bring easy-to-eat snacks.

KEY COMPETENCY 7-3

Examples of Applicable
*Nurse of the Future: Nursing
Core Competencies*

Professionalism:

Knowledge (K8b) Recognizes
the relationship between
personal health, self-renewal
and the ability to deliver
sustained quality care

Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. (2010). *Nurse of the future: Nursing core competencies* (p. 15). Retrieved from <http://www.mass.edu/currentinit/documents/NursingCoreCompetencies.pdf>

- Be keen on details.
- Learn how to communicate.
- Learn to multitask.
- Be realistic.

Burnout and compassion fatigue may be the end result of stress not being managed. Burnout is progressive and involves disengagement and withdrawal. Compassion fatigue is acute and may present itself as over-involvement in patient care (Lombardo & Eyre, 2011). The two concepts may occur simultaneously. In caring for patients, the nurse may be depleted physically, emotionally, and spiritually. These indicators involve compassion fatigue. Burnout causes physical symptoms that lead to feelings of being constantly tired. Some observed signs are avoiding certain patients; not feeling compassion for your patients and their families; experiencing headaches, digestive problems, fatigue, mood swings, anxiety, and/or poor concentration; and/or feeling underappreciated and overworked. In response, nurses may not want to go to work and/or just go through the motions when at work.

The healthcare workplace is demanding, requiring many caregiving responsibilities from various members of the interdisciplinary team that must be accomplished and communicated within an abbreviated time. Sustained workplace stress can dramatically influence how we interact with colleagues, how professionally satisfied we are with current career choices, and employee retention rates.

Stress at work can be managed in a civil environment. Civility builds community and allows for efficient functioning units. Civility is defined as respect for others (Clark, 2010). A code of conduct establishes ways of behaving for interacting with people. The ANA (2015a) developed a *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements* that requires nurses to communicate with respect when interacting with colleagues, patients, and students. Civil behavior is not always easy to accomplish; it requires courage and genuine concern for others. We have the choice to be colleagues who habitually respect and assist one another and who are instrumental in creating a milieu of civility and safety or to be colleagues who are engaged either overtly or subtly in lateral and vertical workplace violence exhibited by bullying, harassing, speaking ill of one another, demeaning one another, and excluding colleagues.

The first step toward managing stress and creating a civil milieu is to assess your work environment. Some of the characteristics of healthy collegial relationships include being a reliable and respectful colleague who works his or her scheduled days, arrives on time, shares equally in patient care and management responsibilities, provides care in a timely manner, and actively volunteers to help a colleague who needs assistance.

KEY COMPETENCY 7-4

Examples of Applicable
*Nurse of the Future: Nursing
Core Competencies*

Teamwork and Collaboration:
Knowledge (K7b) Identifies
lateral violence as a barrier
to teamwork and unit
functioning

Attitudes/Behaviors (A7b)
Recognizes behaviors
that contribute to lateral
violence

Skills (S7b) Practices
strategies to minimize
lateral violence

Source: Massachusetts Department of Higher
Education. (2010). *Nurse of the future: Nursing
core competencies* (p. 32). Retrieved from
[http://www.mass.edu/currentinit/documents
/NursingCoreCompetencies.pdf](http://www.mass.edu/currentinit/documents/NursingCoreCompetencies.pdf)

Self-care strategies that promote resilient nurses may include:

- Saying no to additional shifts and reducing overtime in order to conserve energy
- Taking a day off in order to renew energy
- Changing shift or unit in order to gain a new outlook on being a nurse

Consulting a social worker, a chaplain, your preceptor, and/or your mentor can provide you with resources for caring for self, managing burnout and compassion fatigue, and sustaining a resilient self.

Conclusion

You are responsible for actively managing and advancing your nursing career across your entire life span as a professional nurse. This means that you will need to make purposeful and strategic choices about your professional practice, academic preparation, and continuing education. Mentors, preceptors, and engagement in your healthcare organization and professional nursing organization serve as guides for advancing your professional path. Creating a healthy lifestyle and reducing the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue are essential for sustaining your personal and professional life.

Classroom Activity 1

Have students begin creating a career map that includes short-term and long-term goals and strategies to achieve those goals. The Nursing License Map (available at

<http://nursinglicensemap.com>) may be useful in this activity if students want to compare educational requirements and salaries as they consider career goals.

Classroom Activity 2

Have students begin working on a professional portfolio that contains a cover letter and résumé, along

with examples of accomplishments and selections of quality projects, papers, and presentations.

Classroom Activity 3

Have students register online for access to the ANA's New Graduate Profession Kit and then explore various parts of the toolbox that include taking care of your career, taking care of yourself, taking care of your

profession, and taking care of your patients. The resources in this kit are available at: www.nursingworld.org/Content/New-Graduate/default.aspx

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