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Higher Education Gives A Chicago Nurse Essential Critical Thinking Skills

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Weather.com lists the American life expectancy data by state and summarizes some of the CDC's dramatic findings in which they reported that Americans are living longer. "In 2012, the most recent year for which data are available, life expectancy reached an all-time high of 78.8 years across all states and genders." With people living longer, health care is one of the highest priorities, which means health professionals are even more important.

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Photo Courtesy of Azella C. Collins

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Nursing continues to be one of the fastest growing and most lucrative career fields. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average nursing salary is \$65K annually.

Although an associate degree is the bare minimum to be a registered nurse, Chicago nurse Azella C. Collins has plenty to say about education and what can and can't be taught outside of the classroom, including saving patients from sanitation risks.

"Critical-thinking skills are not really taught in associate degree programs," Collins said, who was a nurse for 39 years. "I was advised not to waste my time in an 18-month course for an Operating Room Technician (at Malcolm X College), so instead I chose to pursue my bachelor's degree and applied to Saint Xavier. It was at a time when they really needed African-Americans and were providing educational scholarships."

Sociology and philosophy courses are at the top of her list for recommended electives.

"I think all nurses — and I shouldn't leave out physicians — should learn how to take care of people with different backgrounds. Education is the broad umbrella, but how do you teach a diabetic who lives in a food desert, how to have an adequate diet? How do you utilize education to teach someone who is mentally ill and whose family denies their mental illness?"

Collins has had a colorful background dealing with a variety of patients, including talking a professional printer out of his fear of nursing homes, even when he was dealing with rat infestation at home.

Although every registered nurse may not have to deal with such extreme circumstances, cognitive abilities is a factor Collins feels should be mandatory.

"For nurses who are just starting out, I would encourage them to mark their work with excellence. If they are abreast in the latest treatment for modalities, the likelihood of patients having recidivism or health exacerbation is going to be minimized."



02:38

Shantrell Vaughn is a freelance writer covering all things Chicago. Her work can be found on Examiner.com.

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