

## Rehabilitation Nursing

### Humble Beginnings

In 1633, the profession of nursing began in France with the Sisters (or Daughters) of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor, which was founded by St. Vincent de Paul and Louise de Merillac. The Sisters would leave the convent to nurse the poor in their homes. By 1660, there were more than 40 houses of the Sister of Charity across France and several other countries in Europe.

A true pioneer of modern nursing, Florence Nightingale began her training in 1850 at the Institute of St. Vincent de Paul in Alexandria, Egypt. She learned the methods of the Daughters of Charity in 1853 and was instrumental in assisting with the care of the injured during the Crimean War.

The first nursing school located in the United States opened in Bellevue Hospital, New York City in 1873. It was based on the principles of nursing from Florence Nightingale. Between the years of 1889 and 1893, services for crippled children began to be offered by the Cleveland Rehabilitation Center, and the first schools for children with physical disabilities were established in the United States.

The specialty practice of rehabilitation nursing began in the 1940s — essentially to care for World War II veterans suffering from spinal cord injuries along with those disabled from the polio epidemic. Both groups required hospitalization and care over long periods of time.

The passing of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 increased public awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. This act helped to promote community access by decreasing or eliminating physical barriers and helped to promote nondiscrimination in employment.

The Association of Rehabilitation Nurses (ARN) was established in 1974 and was recognized formally by the American Nurses Association in 1976. Over the years, the ARN has worked to advance the practice of rehabilitation nursing through ongoing research, education, and the promotion of certification.

### Requirements to Become a Nurse

A valid high school diploma is required to enter nursing school. Talking to a guidance counselor, staff from a prospective nursing program, or even a practicing nurse may also be helpful in finding out more information about the profession. Many high schools offer career tracks that help guide students in selecting classes that



will relate to the profession or degree they plan on pursuing.

Many schools of nursing offer accelerated programs for students who have already earned a bachelor's degree or master's degree in another field other than nursing. The programs are typically shorter in length than the traditional program and allow the student to enter the profession of nursing without having to complete four additional years of college.

Some schools of nursing require applicants to take a pre-admission test called the National League for Nursing (NLN) Pre-Admission Exam. These exams aid faculty in the selection process of prospective candidates by providing them with another picture of the candidate's academic skill level.

### Entry Level Education/Degrees

An Associate degree in Nursing (ADN) is a two or three-year program offered at a community or junior college that prepares nurses to provide direct patient care in a number of different settings. Many students start by obtaining their ADN, enter the workforce, and then complete a bridge program to complete their BSN on their way to a master's degree.

Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) care for clients under the direction of a registered nurse. They provide patient care and can administer medications in some health care settings if they are licensed to do so. Most programs are about one year long and are offered by vocational and technical schools.

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A Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BS/BSN) is a four-year program offered at universities and colleges that prepares nurses to practice across all health care settings. A BSN degree is required for advancement to a master's program and is preferred for some entry level positions such as case management, public health nursing, or school nursing.

A Hospital Diploma is a two or three- year program based in a hospital setting that prepares the student to deliver direct patient care in a variety of settings. Many hospital programs are affiliated with junior colleges, where the student can also take basic English and science requirements, earning an ADN along with a diploma in nursing.

### **Advanced Degrees**

Degree completion programs are offered for nurses who have already earned a diploma or ADN degree but wish to complete a bachelor's or master's degree in nursing (RN to BSN, or RN to MSN). Many of these programs offer flexible formats such as online classes designed for working nurses whose time to attend traditional classes is very limited.

A Masters of Science in Nursing (MSN) prepares nurses for more independent roles such as Nurse-Midwife, Nurse Anesthetist, Nurse Practitioner, Clinical Nurse Specialist, etc. Master's prepared nurses serve as expert clinicians, can work in a specialty field of nursing such as community health, administration, or geriatrics, and can hold faculty roles as well.

### **Licensure**

Once training and education is completed for your Advanced Practice Nurse, Registered Nurse, or Licensed Practical Nurse program, you must become licensed to practice nursing in your state of residence. This is done by successful completion of the NCLEX-RN or NCLEX-PN license examination.

### **Certification**

Many different specialty certifications are available for nurses who wish to establish themselves as a clinical expert in their field of practice. A specialty certification applicable to Rainbow's setting is the Certification in Rehabilitation Nursing. Nurses who complete the certification exam are awarded with the title of Certified Rehabilitation Registered Nurse.

The first certification examination for the Certified Rehabilitation Registered Nurse (CRRN) was offered in 1984. More than 950 nurses sat for the first exam. As of 2007, there

were nearly 10,000 CRRNs across the United States, and the number continues to grow annually.

Certification in Rehabilitation Nursing demonstrates to employers, colleagues, clients, and the public that the nurse is committed to excellence in caring for people with chronic illness and physical disabilities. It also indicates that he/she is an experienced rehabilitative or restorative nurse who has achieved a higher level of knowledge in this specialty practice area. It can also lead to a higher professional credibility, recognition of expertise, greater impact as a job candidate, and a heightened sense of personal achievement. Certification of nursing staff also factors into accreditation by agencies such as CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities), and JCAHO (Joint Commission and Accreditation of Hospital Organizations).

### **Continuing Education**

Continuing education is required by the state of Michigan for all licensed nurses. The requirement is 25 contact hours over a three-year period — two of those contact hours must relate to the topic of pain management. Requiring continuing education hours ensures that the nurse will remain current with clinical practice skills and will advance as a health care professional along with technology in the medical field.

### **Looking into the Future**

The integration of information technology and telemedicine into the practice of rehabilitation nursing will help link health care providers with patients across a great distance. Electronic medical records will become the standard of practice in many settings. Research and evidenced-based practice will continue to validate old standards of care and address new ideas to continue to foster and grow the practice of our profession. As the population continues to age, the demand for home and long-term care will necessitate the need to expand our practice realm beyond the walls of a facility. We must remain open to change and move forward together. As the profession of rehabilitation nursing continues to evolve, the basics of human caring must remain intact. Leadership in nursing must remain strong and model change to help mentor future nursing leaders to move our profession forward together. ❖

*About the Author...*

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*Centers' Ypsilanti Treatment Center. Before joining Rainbow, Kimberly worked at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital on their Acute Inpatient Rehabilitation Unit for almost 19 years. Her specialty diagnosis of choice was traumatic brain injury. Kimberly graduated from Eastern Michigan University with a BSN and earned a specialty certification in general rehabilitation in 1999 (Certified Rehabilitation Registered Nurse - CRRN). She started working at Rainbow in July of 2006 as the nurse for the Ann Arbor Semi-Independent Living Apartment Program.*

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