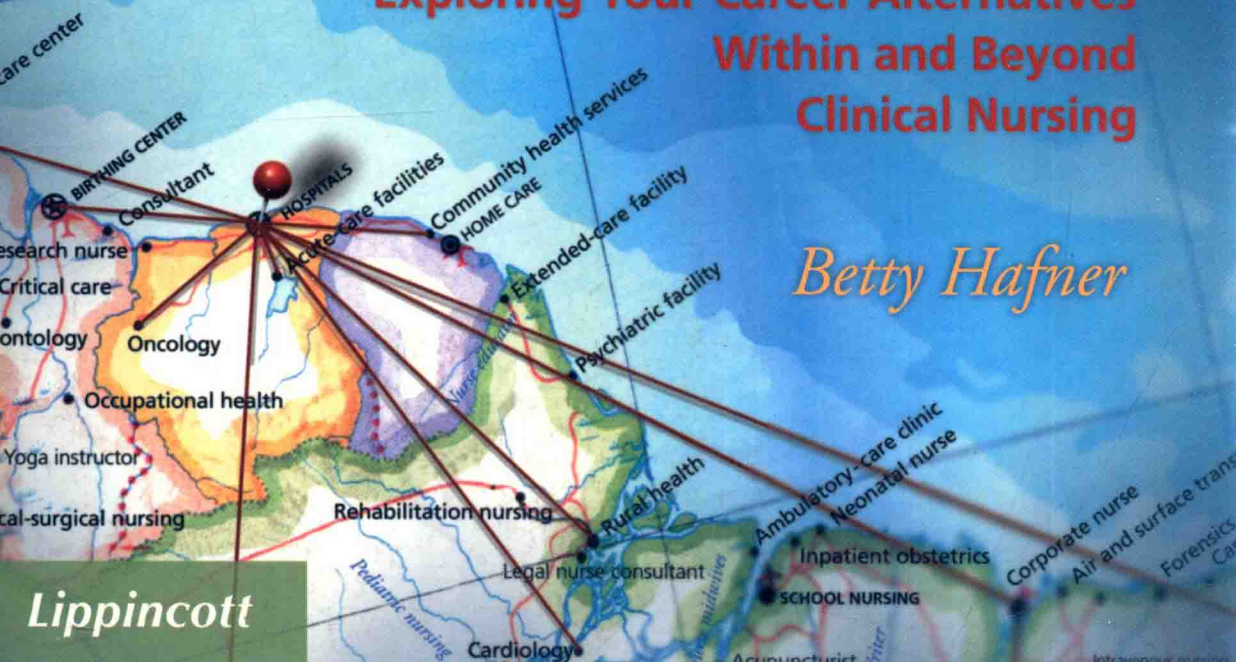


Where Do I Go From Here?

**Exploring Your Career Alternatives
Within and Beyond
Clinical Nursing**

Betty Hafner

Lippincott



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Foreword

WE PARTICIPATED IN A FOCUS GROUP OF NURSES WHICH WAS ASKED, “WHAT WOULD A nurse find valuable in this book?” Our conversation first centered on the nursing options presented; the exploration of our traits, skills, and qualities as they relate to nursing; the stories and perceptions of so many nurses; the confidence-boosting tone; the forward-thinking approach; and the discussions of risk taking, change, and growth.

But that doesn’t tell the whole story. The book also allows the reader to think “out-of-the-box”, bringing us to a place where we can envision nursing as “something else”—something other than what it is traditionally known to be. The timing for this book couldn’t be more appropriate. Some would say that this is a time of crisis within nursing. We are experiencing the biggest nursing shortage in the history of the profession. Many who remain in the profession are experiencing burnout, confusion, and the need to re-examine their options.

With the shift in health care to prevention and wellness, the growing nursing shortage and other recent changes, the opportunities for nurses are vast and are becoming more varied. With nurses in positions of leadership and management; in autonomous practices; in educational and consultation roles, the doors for growth and change have swung wide open. This book provides the first glance into this new world of nursing, beyond medication administration and direct patient care. It not only opens the doors but is written to guide us along our journey.

At a certain age or a certain point in your career it is natural to question your skills and wonder whether you possess something that is still valued. The book says, “Yes!”; your skills are valuable and so are you. It is a self-esteem booster, giving you the confidence to move ahead. The vignettes are inspirational. They let you know that it is not just talk; there are actually people out there doing what you might have

always wanted to do and they are successful at it. At some point in their lives they were at the same crossroads ... wanting to change, wanting to experiment, wanting to test the waters, and they too, were hesitant and scared, and guess what? They made it! One nurse said that the book makes change seem possible and makes the options real ... “It gives me the courage to step out there on a ledge, since others have done it and have succeeded.”

The book affords you the opportunity to re-examine your daily tasks—how you feel about what you do and whether you are just going through the motions. It forces you to account for the skills you have. Within the profession, you often hear nurses say, “Oh, I’m just a nurse”. We devalue what we do. This book makes it clear that we are more than “just a nurse”. We see that nursing can open the floodgates to endless opportunities for growth and fulfillment. It is one of the few professions, where you don’t necessarily have to “fit a job”; it is more an issue of the job fitting you ... your likes, your preferences, your skills, your joys, your vision. When we talk to nurses doing innovative, creative things and we ask, “How did you get here?”, they often say “Oh, I just stumbled into this”. It is as if they had no plan. In reality, there was a plan. They had made a decision at some point to move, to change, to take a risk, to try, and as their confidence grew, their ability to envision success grew; and an expert was born. That’s how they got where they are. We need to acknowledge the value of our skills, abilities, and intent and not accept things as a coincidence. This book reminds us of that.

Where Do I Go From Here? is not only for “first-degree”, experienced nurses, though. It would serve as a great tool for those known as “second-degree nurses”—individuals coming into the profession from various backgrounds including, business, accounting and law, for example, who bring a wealth of professional and life experiences. This book is a must for their reading list.

Whether you are a new grad trying to find your “fit” or an experienced nurse who is asking “Is this what I really want to continue doing?”, you’ll find something valuable here.

—SHERRY HIGGINS, RN, MSN

—BRIGITTE O’HALLORAN, RN, MS

—JOANNE JOHNSON, RN

Preface

IF YOU'RE A NURSE CONSIDERING A CAREER MOVE, YOU'VE PICKED THE RIGHT BOOK. Whether you're simply curious about your alternatives or fiercely determined to choose one, you can find help in these pages. When writing it, I had in mind nurses who are

- looking for a new challenge
- developing different talents and interests
- dealing with a change in their family lives
- feeling unfulfilled professionally
- beginning careers in nursing
- coming into the field as second-degree nurses
- returning to nursing after time away
- contemplating retirement
- coming to the US from another country

No matter what your motivation is, you'll get *encouragement* about how valuable *and* transferable your nursing experience is. You'll also get *ideas* for new directions to take or ways to enrich your career as you learn what other nurses have done. You'll find here, too, a clear-cut *strategy* for making a change in your work life. And finally, the book offers you a way to find *work that's right for you*.

If the book sounds like it has a counseling slant to it, it should. I've been a career and educational counselor for more than 25 years. I developed a special interest in nurses and their career issues years ago while giving adult education workshops in Florida. One of my programs presented alternative careers for teachers and social

workers, and my supervisor, a former nurse, once suggested I include nurses in it. I did just that the next semester, and from that point on, they filled the classes.

These practicing nurses presented me with the challenge of learning how they might use their skills outside patient care but also find the personal and professional satisfaction that it offers them. I found little written material to guide me on alternatives for nurses and discovered that the only reliable way to gather information was to ask nurses who had found out for themselves. To create a list of nurses I could question, I called scores of associations and organizations for leads, networked with nurses, read newsletters and periodicals, talked to managers of human resource departments, scanned directories, and contacted schools of nursing. This first group then referred me to others, and over time I collected information from more than 175 nurses. I wrote up some early findings in *The Nurse's Guide to Starting a Small Business* (Pilot Books, 1992), which featured those who took the entrepreneurial route.

The stories in this book of nurses who've shifted gears are sure to inspire you. I cast a wide net to find them—young and old, male and female, from Alaska to Florida. (I've used the feminine pronoun throughout, however, because of the overwhelming majority of females in the profession.) The nurses you'll meet are regular people but role models all the same. They've taken the career they've chosen and made it work for them. I asked them to tell me why they changed, what the new work involves, where they got help, and what rewards they're finding. You'll also learn from them the many ways they made their moves—some nurses applied for already existing positions while others literally created their new work and still others were drafted to fill a role they'd prepared themselves for. Each story has something to teach about courage or perseverance or timing or common sense.

I've used a workshop format for the book so you can process the material as you read it. In Section 1, I'll give you guidelines for viewing your options with a positive mind set. In Section 2, I'll ask you to identify specifics about your personal qualities, your background, your circumstances, and your goals that will help you make good decisions. If you do the exercises, you'll leave this section with a valuable summary sheet. Then in Section 3, you'll hear about nurses who've made moves within

clinical nursing. In Section 4, you'll learn more about your options by examining what others are doing beyond clinical care. At the end of each chapter in Section 3 and 4, I'll ask you to think about whether that's the right direction for you, and suggest ways to follow up on it if you're interested. Finally, Section 5 takes you through a seven-step process that will get you ready for a change. Throughout the book you can choose how actively you participate, but I highly recommend that you do the exercises, record your results, and write responses to the questions asked. You'll get so much more out of it.

All along the way, I hope you'll hear the supportive, encouraging voice of someone who believes you have an enormously valuable background to share and any number of ways to share it. I hope you have fun sorting through your options.

Acknowledgments

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF THE NURSES WHO SHARED THEIR STORIES WITH ME. They answered my questions willingly, good-naturedly, and fully showing a genuine interest in helping others make decisions. Their stories bring life to the book.

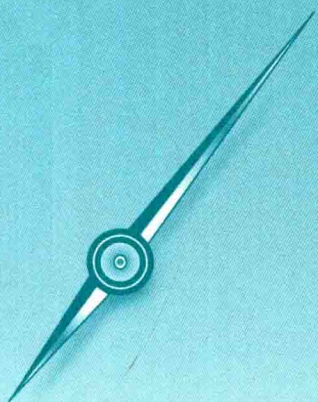
My thanks also goes to many others who played a role in the preparation of the book. Sherril L. Ingram, BSN, MS, DNSc; Deidre A. Krause, PhD, ARNP, CS; and Barbara Ross, BSN, MSN, EdD were valued consultants and reviewers on an earlier draft of the book. Ellyn Cavanaugh, RN; Sonja Simpson, RN; Janet Ladd, RN; and Vivien Butler, RN, LMT provided feedback, support, or ideas at just the right time. My enthusiastic local focus group—Brigitte O'Halloran, RN, MS; Sherry Higgins, RN, MSN; Ellen Hellawell, RNC; Pat Hanley; and Joanne Johnson, RN—played the important role of sounding board for me. Ruth Gruen, Robert Ungeleiter, and Melanie Freely were early supporters of this project and helped shape it. A final thank-you goes to my editor, Alan Sorkowitz, who handles everything with intelligence, professionalism, and a sense of humor.

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section one



Preparing for a Change





Preparing for a Change

“IT’S AN EXCITING TIME TO BE A NURSE.”

I hear that often from nurses these days. Even an old friend who was telling me about her niece recognized it. “She’s finishing up her degree in nursing this year,” she said, “Lucky kid. The world is her oyster.”

It’s not only brand new nurses who have so many exciting jobs to choose from and so many places they can go. All nurses, no matter what their experience is, can look forward to a future full of possibilities, and the more background you have in nursing, the more plentiful the options.

This book will guide you along a path where you’ll explore your alternatives.

- ☐ You’ll learn more about yourself and what it takes to create your ideal situation.
- ☐ You’ll see how other nurses are using their experience to take up new roles.
- ☐ You’ll weigh your various options using data gathered in the exercises.
- ☐ You’ll find out how to develop your own action plan when you’re ready to make a move.

To get the most of this process, you’ll want to approach it with the right attitude. If your expectations are unrealistic, you could easily become disillusioned. If your awareness about how careers develop is incomplete, you could miss ideas or opportunities that are staring you in the face. If you put too much pressure on yourself or

become judgmental about your desire to change, you may find it hard to move ahead. So before we move on, I ask you to consider these six positive ways to view your alternatives. I hope you'll take them to heart.

1. The Changes in Health Care Are Creating Opportunities

You've all been in some way affected by the recent changes in the delivery of health care. The industry is in a state of flux; health care dollars are shrinking and HMOs and insurance companies seem to be calling the shots. New models of management are being put in place that, nurses say, often seem to be misguided. While thankful for the ongoing, steady stream of innovative medical technology, we're learning that its high cost has taxed hospital budgets and taken away from other things that nurses feel are priorities.

Many of the nurses I interviewed for this book voiced a discontent with their work. They told me—loudly and clearly—“things just aren't the same.” Again and again I heard the refrains,

“It's not like it used to be.”

“I don't have time to do my job.”

“It's not possible to give patients the kind of care they need.”

Some were frustrated by the changes in hospital nursing and the roles they now must play. Others said they felt lost or, at the very least, off track.

The result of these and other developments is that nurses are now working in hospitals and other facilities that are merging, downsizing, and restructuring. The stress of this situation has made it hard for many nurses to be comfortable, contributing workers in today's hospitals and health care agencies. Nurses who expressed dissatisfaction also felt that their job description is changing and that they're now given a greater patient load. To compound the problem, the move toward shortened hospital stays and a push toward outpatient care has escalated the acuity level of patients.