



# Lifelong Learning in Nursing

As nursing students graduate, they need to understand that they will *always* have a need to learn. According to De La Harpe and Radloff, “Students must become lifelong learners; that is, learners who have a wide repertoire of cognitive learning strategies, are metacognitive about learning and themselves as learners, are motivated to learn and can manage their feelings and available resources effectively” (2000, p. 1).

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) produced a report titled, *Lifelong Learning in Medicine and Nursing* (2010), which describes the vision for the future of continuing education and lifelong learning for healthcare professionals. The report emphasizes interprofessional, team-based, innovative, learner-centered teaching methods that are needed to teach today’s healthcare professionals, and the need for change regarding how we currently teach. The report calls for collaboration among academia, healthcare, accrediting bodies, licensing and credentialing boards, as well as others associated within healthcare systems.

More than at any time in my career, I am reminded of how much the profession of nursing relies on lifelong learning, not only to sustain our profession individually and collectively, but also to promote and advocate for the resources and tools needed to

care for others. Recently, I was asked to speak at a ceremony for students and graduate nurses being inducted into Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honor Society (STTI). Induction is not only proof of students’ academic accomplishments that have required motivation and commitment to learning, but affirmation of their commitment to the profession. A hallmark of STTI membership is lifelong scholarship and learning.


I shared with inductees that the profession of nursing can be very demanding; a lot of knowledge and

understand and live out their beliefs in new ways.

Everything done in nursing provides an opportunity to learn. From the Ebola crisis, we are learning the newest isolation guidelines. We continue to learn about emerging medications, diagnostic tests, and technologies. We must learn to advocate for healthcare at home and around the world. We need to educate people about disease and illness so that they are not fearful and prejudiced against those who are ill and suffering.

As a nurse for over 25 years, I can attest that every day I have worked, whether in bedside nursing, administration, home care, or teaching, I have learned something new. Occasionally a student tells me, “I learned nothing today.” I know, as both a nurse and an educator, that this is not possible if you are seeking and open to learning. I learned from these students that I need to help them see the vast learning opportunities that surround them.

Every day caring for others you learn something, even if it takes you a while to recognize learning.

The psalmist who wrote Psalm 119 was a passionate learner. Over and over he emphasizes how he wants God to “give me understanding to learn your commands” (v. 73). We, too, need to be open to learning, to have a thirst for knowledge, to seek out wisdom. Then as we learn, we are given a great gift to pass on to others. 

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ongoing learning is needed in order to provide competent, safe, and compassionate care. The learning has just begun for graduating nurses. They will learn that two people with the same diagnosis will not respond the same way. They’ll discover the importance of working on an interdisciplinary team and glean knowledge from each team member, and the importance of teamwork and respect for others’ opinions, including patients, coworkers, and all members of the healthcare team. It will be important to learn the mission and vision of the institution where they work, and about the community served.

Graduate nurses also discover much about themselves. Coping and support mechanisms are put to the test. Many witness the dying process and death for the first time. They are challenged to

American Association of Medical Colleges, & American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2010). *Lifelong learning in medicine and nursing*. Retrieved from <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/education-resources/MacyReport.pdf>

De La Harpe, B., & Radloff, A. (2000). Informed teachers and learners: The importance of assessing the characteristics needed for lifelong learning. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22(2), 169–182. doi:10.1080/713695729



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