

# What makes nursing a dream career?

In a world grappling with healthcare staffing shortages, exploring the exciting field of nursing has never been more crucial. **Dr Kathryn Halverson**, from the Department of Nursing at **Brock University**, Canada, shares insights into the challenges, rewards and opportunities awaiting the next generation of nurses.



**Dr Kathryn Halverson**

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## Fields of research

Nursing education and transition to practice

## Funders

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Brock University

Talk like a ...

## nursing educator

**Ageing population** — a higher percentage of people in a community getting older (65 years or above), leading to growing challenges in healthcare

**Burnout** — when an individual feels extremely tired, stressed and overwhelmed because of their work

**Evidence-informed practice** — making decisions about healthcare based on the best available information, combining what doctors and nurses know with what has been proven to work well

**Health inequities** — the unjust and avoidable differences in how healthy people are, often due to social factors (e.g., where they live, how much money they have, or their access to good healthcare)

**Interdisciplinary research** — when experts from different areas, like doctors, scientists and other professionals, work together to study and solve problems

**Nursing shortages** — a situation where there are not enough nurses to fill the available jobs in healthcare

In a world where healthcare is a key global challenge, nursing stands as a vital force. The nursing profession, which has always been key to successful healthcare systems, plays an important role in providing essential care during critical moments in patients' lives. The significance of nursing extends beyond the confines of hospital corridors – it is embedded in communities and homes and is an integral part of our society.

Nurses are the skilled professionals who

bridge the gap between medical expertise and compassionate support. They are the advocates for health and well-being, the empathetic caregivers, and the individuals who bring comfort and reassurance when it is needed most. Therefore, choosing a career in nursing is not just about filling a role; it is about embracing a profession that holds purpose and significance.

As the need for healthcare professionals grows, Brock University's Dr Kathryn Halverson highlights career opportunities

in nursing, shedding light on its rewards, challenges and potential to shape the future of healthcare.

## What is the current situation with nursing shortages?

Nursing shortages make it challenging for hospitals and other medical facilities to meet the needs of patients and maintain optimal healthcare standards. As the need for healthcare professionals grows, the critical role of nursing becomes increasingly apparent. "There is an urgent



need to recruit and retain nurses and other healthcare professionals to address staffing shortages across Canada,” says Kathryn. “According to Statistics Canada, in the first quarter of 2023, job vacancies for registered nurses increased by 5,475 positions (a 24% increase) to 28,335 compared to the same quarter in 2022.” This shortage of nurses is not just a problem in Canada; it is a global healthcare issue.

There are many reasons why these shortages persist globally. For example, the pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, burnout among healthcare workers, and ageing populations have all contributed to the increased need for nurses. The significance of nursing cannot be overstated. Nurses play an important role in providing compassionate care and their commitment to healthcare serves as a source of hope, inspiring positive change and resilience in the face of challenges.

### What are the qualities of a good nurse?

The qualities that define a good nurse extend far beyond medical and practical knowledge; personality traits are equally important. A truly outstanding nurse has a unique blend of compassion, resilience and adaptability. “People who are caring, enjoy teamwork and are comfortable with communication possess some of the qualities nurses benefit from,” says Kathryn. Communication skills stand as a cornerstone, enabling nurses to create meaningful connections with patients and collaborate successfully within a healthcare team. They act as advocates, anticipating needs, and standing up for those who might feel a bit lost in the healthcare maze. Empathy is at the core

of what they do. They are good listeners, aiming to understand what each patient is going through without any judgment, and they respect the variety of values and life experiences people bring, trying to see things from the patient’s viewpoint.

“As nurses work in so many unique areas with a variety of patient populations, the role demands different skills and attributes depending on the context you may find yourself working in,” explains Kathryn. This is also why your adaptability and critical thinking skills can distinguish you as a good nurse. Nursing is a holistic profession, combining medical skills with empathetic communication, resilience, problem-solving and a constant desire to learn.

### What are the rewards and challenges of nursing?

Nursing provides profound moments of fulfilment. It is not just a profession; it is a calling that combines scientific understanding with humanity. “A career in nursing can appeal to anyone who aspires to find a strong sense of meaning and purpose through caring for others, using evidence to inform practice, collaborating with other disciplines, and embracing science, technology and spirituality to advance health outcomes,” says Kathryn. Nurses of the future will take on the role of advocates for social justice, working to address health inequities caused by social factors such as economic status and education.

However, even though the rewards are abundant, nursing can be challenging. “Nurses are expected to embrace evidence-informed practice and stay

abreast of new and emerging information that may improve the health outcomes of the clients in their care,” says Kathryn. “They are also challenged to quickly establish relationships and demonstrate compassion and cognitive flexibility in stressful and dynamic situations.” From bonding with patients to embracing continual learning, nurses navigate a spectrum of challenges. Yet, each challenge becomes a unique opportunity for personal and professional growth, shaping them into compassionate and skilled healthcare professionals.

### What does the future hold for nursing?

The road ahead for the next generation of nurses is full of promising prospects with the potential for research and education. As the demand for nurses continues to grow globally, the future holds exciting opportunities to make important contributions to healthcare. “Innovative and efficient training and mentorship programmes for nurses around the world will continue to be an important consideration for practice settings such as hospitals,” explains Kathryn. The evolving healthcare scenario encourages a shift towards interdisciplinary research, promoting collaborations that extend beyond traditional healthcare areas. This forward-looking approach not only addresses the demand for skilled healthcare professionals but also pushes the next generation of nurses into a dynamic sphere where their expertise and contributions can span diverse sectors and fields of study.



## Kathryn's career

**Ms Turner, my high school guidance counsellor, had an early and influential role in my career.** She convinced me to study nursing based on our conversations, my personality and her perception that I would thrive in a career that involved frequent contact with people. She saw something in me that I did not see in myself at the time. I trusted her and am glad that I did.

**As an undergraduate nursing student,** I was fortunate to have incredible nursing professors and clinical instructors who truly embodied the values integral to nursing. Their knowledge, professionalism, compassion and expectations inspired me to want to be the best nurse I could be, and in turn, to inspire others in the same way.

**My transition from being a student to becoming a nurse provoked a sense of responsibility I did not always feel prepared for,** and a frustration with systemic challenges I knew I didn't fully understand. I realised I had more to learn and that doing so may assist my ability to influence change. Pursuing further education in nursing led me to becoming an educator, which I found to be more rewarding than I had expected. As a researcher, I have chosen to focus on people's transition to nursing practice to help future nurses feel prepared for and supported during their early days as an independent nurse.

**I look forward to having the opportunity** to influence changes in education, practice and policy that reflect and respond to challenges shared by new graduates in their early careers as nurses. I will continue to engage in research that optimises academic-practice partnerships, while honouring and showcasing the voices and stories of nurses.

### Kathryn's top tips

1. Have conversations with guidance counsellors and explore a variety of career opportunities in healthcare with those working in the field.
2. Develop teamwork, communication and leadership skills through extra-curricular activities, such as sports and voluntary or part-time work. These will help to prepare you for many jobs in nursing and beyond.

### Pathway from school to nursing

"Prepare yourself for the study of nursing by establishing a strong foundation in science, mathematics and language," says Kathryn. "Developing relational skills in communication and seeking opportunities to listen and demonstrate compassion toward others will prepare you personally."

Kathryn recommends volunteering or working in a care setting such as a hospital or long-term care facility while studying. "Speak to nurses about their roles and experiences to gain valuable insight into the realities of nursing as a career."

Typically, nursing programmes provide a list of prerequisite courses necessary for entrance into an undergraduate nursing programme. "These often include biology, chemistry, English and mathematics. Every school is unique, so it is very important to look at the admission criteria for the nursing programmes you are considering applying to," advises Kathryn. As an example, here are Brock University's admission criteria: [brocku.ca/programs/undergraduate/nursing/](http://brocku.ca/programs/undergraduate/nursing/)

### Explore careers in nursing

To become a successful nurse, you need to be committed to a lifelong journey of learning. Some useful websites which provide the latest news on nursing include the Nursing Times ([www.nursingtimes.net/news/](http://www.nursingtimes.net/news/)), the Royal College of Nursing ([www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news](http://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/news)) and Nursing in Practice ([www.nursinginpractice.com](http://www.nursinginpractice.com)).

In addition to news websites, consider exploring reputable nursing journals such as the American Journal of Nursing ([journals.lww.com/ajnonline/pages/default.aspx](http://journals.lww.com/ajnonline/pages/default.aspx)) and the Journal of Nursing Education ([journals.healio.com](http://journals.healio.com)). These journals offer in-depth articles, research findings and insights into various nursing specialties.

"Brock University offers recruitment initiatives for nursing and other programmes welcoming Canadian and International students," says Kathryn: [brocku.ca/applied-health-sciences/nursing](http://brocku.ca/applied-health-sciences/nursing)

According to [www.glassdoor.ca](http://www.glassdoor.ca), the average salary for a nurse in Canada is \$75,000. Starting salaries and pay progression varies from country to country.



## Meet Hudson

**Hudson Trask**, nursing student,  
Brock University

**Nursing piqued my interest because of the variety of opportunities it offers**, from desk jobs to shift work to travel nursing, etc. It's a field that gives me the ability to obtain a university degree while also keeping my career options open. Whichever option I pursue, nursing will enable me to help people who might not be able to support themselves otherwise.

**As a nursing student, it is important to look for opportunities** outside of the school environment, such as clinical internships. I look for ways to be involved in my local healthcare community by joining local movements for healthcare improvement.

**In the future, I would like to combine my love of helping others** with my love for landscaping, nursing during the winter and landscaping during the summer. Not

everyone wants to be limited to one career; many people experience burnout in one job. I believe that nursing gives me the opportunity to do both things I love.

**My career goals are not set in stone.** That is what makes nursing such a great field to study in; I can find myself while completing a meaningful and valuable degree. No matter where nursing takes me, I know it will provide a solid income and a career to be proud of.

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### Hudson's top tip

Take healthcare courses. Some high schools offer healthcare credits that count towards your high school diploma and will give you a taste of what nursing entails.



## Meet Shabneez

**Shabneez Xin**, Registered Nurse,  
Home and Community Care Support  
Services, Ontario

**While the science of nursing drew me in**, the art of the profession is why I stayed. I was always intrigued by the rationale behind the care we provide, but the human aspect of connecting with patients and caregivers is where I feel most fulfilled.

**I'm currently a case manager based in the community**, coordinating home care and supportive living settings. I complete home visits with patients and work with other primary care and community partners. Each patient is like a puzzle, and my job is to find the right pieces to meet their goals. Working in the community allows me to meet patients and understand their everyday experiences. Helping patients navigate their daily lives is invaluable in keeping people out of the hospital.

**I'm also in graduate school studying** for a Master of Science degree and will eventually pursue a PhD, with the goal of becoming an educator and future researcher. There is so much we have yet to explore and improve within nursing, and I want a front row seat.

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### Shabneez's top tip

Find volunteering or shadowing opportunities in as many diverse settings as possible. I never would have considered home care but after having the chance to try it out, there's nowhere else I would rather be!



## Meet Kiersten

**Kiersten Ek**, Registered Nurse,  
Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Thunder  
Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre

**Volunteering while I was in high school** taught me that helping others is something that brings me joy, and nursing is a career that offers so many different avenues to help others. I am a neonatal intensive care nurse working with newborn babies, and I am so grateful to have the opportunity to help parents navigate through the difficult time of having a newborn in intensive care.

**I hope to one day get into an educational or leadership role** within paediatric or neonatal nursing. I would love to help nurses achieve their full potential and feel confident in their careers and roles.

I am currently working on my Master of Nursing degree to help me achieve these aspirations.

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### Kiersten's top tip

Explore as many nursing career paths as possible before entering nursing school. Not everyone is meant to do one kind of nursing; find what you are truly passionate about – it might be completely different from what you expect!