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Medical Anthropology

### The Demanding Life as a Nurse

From floor nurse in the emergency room, to educator for other nurses, to assistant dean of an accredited nursing school, and to now an occupational nurse at a pharmaceutical company-- this is Jennifer Rocco's path as a healer. She never saw herself settling into the position she is in now. Jennifer always saw herself doing traditional nursing, working in a hospital or doctor's office. But things change in life, and her calling as a healer was needed elsewhere.

Jennifer's journey as a healer started when she was a young girl and her grandmother was in the hospital. She was very sick and Jennifer did all she could to help. She would have the nurses teach her how to care for her grandmother and explain the procedures. But, in addition to this experience, what inspired her most was her grandmother's own words telling her to be a nurse. She thought that Jennifer was compassionate, brave, and empathetic, all qualities that would make an incredible nurse. Those words stuck with Jennifer as she grew up, and once she graduated high school she got the ball rolling to pursue a career in nursing.

Jennifer first attended a community college and then went off to nursing school. Nursing school not only included bookwork, but hands on clinical training in hospitals. She had classes that were science intensive and that gave her the anatomical and physiological mindset of a nurse. Jennifer also went into hospitals and shadowed other nurses. These were called clinical rotations where she would first observe a nurse's tasks and then perform them under supervision. She took patient's vital signs, put in IVs, and took notes on patients for physicians. This early

exposure showed Jennifer what some of her responsibilities would be and helped her decide that nursing was the career for her.

Once she graduated, Jennifer worked for 22 years in an emergency room caring for patients. She felt this was the only calling of her career as she did not know the other possibilities of the field. However, soon enough she ended up at the position she is today—an occupational nurse for Johnson and Matthey. At her current job, Jennifer is a different type of healer. She not only delivers first aid and medical care, like giving medical opinions of minor injuries and illnesses, but she also provides emotional support. Jennifer is the only nurse at the plant so all the injuries of the workers come to her. She evaluates patients, provides the necessary first aid care, and then either sends them to a health care professional or lets them return to work. It is also her responsibility to monitor the plant for safety regulations and make sure the workers follow protocol. Jennifer also doubles as a counselor on site. Many of the workers come to her to discuss their feelings or talk about medical problems in their family to better understand them. This is unlike any type of healing Jennifer has ever done. Though, Jennifer was accustomed to more traditional healing in the hospital where the patient is treated for their physical needs, at this new position, she not only cares for their physical needs but for their emotional ones. And, based on her personal qualities and years of experience, Jennifer can provide those services because of the empathy she has. In Jennifer's opinion, for one to become a healer she feels they need to have empathy, be compassionate, a people person, motivated, and just want to do better and make a difference in someone's life. Among all those traits, she feels empathy is the most important because it allows one to try and understand what a patient is going through. Being an empathetic person means having the ability to understand a patient's emotions. Providing empathetic care allows for more personalized treatments and patients often feel more

comfortable in the hands of their healthcare providers. Jennifer possesses these traits and they help her become a better healer every day at work.

As an occupational nurse, Jennifer never knows what to expect each day at work, and each day she encounters a different situation. As with all her years of being a healer, she provides medical care for her patients as well as the comfort and empathy they need. Currently, Jennifer also provides counseling services where she will talk with a patient. These counseling services allow patients to come to Jennifer and discuss anything on their mind. They can come to her seeking medical advice, opinions on medical problems with their family, or if they just need someone to talk to. Often these therapeutic services can be the only treatment someone needs to help get through a medical problem or just a rough patch in their life. A story that sticks out in her mind was when a patient came to her seeking advice. He was a married man and he was terminally ill. He was diagnosed with terminal cancer and has less than 6 months to live. This patient would come down to see Jennifer weekly to discuss the progress of his condition. He would tell Jennifer about the treatments, and describe what is happening to his body. The patient wouldn't always understand what is going on with his body, so Jennifer could explain and help him understand how he can cope with his condition. Jennifer would also speak to this man's wife over the phone. She would explain what is going on with her husband after each treatment and just be there to listen to her. Jennifer was the support system that their family needed to get through a dark time in their lives. Thus, this type of healing makes the patient feel heard and gives them a sense of comfort knowing that someone is there to listen to their issues. Jennifer feels that this type of healing can be provided after first aid treatment to make sure the patient is emotionally healthy. She believes that each person is an individual body and that they must care

for themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally. Jennifer believes treatment is only seen as successful if the patient can return to work in healthy physical, mental, and emotional states.

Jennifer never became a nurse because of the pay or health benefits she receives. She became a nurse because she wanted to do good in the world. Jennifer wanted to make an impact on people's lives and make them see a difference in the world. She feels that becoming a healer was the most rewarding job she could have chosen because of satisfaction of watching a patient heal from their illness and grow as a person along the way. Valuable lessons are taught from being a healer such as to try and show empathy towards others, be a life-long learner, and always try to step in and help. Being a healer also affected Jennifer personally. Jennifer wouldn't be the person who she is today without her career as a healer. All her dedication and hard work she put in early on has paid off as she finds herself at a stable position that has a sufficient income and benefits all while being emotionally rewarding at the end of a work day. Jennifer often finds herself benefitting from counseling sessions as she learns more about herself as a healer. She discovers new ways to treat patients and how to interact with them. Jennifer even brings these skills and applies them to her home life. Choosing the career path as a healer is a difficult one because there will be emotional pain to endure, intense physical demands, and mental drainage. However, these hardships make becoming a healer that much more rewarding as it makes you stronger as a person overcoming these difficulties while improving the lives of others.