

What Does 'Being A Nurse' Mean to You?

Being a nurse used to be associated with the white starched dress uniform and cap. When you saw someone in that uniform, it meant purity, compassion and care. It also used to mean handmaiden or the "one who takes orders."

These days few people still wear white and even fewer wear dresses. Many nurses don't even wear uniforms to perform their duties. So the uniform alone is no longer representative of nurses.

Being a nurse has always meant more than just a piece of fabric. Interestingly, many nurses who move out of nursing and into other jobs leave their nurse title behind as well. Being a nurse doesn't seem to have the same good feeling that it used to. People think of 'nurse' and they think of the bedside nurse. Nursing today is so much more than just working at the bedside. We impact people in many ways and in numerous environments. The very things that make you who you are the very things that attracted you to nursing in the first place.

So, what does 'being a nurse' mean to you?

A Job

Nursing is a job. It is something that you do for a living. You go to work in a patient care setting – hospitals, outpatient centers, long term care facilities, home health organizations – perform your duties, and at the end of the day, receive a paycheck for your service. Or perhaps you don't work in a patient care setting but use your nursing skills in other ways of caring.

Nursing is a great job. It is a privilege to work with people from all walks of life and provide them with care. As a nurse, you do things for people that impact them in ways that they remember for a lifetime. When people enter the healthcare arena for care, they have certain expectations. They are not always at their best. In fact, as nurses, we see people at their worst. And during the most intimate, challenging and frightening moments in life, nurses are right there by your side.

It's an incredible job.

An Identity

Nursing means so much more than being a bedside nurse. Nursing gets into your skin. Being a nurse says something about who you are as a person. I work primarily with nurses because there are common characteristics that we share. As a nurse, there is an implication that you are compassionate, caring, hardworking, ethical, trustworthy – all incredible attributes to be known for. If you exhibit these characteristics, they are part of your identity. And they go with you throughout your life and career. Nurses are also critical thinkers, trained observers, problem-solvers, and highly creative.

As a nurse, you get to determine what values you express on the job. There is a difference between advocating, for example, and patronizing. There's a difference between helping someone – where there is an implication of a hierarchical structure (I am better than you so I help you to get better) versus performing care, assisting, supporting and serving (being in service). You can accept responsibility for the care you give and the tasks you perform and how you perform those tasks. In healthcare, people tend to take things personally. But you need to be able to factor that out of the equation and accept responsibility for what you do and not for what the patient does – or doesn't do, or for what others do – or don't do. You decide the kind of nurse you are going to be and what qualities you want to represent regardless of what others do.

Nursing as an identity means that you see yourself as possessing the qualities of a nurse regardless of what job you are doing. I am a nurse and am proud to be one, although I no longer perform direct patient care. It is part of who I am and the values that I hold dear to me – integrity, lifelong learner, excellence, mastery, connection. Today, I express these values through my coaching business. So, what does 'being a nurse' mean to you?