

About Your Nursing Career

Stressed Out



Kathleen L. Garrison, MSN, RN
and Jill Duncan, RN, MS, MPH

An Insider's Guide to Success

- Strategies to help you land your dream job
- Find the unit that's right for you
- Advice to help you advance your career and your education
- Avoid burnout and keep your passion for nursing alive

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Kathleen L. Garrison, MSN, RN
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HCP Pro

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Dedication

Kathleen L. Garrison, MSN, RN

I dedicate this book to my beloved brother, Jeff, and my mother, Shirley, whose dedication to each other has taught me that family, love, and faith will see you through the worst and best of times. I also dedicate this book to my husband Jim; and to my children, Emily, Kaitlin, and Jimmy, who have always been—and will always be—my strength and greatest loves.

Jill Duncan, RN, MS, MPH

My contributions to this book are dedicated to my husband, Jason, for supporting and encouraging me to continually seek and aspire to new adventures; nothing beats having someone to share them with. I also dedicate this book to the nurses, physicians, and nurse practitioners in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit of the Inova Fairfax Hospital for Children in Falls Church, VA. I will carry memories of you and the lessons I've learned along the way wherever my travels take me.

Acknowledgments

Kathleen L. Garrison, MSN, RN

“Thank you” is such a small phrase, but it carries an enormous message. Thank you to all my nursing peers who have, in one way or another, made me who I am today. A special thanks to my family, who have endured countless hours of “Mom has to work” or “Mom has to work on her homework, her book, etc.” I love you all very much. You are my inspiration in everything I do. Love you . . . more!

I also would like to thank Mike, our editor, for giving me this opportunity to expand my horizon and for his understanding as the waves of stress in my career and life crashed ashore.

Jill Duncan, RN, MS, MPH

For my part, I am thankful to the friends, mentors, and colleagues I have had the pleasure of working alongside and learning from throughout the years. There is a piece of each and every one of you in this text. I am especially appreciative to Laura Batzel, Sandy DiVarco, Lorna Facticeau, Lori Richardson, Carrie Bullard, Jennifer Cruikshank, Priscilla Buck, and Beth Price, as well as to the late Cynthia Clinton-Dooley, whose memory I hold dear. I am also thankful to my parents for their immeasurable support, and to my sister, Jennifer, for her confidence and love.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our editor, Mike Briddon, for his patience, creativity, support, and expert guidance in keeping this adventure afloat!

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How to use this book

What if there was a book that explained complex nursing topics in an easy-to-understand manner and in an accessible format? That's the premise behind the *Stressed Out* series: solid references with a bit of a sense of humor and the understanding that a lighthearted approach to learning makes the whole thing more enjoyable.

To help you navigate through the book, you will find the following icons highlighting a particular passage:



Don't Forget: A little reminder about something of importance.



Don't Panic: Take a deep breath and relax. Get ready for a little reassurance.



Tip: A bit of inside information, a hint, or helpful advice.



Watch Out: Word to the wise; this is a warning.



Click: This icon refers you to a helpful Web site, where you may find further information on the topic.



Exercise: This activity will help you on your journey toward nursing success.



Fact: Highlights a description or truth.

Happy Nursing! Now you're ready to get started.

About the authors

Kathleen L. Garrison, MSN, RN



Kathleen L. Garrison, MSN, RN, has been a registered nurse for 28 years after graduating in 1980 with her BSN from Fairfield University in Fairfield, CT. She earned her master's degree in nursing in 2005 from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA.

Kathy began her nursing career in Bridgeport, CT, where she cared for burn victims. Upon moving to Virginia, she added critical care, home health, and 16 years of emergency nursing to her experience. She is a member of the National Nursing Staff Development Organization (NNSDO) and the Sigma Theta Tau, the Honor Society of Nursing.

Kathy is employed at Prince William Hospital in Manassas, VA, as the clinical educator in the nursing practice, education, and research department. Throughout her career at Prince William, she has progressively “climbed the ladder” of responsibility from staff RN to charge nurse to clinical nurse leader, and functioned in a variety of management roles.

Kathy lives in Manassas with her husband, Jim; three children: Emily, Kaitlin, and Jimmy; and their dog, Jingle.

Jill Duncan, RN, MS, MPH



Jill Duncan, RN, MS, MPH, recently assumed a new position as director for the Institute for Healthcare Improvement Open School for Health Professions in Cambridge, MA. In addition to this position, she is the clinical advisor to the Rival Interactive Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Critical Decision Simulation project. Jill has more than 15 years of clinical nursing and education experience in a variety of acute care settings, and most

recently served as clinical nurse specialist in the NICU at the Inova Fairfax Hospital for Children in Falls Church, VA.

Jill began her career working with adult and pediatric neurology and neurosurgery patients at the National Institutes of Health. After gaining valuable experience in the inpatient research setting, she transitioned to work with acutely ill neonates and their families in a host of large tertiary care medical centers. She eventually expanded her NICU experience to include work in a Level I trauma pediatric emergency department as well as pediatric and neonatal transport. Jill has contributed to *The Journal of Pediatrics* and is coauthor of a new HCPro nursing book titled *Pediatric High-Alert Medications: Evidence-Based Safe Practices for Nursing Professionals*.

Jill received master's degrees in nursing and in public health with a focus in maternal and child health from The University of Illinois at Chicago in 2000, and received her bachelor's degree in nursing from Georgetown University in Washington, DC, in 1993. Her professional memberships include the National Association of Neonatal Nurses, The Academy of Neonatal Nursing, and the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. She was featured in an *Academy of Neonatal Nursing* member spotlight in 2007. The same publication also highlighted the collaborative work she has done on the development of a virtual NICU critical decision simulation education program for nurses.

About the contributor

Richard Freedberg, RN, MSN, MPA, earned an associate's degree in nursing from Lansing Community College, a bachelor's degree in zoology from Michigan State University, a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Detroit–Mercy, a master's degree in nursing from Eastern Michigan University, and a master's degree in public administration from Western Michigan University, and is a doctoral student in interdisciplinary health studies at Western Michigan University.

His clinical experience includes staff nursing and management roles in medical-surgical and mental health acute care settings, home care nursing, and medical intermediate care. He is currently professor of mental health nursing at Lansing Community College in Lansing, MI. In addition, he continues to practice in a clinical setting (nursing is a stunningly incredible way to spend your life!). He is the author of *Stressed Out About Pharmacology*.

Introduction

So, you've graduated. Now what?

Graduation day has come and gone. Looking back, you remember the times you asked yourself, "Will it really be worth it?" Now here you are about to embark on an adventure that you will one day remember (fondly, of course) as "the good old days."

But first you need to get a job.

Not just any job, but *the* job. One that will make you feel as though it was custom-designed for you. One that you look forward to going to every day—no stress, just the joy of doing something you love to do at a place you love to do it.

Where will you start? Everyone seems to have an opinion of what you should do and where you should work. You'll get 400,000–500,000 hits if you type "nursing jobs in the United States" into any search engine. Pick up any newspaper and the healthcare jobs section of the classifieds will have numerous listings in all areas of nursing. Even the nightly news on television runs stories declaring to the public that there is a critical shortage of nurses around the world. How many specialties are open to you? As many as the number of family, friends, and peers who have been giving advice to you regarding what type of nurse you should be. Choose whatever area or specialty you feel is right for you, and then go for it!

You can make your own adventure. Together, let's dive into the journey.

Part One



Before you set sail on the voyage to your nursing future, you need to decide where you want to go. The first step is to take a good look at yourself and figure out how to present that person to the world. This section—filled with philosophies, resumes, and self-assessments—will get you started on the path to a successful career.

Chapter 1

Finding your nursing philosophy

If you are reading this book, chances are good that you are at a crossroads in your nursing career and you want to carefully select your route. Whether you are new to nursing and are trying to navigate the waters to find a port of call that fits your needs and desires, or you are a seasoned professional looking to charter a new cruise to a new port of call, one thing can help guide your decision about where to head next: your personal philosophy of nursing. Like a compass, it can steer you in the right direction.

What?! You don't have one? You didn't think you needed a philosophy of nursing for practice, and that it was just part of a mandatory course you had to take in your school's nursing curriculum? Well, don't panic.



Don't Panic: It's never too late to find your map. Let's take a glance at what a personal philosophy of nursing might look like.

McEwen and Wills (2002) define *philosophy* as "a statement of foundational and universal assumptions, beliefs and principles about . . . nursing practice and human health processes."

The first and perhaps most important thing you need to do as you embark on this adventure called your “career” is to ask yourself a couple of questions:

- What is nursing?
- What do you believe a nurse does?



Exercise: Go ahead and write down answers to these questions. Use them as a guide as we go through this chapter.

To help you start, let’s try to answer the question, “What is nursing?”

Nursing is both an art and a science. If you look at the early days of modern nursing, you will see little science. Nurses cared for the sick and injured with their hands and hearts, with few supplies, and with even less formal training. This is where the art of nursing began. Even today, as we immerse ourselves in the high technology of healthcare, a simple touch or warm words of encouragement can do more than the best medicine.

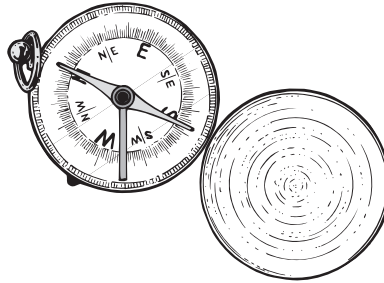
Move forward a few hundred years and we find nurses who are highly educated and trained with skills that surpass those of some physicians (don’t tell the physicians that, though!). We can blend our talents and skills such that it is difficult to see where the art of nursing ends and the science of nursing begins. Much like the horizon at sea, where does the sky end and the sea begin? Together, they are an awe-inspiring sight—as is nursing.

The direction for you . . .

Every nurse prefers and excels in some areas more than others, but most of us enter nursing because we want to care for others. Just like there are different cruise adventures for seniors, families, and singles (three-day, seven-day, and 14-day cruises), nursing careers also offer many itineraries from which to choose (see Chapter 6 for more on this).

Each course has a different perspective or way of defining the word *caring*. Caring for the acutely ill or injured, caring for chronically ill or aged clients, teaching, conducting research, and even writing *Stressed Out* books each carries with it a different type or focus of nursing, but they are all about caring. A director of nursing might say, “I used to care for patients, and now I care for nurses.” It’s just that the action of caring takes a different flavor or focus in each venue.

Part of the caring in nursing must be to care for yourself, as well. We will look at this in depth in Chapter 27, but for now let's just say you must be happy doing whatever type of nursing you are doing. If you are not happy or do not enjoy doing what you do every time you go to work, you must ask yourself why. Then try to answer that question. If you have your personal philosophy of nursing handy, rereading it and reexploring why you became a nurse can help you charter a course for yourself where the skies are blue and the waters are calm.



Tip: Regardless of your area of practice, a personal philosophy of nursing will guide you through your career like a compass.

The path to *your* philosophy

To start, ask yourself what you are comfortable doing. What fits in with your personal beliefs and moral values? Do not put off making these decisions until you “get a little experience.” You may find yourself in an uncomfortable situation that might be difficult to navigate.

For example, let's say you are not sure how you feel about abortion. Then one day you find yourself being assigned to care for a woman who has aborted a pregnancy and now needs care for complications. Will you be able to care for her with the same compassion and skill as you would a middle-aged mother who has just miscarried for the fourth time? Consider the diverse communities we all live in. How will you respond to the internal conflict issues that this diversity can bring to a healthcare environment? Hesitation or negative feelings can compromise care and place patients at risk. Even further, these moral and ethical dilemmas will place stress on you to the point where you might decide to leave nursing altogether. And that definitely is not what the nursing profession needs.

A personal philosophy of nursing might read as follows:

As a nurse, it is my responsibility to care for the physical and emotional needs of my patients, and to advocate for their needs and wishes while educating them and their families so that they can achieve their optimal level of health, comfort, and safety.

Establishing a personal philosophy of nursing practice, and carrying it with you wherever your nursing career takes you, will be like having your passport and boarding pass ready at check-in when you finally set sail on your cruise to success.



Tip: Philosophies can change and grow over time—just like your passport picture. Don't forget to pull it out every now and then and look at it. Be sure that it reflects any changes that have occurred over time as you have grown.



Exercise: Have you crafted your own nursing philosophy yet? If not, now is as good a time as any. Jot down some ideas about your passions and beliefs, and what you think it means to be a nurse. Put it all together. Rearrange it. Perfect it. How does it look?