



Men find satisfaction, good jobs in nursing

(left to right) Students Mickey Belcher, Jimmy Lee and Jeff Middlesworth work in a patient simulation room with Mark Foster (blue lab coat), adjunct assistant professor, nursing.

Helping a patient or family member during a difficult time is the primary satisfaction of being a nurse, according to male nurses and male nursing students interviewed for this story.

There are also practical reasons for being a nurse – the potential for good wages, plentiful jobs and career diversity.

So why do males comprise only 5.8 percent of U.S. registered nurses, 7 percent in Kansas?

Jane Zaccardi, director, practical nursing and health occupations, JCCC, says the eulogized Florence Nightingale may be the reason. Prior to the Crimean War, men provided care in hospitals and battlefields, and women in the home. Nightingale brought the profession to women, and subtly, the job switched from one for men to one for women.

JCCC, in conjunction with Kansas Board of Regents, is trying to reverse Nightingale's influence with two new Men in Nurses Training programs aimed at male high school students. The first is a nursing orientation summer camp for ninth and 10th grade students June 8-11 on the JCCC campus, offered at no charge through grant funding. The second MINT is a males-only *Certified Nurse Aide* course, for young men entering 11th and 12th grades, June 1-July 20 at the King's Cove campus. Students who are employed as CNAs by a nursing facility within 12 months of the program can have their tuition reimbursed by their employer.

With CNA certification, students can earn a good salary and find a job right away, according to Zaccardi, or use the credentials to continue their education as a practical nurse, then registered nurse.

"We flat out don't have enough nurses, and we need to have men interested in the profession," said Zaccardi, whose statement is supported by a 2004 report from the American Nursing Association predicting 1.1 million job openings in the year 2020. "We are hoping though the MINT program,

men will select nursing as their first choice, not as a career change in their 30s or 40s."

John McNally, assistant professor, nursing, JCCC, took exactly that career path. At age 16, he got a job in his hometown hospital as what was then called an "orderly" and worked part time at Stormont-Vail Regional Health Center, Topeka, while earning his bachelor's degree in nursing from Pittsburg State University.

"The orderly positions, now called CNA, were a convenient avenue to earn a paycheck while I was going to school," McNally said.

As an RN, McNally worked at Stormont-Vail and North Kansas City Hospital, earning a master's degree in nursing from the University of Kansas School of Nursing in 1996. In 2000, he decided to add computer skills to his résumé and enrolled at JCCC, where he moonlighted in the academic computer lab 30 hours a week. When a nursing faculty position opened at JCCC, he knew it was a good fit for him, especially as health care technology increases.

"In the hospitals where I've worked, there seem to be more males each year," McNally said. "While still a minority on the hospital floors, men are likely to migrate to surgery, radiology and technical areas. My impression is that men in nursing don't face any discrimination."

Ed Ronnebaum, assistant professor, nursing, JCCC, echoes those sentiments.

"I have never faced discrimination at any time," he said. "It doesn't matter if you are male or female as a nurse; patient care is a team effort."

For Ronnebaum, however, nursing is a career change. After high school, he served eight years of active duty as an Air Force aircraft mechanic, then in the Air Guard in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

On his return, Ronnebaum decided to rekindle his interest in anatomy and caring for sick people to become a nurse. He started as a student nurse tech at St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center, Topeka, earning his bachelor's degree in nursing from Washburn University, Topeka, a master's of science in health care administration from Central Michigan University and is currently working on a PhD in nursing at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He teaches full time at JCCC and maintains his commission as a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserves. He has had one assignment as a critical care nurse in Iraq January-May 2007. Before entering academia, he worked at KU Medical Center in medical/surgery, the burn unit and neurosurgery ICU.

"Nursing is an exciting career, and there is so much you can do with a nursing degree. You can work in a hospital, physician's office, rehabilitation or long-term care facility, nursing school or the military," Ronnebaum said. "With the growth in health care, the sky is the limit for what you can do in nursing."

"Men balance the profession," said Colleen Duggan, JCCC nursing professor. "Having men and women on the team makes for better collaboration on health care decisions."

Wayne Deines, adjunct associate professor, has a dual appointment with St. Luke's South Hospital and JCCC. He teaches JCCC students in clinicals two days a week at the hospital and one day a week at JCCC. As an RN-III at St. Luke's, he works in the cardiovascular recovery unit. Deines also came to nursing circuitously, working as an EMT with the Consolidated Fire District 2 (Prairie Village) and paramedic with Johnson County Med-Act and then earning his bachelor's degree in nursing from KU School of Nursing. A nurse for 18 years, he worked in the military eight years and at St. Luke's South for 10. Deines encourages men to enter nursing. In fact, his son is an operating room nurse at Children's Mercy Hospital, Kansas City, Mo.

JCCC has five male nursing faculty, two full-time, Ronnebaum and McNally, and three part-time, Deines, Mark Foster and Kureo Ohta. Eight male students are due to graduate this spring out of a class of 71. In the practical nurse program, there is one male adjunct faculty and three males out of 37 in the evening program due to graduate in December.

JCCC's male nursing students are gravitating to critical care upon graduation.

"Guys like critical care – ICU, trauma and surgery. I don't know what that's all about, but it seems to be natural," said student D.J. Klinge.

Again students reiterate the fact that they feel no discrimination as males. Sometimes an obstetrics patient prefers a female nurse, but they don't take offense. They see it as a personal preference.

"You have to be secure with yourself when you are a male nurse," said Jimmy Greenlee, student.

"Twenty years ago, guys in their 20s wouldn't have thought about nursing as a career choice. When people ask me if I



Student Matt Munden assesses a heart rhythm under the instruction of Mark Foster (left), adjunct assistant professor, nursing.

am going to be a nurse, I say 'Absolutely. There is nothing wrong with that,'" said Matt Munden, who was determined to finish nursing school despite being readmitted to the RN program after a tour of duty in Iraq.

Almost unanimously, male faculty and students wish they had been introduced to nursing as a career option earlier in life. They recommend earning a CNA (a prerequisite to JCCC's RN program) and working with patients before committing to the RN program.

"I got my CNA and really enjoyed it. You help people who are truly dependent on you. The CNA class pushed me into applying for nursing school," said Jeff Middlesworth.

"Just getting your CNA lets you know if you are cut out for the job. It lets you know whether you have the stomach for nursing or not, and you learn rapport with patients," Greenlee said.

So what would these young men say to other men thinking about a nursing career?

"Look into it and get your CNA. If you have your head on straight, and you are looking for a good career path, I think it is well worth it," Munden said. "It was one of those things I didn't really look at, at first. But this is the right decision for me."

"Even in the recession, the jobs in health care and nursing are still growing," Middlesworth said.

Greenlee says "absolutely" he is glad to have made the decision to be a nurse.

"I am not shy about being a male nurse," he said. "I am proud of it." **Im**