

Why We Should Stop Romanticizing Nursing

By Brooklyn Phillips, GHEHI's Communications and Intern Coordinator

When I entered college as a pre-nursing major, I thought that I had my entire future figured out. I was initially drawn to healthcare after witnessing the major shortage of providers during the Covid-19 pandemic. As someone who lost a family member during that time, I secured a firsthand glance at the chaos that was known as the healthcare field. Naturally, I was drawn to it. I was still in high school and desperately wanted to be a part of the solution.

As time passed and things started to calm down globally, I found myself still drawn to healthcare. As a teenaged girl, when you express your interest in healthcare, people automatically assume you are interested in nursing. Often times it is presented as a stable and highly respected career path. Everywhere I looked, people were encouraging myself and other students to pursue nursing mainly because of job security and the salary. However, after spending time as a pre-nursing student, I quickly realized that there were so many realities of pursuing a nursing career that people rarely talked about openly.

While many people advocate for young people to join the nursing field, what they fail to mention is that passion or interest alone is not enough to survive in healthcare. Before entering the pre-nursing track, I rarely heard honest conversations about the downsides. No one ever seems to mention the emotional and physical exhaustion, the burnout, or the immense pressure that comes with pursuing a nursing career. Instead, the sole focus seems to always be on stability and pay. While those things are important, they do not paint an accurate picture of what working as a nurse will actually look like or what healthcare professionals experience on a daily basis.

Luckily, as a pre-nursing student, I was able to meet and have fully honest conversations with senior nursing students and nursing instructors at my school. I quickly realized how normal stress and exhaustion are within the healthcare field. Students were expected to juggle harsh coursework, clinicals expectations, and constant competition in their cohort meanwhile in the field; nurses felt overworked and undervalued, emotionally exhausted, and a lack of support from their superiors. Being able to have these conversations truly made me question why so many people encourage students to join the healthcare field without fully preparing them for the reality of it. Hearing the truth directly from both future nurses and current nurses made me realize that the nursing profession truly is not for me. I am so grateful that I was able to have that realization before it was too late.

I think that as a society, if our goal is to truly cure the shortage of healthcare workers and have a higher retention rate of providers, we should tell the truth. Instead of encouraging students to join the healthcare profession blindly, we should encourage them to join and stay long-term by ensuring more honesty surrounding the field. Convincing students to join the healthcare

profession by not telling them about the very real struggles, it only sets them up for potential disappointment and burnout later. People deserve to know the rewards and the challenges of healthcare before deciding to join, or in my case, avoid it. Either way, as a society, we should normalize telling the truth, especially if we want to increase the quality of healthcare providers and the retention rate.