

Developing Educational and Professional Goals

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Developing clear educational and professional goals while pursuing my Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree is essential for my growth as a nurse and for achieving long-term professional success. Setting goals provides direction, motivation, and a structural framework for achieving both academic excellence and career advancement. Educational goals help nursing students like myself stay focused on building knowledge, strengthening critical thinking skills, and mastering the clinical competencies required for safe and effective patient care. Professional goals, on the other hand, allow me to envision my future roles as a nurse and take intentional steps toward achieving those aspirations.

My passion for nursing began while working alongside nurses at an outpatient dialysis clinic and grew stronger during my time in the acute care setting at a Level 1 Trauma Center. These experiences highlighted the versatility of the nursing profession and demonstrated how resilient, intelligent, and selfless nurses are. I have always enjoyed supporting nurses in their work and found fulfillment in training my mind to “think like a nurse” by applying clinical reasoning to medical decisions. Together, educational and professional goals foster lifelong learning and personal accountability, which are essential qualities necessary for meeting the demands of today’s constantly evolving healthcare system.

Examination of Journey

Becoming a Certified Clinical Hemodialysis Technician (CCHT) at a dialysis center involved many steps, beginning with rigorous training and passing the certification exam. At that time, I had recently earned my Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice and approached the training as if I were still in college by taking copious notes, studying daily, and fully immersing myself in the material. My dedication paid off, and I earned a near-perfect score on the exam. Earning my

certification qualified me to become a preceptor and train new dialysis technicians during their orientation period. Although the position typically required a minimum of six years with the company, I only had four. To my surprise, I was awarded the position and began training my first orientee within weeks. I thoroughly enjoyed this new leadership role, which sparked my interest in pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). Through this experience, I was able to positively influence the learning environment in a demanding work setting with high turnover rates, and provide meaningful feedback on ways to improve the orientation program.

While I am not currently an official preceptor at the hospital where I am employed, I am often entrusted with training new patient care technicians. This responsibility allows me to strengthen essential skills such as effective communication, problem-solving skills, patience, empathy, and mentorship, which will support my success while earning my BSN.

Specific Educational and Professional Goals

I aim to strengthen my academic writing skills and research abilities to effectively communicate complex nursing concepts in both academic and professional settings. Participating in group activities, discussion posts, and case studies throughout the program will allow me to practice critical thinking and proper use of evidence-based sources. By enhancing my ability to locate, interpret, and apply research findings, I will be better equipped to integrate current evidence-based practices into clinical decision-making and improve patient outcomes.

Upon completing ODU's BSN program, my goal is to obtain a leadership or charge nurse position within my current unit, the Neonatal ICU. Success in this role will be measured by my ability to apply clinical judgment, communication, and management skills gained through the BSN curriculum to support and guide other nursing staff effectively. Additionally, I plan to pursue NICU-specific certifications, including the Neonatal Resuscitation Program (NRP), Care

of the Extremely Low Birth Weight Neonate (C-ELBW), and the Neonatal Intensive Care Nursing Certification (RNC-NIC).

Self-Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses

Two of my greatest strengths include perseverance and a commitment to lifelong learning. This is my second attempt at earning my BSN; my first attempt was nearly three years ago as part of an accelerated bachelor's program. At that time, I struggled to balance school with full-time work and my role as my partner's primary caregiver. Although I ultimately had to step back at the time, I never lost sight of my goal to earn my BSN, even if it took several years to achieve.

Nursing is an ever-evolving field, and I am excited to dedicate myself to lifelong learning, recognizing that there will always be new knowledge to gain and skills to refine. My strong communication and interpersonal abilities allow me to collaborate effectively with peers, instructors, and patients. Additionally, my adaptability enables me to stay focused and provide high-quality care even in challenging circumstances, which is a critical skill as a NICU nurse.

One area I continue to work on is time management, particularly when balancing school, work, and personal responsibilities. I sometimes take on too many tasks at once, which can lead to an overwhelming amount of stress and difficulty prioritizing. I have also recognized the need to strengthen my confidence in public speaking and formal presentations, as these are essential skills for professional growth in nursing leadership and providing patient education. To address these weaknesses, I plan to implement structured study schedules, set realistic deadlines, and seek mentorship and constructive feedback. I will also take advantage of opportunities throughout the program to practice public speaking and presentations, helping me to build confidence and enhance my professional presence.

Self Care

Self-care is a vital component of maintaining overall health, well-being, and preventing burnout. It involves intentional actions to protect one's physical, emotional, and mental health through rest, proper nutrition, exercise, stress management, and simply indulging in activities one enjoys. Modeling self-care also promotes a culture of wellness and encourages patients to adopt similar health behaviors.

Working night shifts, I often rely on sleep as a key form of self-care, allowing me to reset and recover after a demanding 12-hour shift. Although it has been more challenging during my RN program, I make an effort to exercise often, go to the beach, and spend time with family and friends as ways to take meaningful mental breaks. Prioritizing my own well-being enables me to provide the best possible care for my patients.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my personal and professional journey has deepened my understanding of the experiences, values, and motivations that have shaped my path towards earning my BSN. My progression from Certified Clinical Hemodialysis Technician to now a NICU nurse revealed how perseverance, leadership, and a commitment to learning have guided my career decisions. By clearly defining my educational and professional goals, I have developed a stronger vision for my future as a BSN-prepared nurse, including how I can contribute to the NICU through research, evidence-based practice, and leadership. Most importantly, this reflection has emphasized the importance of self-care and balance, reminding me that personal well-being is a priority to show up for every patient every day. I am confident in my ability to achieve my goals and make a meaningful impact in the nursing profession.