

Becoming an effective hospice nurse nursing essay



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Hospice nursing is an occupation that few people know about. Although the process of getting into this occupation is quite simple, there is a lot of work to be done in this growing field. Almost anyone can get a degree in nursing, but it takes a special kind of person to be a hospice nurse. This is because hospice nurses deal with the emotions that come with caring for terminally ill patients every day.

How to Become an Effective Hospice Nurse

Hospice nursing is an occupation that many people don't know about, although it deserves as much credit and awareness as any other nursing position. Many hospice nurses go to great lengths and make huge sacrifices in order to get this position, and the process to do so is very intricate and can be confusing.

Nursing is a profession that takes a special kind of person, especially hospice nursing, because their job is to assist a patient and the patient's family through a death. In today's healthcare situation, there is a rapidly increasing shortage of nurses. This is due to the fact that most registered nurses are retiring all at once, and there is no one there to fill their shoes.

It is not uncommon to go to the doctor's office and not give a second thought to the nurse seen before and after the doctor. This is part of what makes hospice nurses different. They form a close relationship with not only the patient, but the family as well. As with any medical profession, it can be difficult to understand how a person went about obtaining their career. There are many routes available, along with characteristics that make up a good hospice nurse.

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Essential Question

How does a person become an effective hospice nurse?

Supporting Questions

What schooling is required, and what kind of classes should be taken?

What kind of certification is needed, and how is it obtained?

What is the job outlook, and why is it like this?

How will having certain characteristics and specific skills benefit?

What schooling is required, and what kind of classes should be taken?

To be accepted into nursing school, a person has to have a high school diploma. Taking classes in math, biology, and chemistry while in high school help build a strong application, as well as being able to speak a foreign language. Someone looking into being a registered nurse can choose one of three options when it comes to finding a program. The first option is to get a four-year bachelor's of science degree in nursing. This is offered by more than 700 colleges. The second option is to get either a two-year or a three-year associate degree in nursing, and this is possible at 850 community colleges. The final alternative would be to go through one of the 70 diploma programs available at some hospitals, which takes about three years ("Education and Training," 2009, p. 3).

Regardless of which path is chosen, all nursing education will involve supervised clinical and classroom instruction. Anatomy, physiology,

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microbiology, chemistry, nutrition, psychology, and behavioral sciences are some of the classes that are commonly taken by nursing students (“Paying Your Dues,” 2010, p. 1).

It is important to take math, biology, and chemistry in high school because even if they can't be taken as college credit, they are still crucial preparatory classes. They will serve as the basic foundation for starting out in nursing education. Being able to speak a foreign language is helpful as well, because people from all backgrounds and cultures need medical help and deserve the right to speak in their own language. This is especially true in the hospice area of nursing because most patients are being taken care of in their own homes, and need the comfort of not having to be stressed about what languages their nurse can or cannot speak. One of a nurse's main duties is to serve as a central communicator between the doctor and patient. The best option to choose when picking a nursing program is getting a four-year bachelor's of science degree (BSN). It used to be that a nurse with an associate degree could get a job at almost any hospital. However, times are changing and it is now preferred that nurses have a four-year BSN. It is important for all of the programs to have experiences in clinics in all different settings because it provides students with a chance to learn about multiple areas of healthcare. For instance, a person could be planning to have a career in geriatrics, but after spending hours at a nursing home for a clinical, they might completely change their mind.

What kind of certification is needed, and how is it obtained?

In the United States, all hospice nurses must be registered nurses in addition to being certified by their state's health department as a hospice worker. In order to become a registered nurse, a person must take and pass a national examination after graduating from a school of nursing (" Education and Training," 2009, p. 3). This examination is called the National Council Licensure Examination, or NCLEX-RN (" Licensing and Certification," 2010, p. 7). It is mandatory for all registered nurses to renew their license periodically, and some states require continuing education. This test is administered electronically, and is multiple-choice. Students usually begin studying for it in their final year of nursing school. Results are sent by mail and arrive five to eight weeks after the testing date.

Being certified by the state health department as a hospice worker is important because it ensures that only nurses trained for this field will be entering palliative situations. If this requirement wasn't in place, any registered nurse could go into a home and perform hospice work. It is because of this rule that patients and families can feel confident that they will receive the best care. The National council Licensure Examination helps weed out the students who aren't quite ready to start their career in nursing, and need a little more time to study. The student's who don't pass can continue to study and try again the next time the test is administered.

What is the job outlook, and why is it like this?

Registered nurses have more than 2.5 million jobs in the United States. This is expected to hold through and only increase until at least the year 2016.

The growth of healthcare in general and the needs of a quickly growing and

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aging population will raise the demand for registered nurses. The Bureau of Labor Statistics says that more new jobs are to be created for registered nurses than for any other occupation (" Employment Outlook," 2010, p. 4).

The number of elderly is increasing rapidly, which creates many new jobs for hospice nurses. Another reason is because patients are becoming more and more okay with the idea of in-home care, and are actually starting to prefer it. Technology is supporting this by allowing nurses to deliver complex treatments away from hospitals.

As interest in the field of hospice nursing grows, so do the opportunities. Right now there are two programs in the United States that provide master's degrees that focus on hospice care. One is at New York University, and the other is at Ursuline College, which is in Pepper Pike, Ohio. However, once this career takes off, there will hopefully be more master's degree programs available that specialize in hospice nursing.

How will having certain characteristics and specific skills benefit?

Hospice nursing includes 24-hour availability, pain management, and family support combined with compassionate listening and counseling skills (" Hospice/palliative care nurses," p. 1) . According to Theresa Valiga:

Nursing is a profession that challenges a person intellectually, physically, and emotionally. But it is also a profession that is incredibly rewarding.

Nurses are with people during every major life event from birth to death.

They have the privilege of being quite intimate with strangers. They are well-

respected and they make a real difference in the lives of people and communities. Who could ask for more from a career? (p. 1)

Like she said, a hospice nurse needs to not only be able to handle the physical stress of the everyday work, but also the emotional stress. One of the main goals of hospice nursing is to find out the patient's last wishes and make sure they are carried through and communicated to the family (A. Fredericks, personal interview, December 9, 2010).

On average, hospice patients die within a month of enrolling in a hospice program. Because of this fact, hospice nurses need to have skills to deal with spiritual and culturally sensitive patients. They also need to be able to lift patients or help them bath, sit up, get out of bed, or walk. Sometimes the patients are moody, confused, and uncooperative. Communication is a huge key in hospice nursing, because it is the nurse's job to observe the patient's condition and report it to the doctors, as well as the patient's emotional needs and wishes to the family.

How does a person become an effective hospice nurse?

The first step to becoming an effective hospice nurse is getting a bachelor's of science degree from a four-year nursing program. After that, the National Counsel Licensure Examination needs to be passed, as well as registering with a state health department as a hospice worker. A master's degree may be obtained specializing in palliative care. Amy Fredericks, a hospice worker encourages nursing students to continue on past their registered nursing licenses while they are free and not tied down by family and career (Personal interview, December 9, 2010).

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An effective hospice nurse can walk out the door at the end of the day and know they made a difference, whether it be through making someone smile or teaching a family member how to care for their loved one. As a hospice nurse, it is important to be caring, compassionate, and knowledgeable in order to provide the best care for the patient.

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