

THURSDAY CAREERS CHATS

Date of Session: 12/1/11 Title of Session: Nursing Careers

Alumni Presenter: Melissa Paterakis Class Year: 2008

Title: Pediatric Emergency RN Employer: Children's National Medical Center

Notes from Session:

Background

- A Biology major at Dickinson, interested in pre-health
- Took Medical Sociology, Biological Ethics classes at Dickinson – they were interesting, and showed how medicine and health affect communities.
- Dickinson provided the opportunity for exposure to other areas of health and health-related experiences (she did a Physical Therapy independent study, which was a great learning experience even though she decided not to pursue PT for her career.)
- Did a clinical research internship in pediatrics at Johns Hopkins her sophomore year. She liked interacting with children while also using her brain. She kept going back each summer, became close with RNs, NPs and clinical residents who suggested she consider nursing.
- After touring Johns Hopkins she loved it and applied to their program. Matriculated Fall 2008.

Her Nursing Degree

- About 75% of nursing students at Hopkins have a previous Bachelor's degree and are getting another bachelor's. Hopkins has another program where you can get the RN, but you need to BRN to advance in nursing.
- She did a Traditional BRN at Hopkins, which was 2 years, but there's also an accelerated program that takes 13 months. Melissa liked the break in between the school year to get more experience, but most people want the accelerated program. Hopkins has shifted to only having the accelerated program beginning in 2012.
- Having a biology major helps for nursing school because of prerequisites needed for the nursing program, but psychology would be another discipline to pursue (life span psychology class will likely be a nursing school requirement) Another prerequisite may be a Nutrition class, which Dickinson doesn't offer.
- A knowledge of Biology through having it as a major helps a nursing students understand the basics - you're expected to have a basic understanding of hard science in nursing school because they don't cover it.
- Research and writing development at Dickinson is very helpful for time at nursing school
- The average age at Hopkins is 27 – it's not too late if you decide after graduating. Nursing school has a diverse group of people from a variety of backgrounds.
- Nursing school includes classes, but also clinicals where you have an instructor but you work on a hospital floor (become familiarized with the flow of a hospital, reading a chart, talking to patients...then you gain experience in various departments: Labor & Delivery, psych, surgical, general medical, etc.)

The Nursing Field

- Melissa likes nursing because of the flexibility and how much room there is to grow. There are so many things you can do – you have a general degree, so you can work in Labor & Delivery and then transition to the operating room. You have the flexibility to say "This isn't for me – I want to try something new."
- A lot of continuing ed. opportunities (master's):
 - o Forensic nurse specialist (called in when indication of abuse)
 - o Nurse Practitioners - most common (she's considering)...there's going to be an emphasis on Nurse Practitioners with new health reform. NPs work in the ER like doctors, they also work in primary care settings (like at the health center at Dickinson)
 - o Master in nursing/public health joint degree or MBA or Law

Her Nursing Career

- Worked at Children's National Medical Center
- Involved in patient care in the ER (don't need docs' orders to give meds and order x-rays) and patient education (docs are in and out, so nurse goes over things in detail including discharge instructions)
- Worked 4-hour block shifts
 - o Triage nurse (assess what could be wrong and how quickly need to be seen)
 - o Assessment nurse (gets vitals and decides to upgrade or downgrade in how soon to see doctor) and then carrying out some things that need to be done
 - o Separate areas for urgent care, psych patients, asthma patients
- Three 12-hour shifts per week (liked the flexibility)
- She worked the night shift (7pm-7am) – found there to be a lot of camaraderie because they were "in the trenches" together without a lot of resources
- She's really happy with her decision to go into nursing
- Now transitioning and taking a position as a clinical research nurse in pediatric food allergies division – a Monday-Friday, 9-5 job.

Advice

- Explore your options, shadow to help clarify what you do/don't want to do
- Look for programs with new graduate internship programs, to help the transition from school to working
- Look for opportunities with low patient-nurse ratio, especially right out of school