

Nursing Careers Not Defined by Gender – A Look at the Male Nurse

Nursing was once a predominately female profession, but it has become popular for men as well in recent years.

Although this is now a common career choice for men, there are still many misconceptions and stereotypes associated with being a male nurse.

“I’ve always believed that people feel a calling to enter nursing,” says Dottie Roberts, Nursing instructor at South University — Columbia. “As the nursing profession has become more open to men over the years, males with a strong call to caring have chosen nursing.”

Roberts disagrees with the way that many men who choose nursing careers are referred to as ‘male nurses.’ “We don’t use the term ‘female nurse’ to describe a woman in the profession, so using the term ‘male nurse’ implies we have to differentiate that individual somehow from other practitioners,” Roberts says. “While men often are drawn to more intense practice areas, such as critical care or emergency services, no basic difference exists between them and women in the profession.”

Why Do Men Choose Nursing Careers?

Jerry Lucas, a registered nurse and the founder of Male Nurse Magazine, is devoted to his profession.

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Lucas says he has not looked for a new job since he became a nurse 20 years ago. He enjoys that his line of work allows him to do many things that he could not do with another job.

Registered Nurse, Robert Fraser likes knowing that his work has a direct connection to his patients’ health.

“There are clear things that I need to do to keep patients healthy, such as constant assessment of their condition, ensuring medications are given when needed, and their care is organized and planned out,” Fraser says. “However, each shift you get 12 hours to dedicate to a small group (1-7 patients depending on the floor you work on) of patients, which is a luxury physicians don’t get.”

For Fraser this helps him to create a more intimate relationship with the patients.

“While patients need their medication, a lot of patients also need to know that there is some that cares about them and will be there to help them make it through challenges they are living with,” Fraser says.

Benefits of Having a Male Nurse on Staff

Roberts says that working on health care teams with men has allowed her to benefit from the distinct perspective they bring to the profession.

“Historically, especially in the medical-surgical areas where I have spent my career, men were used for ‘heavy lifting’ because they may have been physically stronger than the women on staff,” Roberts says. “Now, thankfully, stereotypes are fading, and men are recognized as nursing colleagues in every respect.”

Lucas says he has been told over the years that adding a male nurse into the mixture can help to balance out the staff, and make for a more relaxed working environment.

“Bringing a balance of perspectives to any situation can be useful,” Fraser says. “When there is an imbalance of gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc., there is something left out. Bringing more balance to a group can strengthen it by bringing in perspectives that were left out, and increasing the mix of skills in

your team.”

Common Misconceptions about the Male Nurse

Lucas says that men have had nursing careers for many years, but many people just don't realize that. He says that men, such as himself, have had to fight a number of unwarranted stereotypes.

He resents the misconception that becoming a nurse is just a way for men to ease their way into medical school.

“We will not be seen as the doctor's aid, we are trained professionals,” Lucas says.

Fraser also believes that people tend to have mistaken beliefs about the reasons men choose nursing careers. “I think there is a misconception that men bring strength and mainly physical differences,” Fraser says. “Strength of the women I work with should not be underestimated.”

Fraser believes that each gender should not be defined by their physical attributes.

“Males bring just as much critical thinking and clinical skills as they bring caring and compassion,” Fraser says. “Thinking that one sex has or lacks capacities to be a good nurse or is naturally a better nurse is just untrue.”

Roberts says the misconception that bothers her the most is that men can't practice as nurses in women's care settings, such as obstetrics or gynecology.

“I suspect part of the hesitation comes from the fact that men don't give birth or breast-feed infants,” Roberts says. “However, I've known many females who've never done either of those things and yet are beloved obstetrical nurses.”

Roberts says that many women see medical specialists who are male, so there's no reason why men can't have nursing careers in those specialty settings.

“The labor and delivery nurse who admitted me for the birth of my first child was male, and he was a wonderful model of nurse caring,” Roberts says.

Nursing Careers Are For Everyone

Fraser believes the stereotypes that nursing is a female-only profession are slowly crumbling. He says that he receives a lot of second glances when people hear that he's a nurse. Many people also ask him if he intends to go to medical school.

“I enjoy it though, you get the chance to explain the profession and what nurses actually do,” Fraser says.

He uses this as an opportunity to change the misconceptions of people who think nursing is a strange career choice for a man.

Fraser says that by being a nurse, he has been able to inspire a few other men to get into the profession.

“It is great to know that men are interested. It is just unfortunate that it still is not widely discussed as a profession for men leading up to university,” Fraser says.