

Charge Nurse



Jo Harris
CAMC-All Divisions,
Charleston, West Virginia

Circulatory Dynamics Lab
Charleston, West Virginia

Jo Harris has worked for the past 11 years as a registered nurse. She has a bachelors of science in Nursing and is currently working on her master's of science with the intent of being a Family Nurse Practitioner.

What motivated you to do this type of work?

Initially, I had never planned on having a career. However, I had two small children and my husband was laid off from his job. What started out being temporary ended up being permanent. I thought that if I was going to have to work full time I might as well go to school and get into a profession. I had always been interested in the medical field and became a Certified Emergency Medical Technician to see if I could handle caring for the sick. I loved it because I have a caring nature and I like to be able to make people better.

What satisfaction do you get from your job?

The job is challenging and constantly changing with new procedures and medications. I really enjoy patient education and when the patient and family can truly understand their disease process and procedures. Sometimes the satisfaction is just being able to be there, to comfort someone or provide reassurance.

What are the disadvantages of your type of job?

The disadvantage of this job is that you can't save everyone and there is sadness with death. Often you become attached to the patient and their family. It is difficult emotionally, especially if death is sudden or traumatic. Sometimes it is difficult to leave work without taking it home with you.

What classes or part-time work would you recommend to prepare for this field?

I would recommend taking the science courses (biology, anatomy, physiology and microbiology) prior to entering the nursing program. This is because these courses are very involved and require a lot of study time. It is difficult and stressful to try to do these courses and the nursing courses at the same time. Also, I would recommend working part-time in a hospital. Although it does not actually prepare one for the nursing role, one can become familiar with the layout of the hospital. Working part-time as a Health Unit Coordinator would familiarize one with the computer system since the individual would be responsible for entering lab work and performing other functions regarding patient care. Going in as a new graduate trying to perform your nursing functions as well as trying to learn the operation of the hospital, (e.g. where the different departments and supplies are located) is stressful. Learning it all at one time can be overwhelming. One good suggestion is to work as a nurse extern which one can begin during the second year of nursing.

What qualities, skills and characteristics do they look for in this type of field?

Self motivation, conscientiousness, and critical thinking are important skills. Also, humility; one must know when to ask questions in order to do the right thing. Often people will not ask questions for fear of being labeled as dumb. It is better to ask and take the appropriate action than guess and be wrong. Finally, organization is a skill that is learned and is very beneficial for an individual.

In your time working in this field, has your salary increased? What benefits do you receive?

My salary has steadily increased. Also, for nurses there is a career ladder and this is an incentive for career growth. In our facility a nurse can progress to a clinical nurse IV. With each successful completion of a level there is a pay increase. Benefits include paid time off, medical and dental insurance. We also get long and short term disability, accidental death, and retirement benefits.

To what extent has your job worked well with your activities and life outside of work?

This really depends on where you work. For example, on the nursing units one can work different shifts (8 hour, 12 hour or 16 hour shifts). Also, you are required to work every other weekend. In my job, I work Monday through Friday with no weekends and I am on call every 4th week. That may sound great but sometimes the days are long and you may not know exactly when you can go home due to cases being added or emergency situations. Sometimes it is impossible to work and go to school because of the staffing shortages.

If you had the choice to do it all over again, would you make the same decisions about your career?

Yes, I would do it again. I really enjoy being a nurse and I can't think of anything else I would do. One can also continue in their education by getting a master's and doctorate degree in

nursing. My plan is to continue with my education so that someday I can teach; I'm not ready for that now since I need to learn a lot more and I like being in the midst of all the action!

Would you have done anything differently?

I would have initially completed a four year degree in nursing. However, at the time I was working and going to school full time and my children were small. Due to the financial situation, I had to get to work as quickly as possible so went for the associate's degree. Nurses with a four year degree do not make any more money than those with a two year degree. However, with a four year degree, there are many more opportunities for advancement in management positions.

What advice would you give someone who is seeking a profession?

I would advise a person to make sure that the medical field is of interest to them. Nursing is a very hard profession; emotionally, mentally and physically. However, it can be rewarding. The grading scale in the nursing program is high and one cannot make a grade below a C in any nursing course. If this does occur, one would have to sit out a year from taking these courses.

Interviewed by Krista Thomas for a College 101 assignment on 04/01