

Nurse Resumes Old Profession

By Hugo Ottolenghi
 CHAPEL HILL - Eighteen years ago, Barbara Grainger quit nursing and decided never to return. She decided that the time spent getting degrees in nursing and public health was a mistake. But last year she changed her mind. The youngest of her four children was 10, and she had the time to work. "Something inside me said I wanted to be a nurse again," she said.

Grainger heard of a nurse refresher course being offered by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Nursing through its department of continuing education. The course was designed for nurses like her, who had not worked for five years or whose license had expired. Grainger enrolled in the summer but still had misgivings. "Even when I started the course, I wondered if I had made a mistake," she said. "I was not sure I would like it."

For the first week, she and other former nurses sat through 24 hours of classes. For the next 10 weeks, they spent half that time in class and 16 hours each week on the job.

"After I went on the floor at Durham County General Hospital, I knew I had made the right decision," Grainger said. While she worked there, others had the option of doing clinical practice at Duke Hospital in Durham, or N. C. Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill.

Both the classes and clinical work were rewarding, Grainger said. In class, instructors like Bonnie Hensley, who coordinates the refresher course, lectured on changes in nursing practices related to patient assessment and care planning. Hensley also taught new health care techniques and developments in the law that affected nurses.

On the hospital floor, Grainger reacquainted herself with a nurse's routine and was exposed to the many technical and clinical changes that had taken place since she quit. After completing the course, she was hired at Dorthea Dix Hospital, a 15-minute drive from her home. Soon, Grainger was assigned to the intensive care unit.

She admitted that she had found working in the unit difficult.

"They told me that if you worked for a little while, it would all come back," she said. "What they didn't realize was that there was nothing to come back to. The intensive care unit didn't exist when I was a nurse. I had to learn everything new."

That was when the refresher course became important. "The course gave me the confidence to do the job," she said.

Now, Grainger shares a full-time position with another nurse. She works on eight-hour day 10 times a month. She said this allowed her enough time to be with her husband and children and made her appreciate the time she spent at home even more.

Grainger also felt she was still learning. "Things are much more technical than when I was in nursing," she said. "Much more is known about the human body; everything is more precise."

At the same time, Grainger felt she had something to offer her co-worker. "Nurses get carried away about the technical part," she said. "They forget about the personal comfort of the patient. I think you have to combine both of them."

For nurses like Grainger, who have quit nursing but want to return, the School of Nursing is offering another refresher course Jan. 25 - April 9, 1982. Financial aid is available and continuing education credit will be granted. For more information, contact Bonnie Hensley at (919) 966-1411 or write to UNC-CH School of Nursing, Carrington Hall 214H, Chapel Hill, N. C. 27514.

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