

# Second Career Nurses

by David H. Cohen

Nursing has changed. Once a profession preponderantly feminine with moderate salaries, the field is opening up to new participants from diverse backgrounds, offering more favorable wages to men as well as women. What's more, people are entering the healthcare profession after years of labor in other careers, some in teaching, others in factories. The rewards of caring for the injured and important new trends reshaping the profession have drawn in untold numbers who ten to twenty years ago would never have given a thought to acquiring medical skills. For many, it's become a second career.

"It's part of the shift in the economy," declares James Lewandowski, director of human resource services at the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council. "As we move from industry to the provision of services, nursing emerges as a better paying and more rewarding job. Those who have exited from the industrial economy of Chicago may end up looking at nursing and other healthcare careers."

For those who have taken to the profession, it's become a seller's market. The demand for trained personnel has left graduates of nursing schools with more options, higher bonuses and better pay than ever before. Some hospitals are offering new graduates bonuses just to join their staff. Starting salaries, at \$20,000 to \$25,000, compare favorably with other entry-level positions.

"Where else can you recover all of your educational expenses in your first six months of employment?" asks Ann Mathis, the director of the Ravenswood Hospital School of Nursing. "Given the cost of professional training, that's hard to say about anything."

**For information on the Ravenswood School of Nursing, call 878-4300 Ext. 5270. Or write for a free list of admission information, class schedules, financial aid information to:**

**Ravenswood Hospital Medical Center, School of Nursing,  
4550 N. Winchester, Chicago, IL 60640.**

Observers foresee rising salaries and improving benefits until the shortage abates, and few expect that in the immediate future. If anything, the demand in the past year has intensified. During the early and mid-eighties, according to Lewandowski, the nurse vacancy rate in Chicago held steady at just over three percent, but in 1987 it's jumped to almost six percent. Ravenswood Hospital has kept its own vacancy rate rather low, just three percent, due to its ability to draw strong applicants to its School of Nursing and retain them after graduation with a constructive work environment.

The professional satisfaction that comes with a career switch has brought a new, vigorous type to nursing. In decades past, the demand was met by eighteen-year-old women leaving high school, and though hospitals regard them as a valuable source, a new and older type of individual has come to fill the ranks.

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"The maturity of the older student is definitely an asset for the hospital," asserts Joan Bundley of the Illinois Nursing Association. "How many twenty-year-olds can help a family when one of its members is suffering from cancer? Or grieving parents after the death of a child? I go to high schools and have to ask students how many have even experienced the death of a grandparent. The maturity of life experiences older nurses bring to the field is one of their chief advantages. It's one area where youth isn't the answer to everything."

Salaries, of course, are not the only draw for those who have abandoned one career in favor of another. With abundant openings across the country, some nurses work part time in moderate climates during the winter and return to another during the summer, commuting between acceptable areas of the country. Many new sources of demand have appeared, taking nurses out of the standard acute care setting. Health maintenance organizations, insurance companies and home healthcare providers now offer the career nurse a standard hourly schedule. For those with different preferences, rotating shifts as a bedside nurse — where the demand is greatest — break up the standard work routine. Other caregivers do consulting work, sell hospital equipment, offer physical exams for the staffs and executives of private companies, even serve as freelance nurses while teaching part time.



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So who is a suitable candidate for a second career in healthcare? "It's for anyone dissatisfied with their own occupation," says Rita Orzech, R.N., a staff nurse at the Ravenswood Health Care Center on Cicero Avenue. "I say, Go for it!"

Orzech was an English teacher at Notre Dame High School in Chicago for ten years specializing in literature and composition. She abandoned education in 1974, but her love for literature is keener than ever, especially Shakespeare. Her favorite plays? "**Hamlet**," she answers without hesitation, "along with **The Merchant of Venice**. And almost all of the sonnets." Orzech says that as a child she had always wanted a career in nursing but found herself drawn to education instead, at least initially.

"I can't say that I became disillusioned with teaching," she says, "but I wasn't getting the sort of satisfaction of early on, and I always wondered if I could find it as a nurse. Salaries and benefits were low in parochial schools, and jobs were getting harder to find." After declining to renew her teaching contract, Orzech undertake vocational testing, and the results suggested a disposition for nursing and teaching.

"In 1974, I was 33 years old and feared I might be too old to undertake a new career, but a cousin persuaded me to return to school. I took a low-level nursing job in Oak Park and in July of 1975 entered the Ravenswood School of Nursing. I knew that I liked what I was doing, and it went with my background. Teaching is a profession where you give yourself, and nursing is even more so. The main difference with teaching is that as a nurse I have one to one relations with patients.

"What surprised me most is how appreciative the patients are for anything that you can do for them. My students, to say the least, didn't invariably respond with that sort of gratitude. Just closing the shade for a patient with the light in his eyes would evoke his thanks. I was appreciated for doing what I was paid to do. It made me feel good to see that." Orzech has stuck to her choice of a

second career without any regrets. "But nursing is **hard** work!" she exclaims. "You can work on a twelve-hour shift if somebody calls in sick, and you'll work on a holiday too. But everyone takes their turn doing that." Orzech graduated from the School of Nursing in July, 1977, and her career at the hospital has rapidly advanced in the years that followed. Starting out as a staff nurse, she's risen several notches to a nurse coordinator,



"and that wasn't my intention starting out, to move up so quickly."

Like Orzech, Bob Pycrz, B.S., R.N., also shifted from education to nursing, but in this case his new career involved a technical skill that has taken him into the field of laser technology. Pycrz taught for ten years in Chicago public schools specializing in math and English, but in 1981 undertook medical training when educational policy took an adverse turn. "It reached the point in the public schools," he recalls, "where there was more paperwork than instruction, and contact with students began to ebb. For each objective I had with the children, I'd have to churn out five to six pieces of paper.

"On top of that I found myself getting transferred further and further away from my home on the North side. The commute got longer and longer."

Pycrz also attended Ravenswood's nursing school and chose to remain at the hospital on completing the program. Although still part of a gender minority in the female world of nursing, he is perfectly at home in his new profession. On that score he is

quite emphatic. "I didn't have any qualms about entering the profession," he says, "because teaching is principally a female occupation too. I was always working with and for women."

The big surprise for the former junior high school instructor came during his first year at the hospital's rehabilitation unit. "People just don't realize how physical that labor is," he says, "with all that lifting and running around." Intrigued by new medical advances, Pycrz later undertook special training at the hospital's Wenske Laser Center, and now assists with the laser devices used during medical procedures. He also participates in forty workshops a year offering training in the equipment, and engages in outside consulting for institutions considering taking it up.

"The Wenske facility here is unique to the Midwest in the number and variety of lasers we have," he notes. "Lots of places claim they're laser centers, but to really be

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one you have to do more than just treat patients. We conduct research and offer educational programs, too. So right now I have the best of both worlds. I have the opportunity to apply the skills I learned in nursing school as well as to teach."

Indeed, Pycrz is on the education committee of the American Society for Laser Medicine and Surgery and chairman of the Laser Safety Committee of the Midwest Bio-Laser Institute in Chicago.

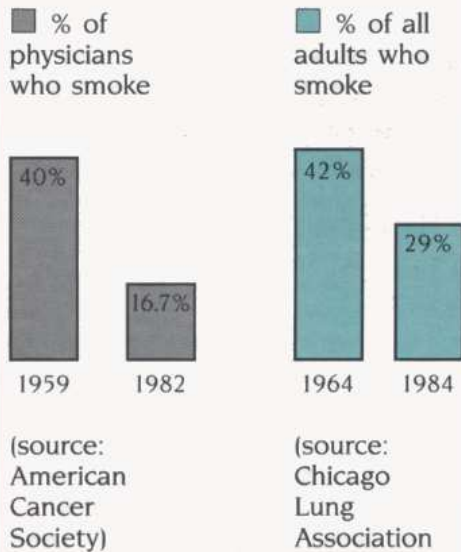


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If the trends continue, smoking restrictions are clearly on their way. How severe, fair or beneficial they are will be a matter of debate in the workplace, courthouses and townhalls for the remainder of the 80's.

**Note:** Ravenswood employees who responded to our survey should be aware that this survey was general in scope and not intended to affect hospital policy. Individual concerns should be brought to the attention of your department head. All survey results and comments will be forwarded to Human Resources for their consideration.

### The Decline in Smoking may be a Major Cause for the Decline in Smoker's Rights



currently the Chairman of the Consulting Nutritionists in Private Practice of the Illinois Dietetic Association. Marotta specializes in clinical dietetics and sees patients with diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and weight-related problems during and after pregnancy.

The Chicago Women Physicians Network consists of women physicians and staff who are trained in various medical specialties providing comprehensive care for men, women and children. For more information on this practice, call 275-9545.

## Woman's Auxiliary

### A Salute to Ravenswood at 80



To wind up the 80th Anniversary year-long celebration, the Woman's Auxiliary will present, "A Salute to Ravenswood at 80," on Saturday, November 7, 1987.

This annual Fall Dinner Dance Benefit will be held at the Thorngate Country Club in Deerfield, Illinois, and will include cocktails, dinner and dancing to Art Mertz and the "Free Notes."

Proceeds from the Benefit will go toward the funding of renovation for the Labor, Delivery and Nursery area of the Medical Center. Admissions to the Obstetrics and Gynecology unit have been increasing for the past five years, from 1,400 to a projected 2,000 admissions per year. New facilities and equipment are of prime consideration in the Woman's Auxiliary's fund-raising efforts.

Tickets for the Fall Dinner Dance Benefit are \$80 per person. For more ticket information, contact the Woman's Auxiliary at Ext. 1346, or Milli Striegl, Community Relations and Marketing, at Ext. 1590.

Betty Garrison graduated from the hospital's nursing school in 1982 and after spending time at Cook County Hospital, transferred successfully to Illinois Masonic Hospital. Hers is one of the more interesting cases, because neither age nor limited background in medicine and patient care restricted her progress in medicine. "I was divorced with two kids and I found myself trying all sorts of work," she remembers. "I was in an airplane factory and I realized that I had to leave. The work was too hard and the factory was dusty, and the labor was simply dehumanizing."

That was in a small town in southern Kansas. Garrison had had aspirations as a nurse when she was younger and prior to completing nursing school worked in a nursing home and on the surgical floor of a hospital. "A friend in Chicago asked if I'd wanted to come here for nursing school and I said no initially. The city was too big. But I later applied to three hospital nursing schools and chose Ravenswood because of the friendly atmosphere of the facility."

After graduating in June, 1982, Garrison went to Cook County Hospital, because "they said we'd learn more in three months there than after spending years anywhere else in the city. And they were right. You see a wide variety of everything. I liked working with patients and there are times that I know I can reach people that others can't because of my age. I transferred to Illinois Masonic because it's closer to my home and I wanted to work with cardiac patients.

"I had more trouble in my thirties getting a job than I did in my fifties as a nurse. I faced a lot of age discrimination after my divorce. But it's a real ego boost to be able to land the job you want even if you're in your late fifties. Nursing is for people who feel they have the talent and aren't afraid of hard work. I haven't had any regrets. There are times when a patient simply says 'thank you' and it's all very rewarding."

All of the graduates of the Ravenswood Hospital School of Nursing stressed the value of a hospital-based training program, and Ravenswood's is just one of two in the Chicago area. Observers consider the academic programs at junior colleges and universities valuable for scholarly purposes, but the sort of hands-on clinical expertise most valued by healthcare organizations today is more easily obtained by working and studying with established and experienced professionals in a patient care setting.

"If a person wants a job or career in

## Chicago Women Physicians Network Adds New Doctor

The Chicago Women Physicians Network has added two members to its ranks; they are Deborah Santo, M.D., and Veronica A. Marotta, R.D.

Deborah Santo, M.D., is a pediatrician with a M.S. degree in genetic counseling from Rutgers University and is also a graduate of Loyola Stritch School of Medicine. She completed a pediatric residency at the University of Michigan in 1985 and sees pediatric patients from newborns to the age of 18.

Veronica A. Marotta, R.D., is a registered dietician who received her training and completed an internship at the University of Iowa hospitals. She completed her Master's work at the University of Iowa School of Human Nutrition. She is

delivering care to people," acknowledges Lewandowski, "the hospital programs are excellent."

The program at Ravenswood lasts 84 weeks, and is designed to expose students to the general principles of nursing alongside the relevant natural sciences. Tuition is \$6,400, and there are at least three different financial aid programs at hand for those who qualify. The School of Nursing works closely with the faculty of Northeastern Illinois University, where mandatory classes on the natural sciences are scheduled. The courses organized by NIU are intended to complement academically the nursing instruction supplied by the hospital.

The criteria for admission are an ACT test score, one semester of high school chemistry and three letters of reference, from past or current teachers, employers or counselors. A personal interview with a member of the Admissions Committee is also encouraged. Formal medical instruction is also encouraged during the years that follow graduation; those who continue their studies obtain full reimbursement of their tuition costs.

"The faculty here have access to a wide variety of clinical activities," comments program director Mathis. "There is a strong correlation between what is done in the class and what is observed and learned in a clinical practice. The methodology in a university program is mainly observation, not hands-on care. At Ravenswood, you learn nursing by caring for patients in a live setting. And let's face it — nursing, after everything is said and done, is a practice profession."

Ravenswood not only trains nurses, but keeps them on staff as well, despite the considerable growth in career options for nurses outside the hospital. The facility's very low vacancy rate testifies to that.

"The program here draws good students, because word has spread that there's real teamwork among physicians, caregivers and administrators," maintains Diane Iorfida, assistant vice president for human resources at Ravenswood. "Students have an opportunity to learn from their peers. There's no attempt to protect information or keep others off your turf. And we really strive to expose students to the daily issues of nursing. We've organized a support system between the school and the practitioners."

"Our ideal candidate," concludes Mathis, "has always wanted to be of service to people. Nursing isn't entirely an altruistic profession, but there are qualities of decency and kindness that we look for. It can be an extremely rewarding profession for anyone. If I'd made one person feel better when I was a nurse, I knew it was worth something."