Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing

EXCELLENCE in Clinical Practice

Second Quarter 2001 Volume 2, Number 2

Is a master's degree in your future?

By Linda Finke

I think graduate school could really help my career, but I don't know where to start. Do you have any recommendations?

Since we first publicized our availability to answer career-related questions, the nurses at Sigma Theta Tau headquarters have received many requests similar to this one. We can see why. As the need for graduate prepared nurses escalates, many nurses are considering graduate education as an entry into exciting career opportunities.

Finding the program that fits you the best and prepares you for the role you wish to obtain is well worth the search.

Doing the research

While doctoral programs generally prepare nurse researchers, master's programs prepare advanced practice nurses, including clinical nurse specialists, nurse practitioners, nurse midwives and nurse anesthetists, as well as nurse administrators.

The first step in determining what master's or doctoral program to pursue is a self-assessment that examines your strengths: financial, geographic and time constraints; and future career goals. You should also explore the forecasts for health care to examine trends, work force needs and opportunities. This can be done by talking with health care administrators, attending professional meetings and reading professional journals. Talk with nurses who are in the role you might like to pursue and ask for advice. It is also important to determine the state requirements for the position desired since they vary. For example, some states may have course requirements to obtain prescriptive authority or clinical hour supervision requirements.

Emphasis must be placed on developing individual career goals to determine what graduate program best fits your specific career objectives. The selected program should not only prepare you for the desired specialty but also meet state and national certification requirements. Certification information is available through the Sigma Theta Tau Web site under career development.

It is important to determine the requirements for the certification desired before exploring graduate programs.

To open the door to new career opportunities, many clinicians are considering graduate education.

Nursing where the people are

Shopping mall provides unique location for health center

Located in prime retail space near popular clothing stores sits the Johnson City, Tenn. mall's most unique destination for shoppers. Rather than offering its consumers the latest fashion, this facility brings nurses and health care to people who need it.

Lori Hamilton, RN, C, BSN, got the idea for Johnson City Medical Center's outreach facility after reading an article about mammograms offered in a Chicago mall. With support and encouragement from Johnson City Medical Center's administration, Hamilton researched similar programs across the country.

Then in March 1997, Hamilton's efforts paid off. Staffed by three nurses and two clerical staff, the Health Resources Center, a 1,000 square foot location in the mall, opened its doors to the community.

"Our goal was to help people live healthier lives," explains Hamilton. "So we decided that in order to meet the needs of men and women of all ages, we would offer more than mammograms.

And it does. The facility now provides fitness and weight loss programs, health care classes, discussions, screenings, and other opportunities for wellness. Speakers from the hospital give free discussions and facilitate support groups. In any given month, experts could be presenting the benefits of exercise for people with heart disease, discussing how to lower cholesterol, and explaining what to do when preparing for hip and knee replacement. Support groups for people diagnosed with cancer and sleep disorders are also offered regularly.

Nurses encouraged to register on Sigma Theta Tau Web site

In the face of today's growing nursing shortage, the demand for experienced, qualified nurses has never been greater. Employers are eager to fill job openings, particularly for clinicians, so many are turning toward the Internet to connect with the maximum number of candidates. To help its members find the best jobs no matter what their location, Sigma Theta Tau International recently partnered with NTN NurseNet, an online recruitment service for job-seeking nurses.

"Entering through the Sigma Theta Tau Web site, nurses are able to access the NTN NurseNet database of numerous employment opportunities," said John Bullock, president of National TeleAccess Network (NTN). "This makes it easy to search services especially convenient for society members."

Why register your job search?

NTN NurseNet, found at www.nursingsociety.org/careers, offers a candidate-focused and easy-to-use format at no charge to its users. Nurses can customize their search according to their specialty area, desired work setting and geographic location. Privacy is another benefit to members, since this information is used only to deliver the career opportunities that best match their needs.

"By allowing nurses to search for jobs in a particular setting, such as a hospital or office, and by locating positions in a specific area as specific as a ZIP code or as broad as an entire state, this service allows our members to search for new jobs efficiently," says Nancy Dickerson-Hazard, online job search manager.
Taking control of your career and your future

By Gail J. Donner and Mary M. Wheeler

The tremendous challenges that have marked nursing over the last half of the 20th century have brought significant challenges along with terrific opportunities. Cycles of boom and bust, as well as high unemployment and shortages of workers, have been common, and change has been the norm. These changes have created an environment in which individual nurses must take control of their careers and futures. Nurses’ dependence on others helps nurses adapt to changes in their work and health care. When one engages in the process, a sense of enjoyment, pride and energy is also realized.

Career planning, a continuous process of self-assessment and goal setting, helps nurses adapt to changes in their own development, in the profession and in the world in which they live and practice. The process is really about the development of a life skill, one that nurses can apply not only in their workplaces but in their personal lives as well. It is an individual responsibility, a life-long activity, and a necessary skill in a changing world of work and health care. When one engages in the process, an understanding of self-assessment and goal setting will allow you to give honest and accurate answers to the two questions, “Who am I?” and “How do others see me?”

Creating your career vision answers the question, “What do I really want to do?” Without a vision of where you want to go, you will most likely simply react to events as they occur rather than choose a direction that helps you take advantage of an opportunity when it occurs. Your career vision is the link between who you are and what you can become. Having a career vision is a powerful motivator for reaffirming your current situation or for making a change.

Scanning your environment is about taking stock of the world in which you live. It involves understanding the current realities in the nursing and work environments as well as the future trends at the global, national and local levels in society and health care. Through the scanning process you become better informed, learn to see the world through differing perspectives and are able to answer the question “What are the current realities/future trends?” These trends will influence career opportunities.

Completing your self-assessment and reality check enables you to identify your values, experiences, knowledge, strengths and limitations and to marry those with your environmental scan to help you create your career vision and identify the directions to take as you plan your future. As you begin your self-assessment, you will first identify all the attributes that make you who you are and, then, what you have to offer to the environment. Completing your self-assessment and reality check will also give you honest and accurate answers to the two questions, “Who am I?” and “How do others see me?”

Develop a professional strategic plan to achieve the career you have always wanted.

Developing your strategic career plan is critical to taking control of your own career. Designing a plan is not something that someone else can do for you. You must do it for yourself to ensure that you are continually and satisfactorily progressing toward your personal career goals. By answering the question “How can I achieve my career goal?” you ensure that you have a plan that is both uniquely yours and easily converted into action.

Marketing yourself involves articulating your professional and personal qualities, attributes and expertise so that you can effectively communicate what you have to offer and why you are the best person for the service that needs to be delivered.

For nurses, “How can I best market myself?” is facilitated by establishing a network, acquiring a mentor, and developing written and verbal communication skills. Your strengths, coupled with a commitment and belief in yourself, make you your own best marketer.

Gail J. Donner, RN, PhD, and Mary M. Wheeler, RN, MEd, are partners in Donner & Wheeler, a consulting firm based in Canada that specializes in career planning and development within the health and human service sectors. Their services are offered both onsite and online. You may contact them at donner-wheeler.com. Donner and Wheeler have also been presenting “Achieving Your Lifelong Career” at the Sigma Theta Tau 2001 Professional Development Conferences.

ONLINE JOB SEARCH PREMIERE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

RN, MSN, FAAN, chief executive officer of Sigma Theta Tau International. “E-mails are also sent to candidates when a new job that matches their profile is posted, and useful links, such as salary and moving calculators, are included on the site.”

Other tools part of NTN NurseNet help nurses conduct an effective online job search. For example, candidates can save an online resume to send directly to potential employers.

For employers searching for candidates Employment opportunities posted on NTN NurseNet are made available to the more than 130,000 Honor Society of Nursing members—nurses identified as the best and the brightest in the profession. As a registered employer, you have immediate access to a database of exceptional candidates. Also, jobs are listed by specialty area, desired work setting and geographic location—helping nurses find you easily and quickly and giving you repeated exposure. Because the database is updated daily, candidates are e-mailed new opportunities immediately. Listings are posted within one business day of receipt.

Your decision to advertise with Sigma Theta Tau International helps to further its mission to provide excellence in clinical practice, education, administration and research. For information on placing your listing, visit the society’s Web site at www.nursingsociety.org/careers and enter the employer section. Or, if your organization is interested in sponsorship opportunities, please call 888.634.7573.

Contest recognizes evidence-based practice

Have you been involved in a successful project to improve patient outcomes? Share your success with your colleagues and win free conference registration, free CE, a day at the spa, dinner for two — and more! Sigma Theta Tau International and Nursing Spectrum are sponsoring “Innovations in Clinical Excellence,” a program designed to acknowledge successful evidence-based projects. Five nurses will be recognized for their innovations.

For more information, visit www.nursingsociety.org and click “What’s New” or call Adam Kremer at 888.634.7575. Submission deadline is June 1, 2001.

Renew your membership today!

Here are three easy ways to keep your Sigma Theta Tau membership active:
1) Check www.nursingsociety.org
2) Call, using the toll free number, 888.634.7575.
3) Send renewal form by mail or fax

U.S. and Canada toll free: 888.634.7575
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NURSES for a Healthier Tomorrow

Efforts show young people benefits of a nursing career

The nursing profession has never faced greater challenges. Shortages loom. Managed care is changing how and where we work. High pressure is leading to high turnover. Yet the world’s population is aging and growing, and it needs nurses more than ever.

As part of Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow, 24 nursing and health care organizations across the United States are working together to ensure that a new generation of young people learns about the benefits of a nursing career. Soon we will be advertising nationwide and reaching out to youngsters who’ve never really given nursing a second thought.

Our organization is proud to support Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow.

To learn how you can help, contact Kathy Bennison at Sigma Theta Tau International: 888.634.7575 or visit www.nursesource.org.
**When Bright Minds Come Together**

**Why you should attend Convention 2001**

Beginning November 10, Sigma Theta Tau members from around the world will converge on Indianapolis to participate in the 36th Biennial Convention. “Leading and Learning Globally,” the theme for the convention, will unite the variety of educational sessions, research presentations and panel discussions that span the four-day event. To learn why you should join more than 2,000 other “bright-minded” nurses at convention, read on.

More networking opportunities than you can count

Bringing members together—whether they are seasoned leaders or recent graduates—is one of the hallmarks of Sigma Theta Tau International conventions. “Attending the receptions and visiting the lively exhibits are perfect opportunities to meet society leaders, get together with new friends and renew past acquaintances,” says Nancy Dickenson-Hazard, RN, MSN, FAAN, chief executive officer of Sigma Theta Tau International. “We’re proud that the biennial convention provides such excellent opportunities for our members to network.”

In recent years, many members attending convention have found insightful answers to their questions about careers, clinical specialties, research interests, and education, leadership and volunteer opportunities. Attendees have also been able to share the challenges they are facing as nurses and brainstorm with colleagues to find innovative solutions.

Sponsored by the Indiana University School of Nursing and Clarian Health Partners, the Welcome Circle of Friends reception provides the first opportunity for attendees to network with colleagues and meet President Patricia Thompson and Chief Executive Officer Nancy Dickenson-Hazard. The Welcome to Indy reception on the following day, sponsored by St. Vincent Hospitals and Health Services, marks the opening of the exhibit hall and gives attendees a chance to view exhibits, survey research posters and peruse the creative arts displays.

Throughout the convention, luncheons, receptions and educational sessions lend themselves to additional one-on-one contact with nurse professionals from around the world.

Information relevant to your career

By providing information relevant to the careers of its members, Sigma Theta Tau International hopes to further excellence in nursing. On Sunday, November 11, attendees will listen to the keynote address by the University of Manchester School of Nursing’s Vice Chancellor and Professor Tony Butterworth, CBE, FRCN, FRPsych, FMedSci, FRSA, followed by educational sessions throughout the day. Using the theme, “Leading the Way for Clinical Excellence,” a diverse range of nursing topics will be featured, as well as innovations in clinical practice and new technology that can be applied to nursing practice, education and health care.

“Employers value the educational opportunities our convention provides attendees,” says Linda Finke, RN, PhD, director of professional development services at Sigma Theta Tau. “Not only do our nurse professionals discover some of nursing’s best practices from around the world, they earn continuing education credit, network with leaders in health care and return with new solutions for current challenges.”

During the scientific sessions on Monday, November 12, “Global Leadership through Nursing Research” will be addressed in the educational sessions and in the keynote by Judith Shamian, RN, PhD, CHE, executive director of nursing policy for Health Canada. The latest research in aging and health, transcultural nursing, cancer and palliative care will be explored, as well as innovations in information technology, outcomes measurement and more. As part of the “Rising Stars of Scholarship and Research” display, nursing students selected by their educational institutions will also be showcasing their research. Attendees are encouraged to start their day with the walk/run to benefit nursing students.

On the third day of the convention, leadership sessions focus on “Leading and Learning: Moving from I Can’t to I Can.” Ronald Gross, author of Peak Learning, and Elizabeth Cohn, RN, NP, administrative director of critical care services at North Shore University Hospital, will give the keynote address. Attendees will learn leadership and career strategies as well as new ways of envisioning for the future.

The House of Delegates convenes on the fourth day to address all business aspects of convention. “Part of the role that chapters play is sending one or two members to the House of Delegates during convention,” says Barbara Robinette, RN, MSN, director of constituent services. “These chapter representatives elect the new officers, vote on changes by bylaws, approve resolutions, and receive reports from headquarters and committees.”

**Excellence in nursing**

Throughout the four-day convention, excellence in nursing is showcased in the presentation of prestigious awards. The Episteme Award, funded by the Baxter Foundation, acknowledges a major breakthrough in nursing knowledge development. It will be awarded Monday during the scientific sessions.

“Presenting awards during the Sigma Theta Tau International convention enables us to recognize the tremendous contribution nurses are making in health care,” says President Pat Thompson, RN, EdD. “It is also an opportunity to share their inspiring stories with other nurses and perhaps future award-winners.”

Additional awards, including the founders, chapter, communication and technology awards will be presented during convention.

**Need more information?**

To learn more about convention and sponsorship opportunities, visit our Web site at www.nursingsociety.org or call 888.634.7575.

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surgery, and because these people are more informed, they will do better after surgery.” Since people often don’t need to make an appointment, many stop by while shopping in order to have their blood pressure taken. “As a result, we have picked up countless people with high blood pressure and low heart rates,” says Hamilton. “Walk About Australia” is another popular program that helps community members develop healthier lifestyles, lose weight and improve their fitness. Participants measure their success by charting the number of miles they have walked on a map of Australia. Fun activities and programs related to the theme are offered to keep participants motivated.

“In the U.S., people think nurses do bedside care; here we work to give the type of one-on-one caring that people want. Caring is really what it’s about,” says Hamilton. “If we tell kids we are helping them take more control of their health and conditions.”

Clarke. “I also think people have an improved appreciation of nurses because we are helping them take more control of their health and conditions.”

What advice would the nurses of the Health Resources Center offer to others interested in starting this type of program? “Apply knowledge, creativity and teamwork to give the type of one-on-one caring that people want. Caring is really what it’s all about,” says Hamilton. “Dedication and creativity really make a difference,” she adds. “If people would have told me I’d be a nurse in a mall, I would have thought they were crazy.”

“The outreach is another important part of what we do,” comments Susan McAuley, RN, another nurse at the Health Resources Center. “In March, we had a Kids Health and Fitness Hoedown at the HandsOn! Museum in Johnson City. We offered free health checks and fitness activities for kids throughout the day. It was a great opportunity to reach children and their parents in a fun atmosphere.”

When the Health Resources Center was opened in 1997, staff expected to see approximately 500 consumers per month. But word of this innovative health care spread quickly—even into surrounding states. With help from satisfied consumers and the visible location, 4,000 to 5,000 people per month now take advantage of the facility’s mostly free offerings.

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“Having this facility in the mall gives people convenience and personal attention in a relaxed atmosphere,” says Clarke. “I also think people have an improved appreciation of nurses because we are helping them take more control of their health and conditions.”

What advice would the nurses of the Health Resources Center offer to others interested in starting this type of program? “Apply knowledge, creativity and teamwork to give the type of one-on-one caring that people want. Caring is really what it’s all about,” says Hamilton. “Dedication and creativity really make a difference,” she adds. “If people would have told me I’d be a nurse in a mall, I would have thought they were crazy.”

What does the school offer?

Though graduate programs usually allow for some flexibility to meet individual goals, it remains a large time commitment. It is more difficult to work full time and attend school full time; most students in nursing graduate programs either work or attend school part time. Fortunately, the learning that takes place at school can be applied in the work setting the very next day. This type of learning can be energizing and stimulating. It is also important to be sure that the faculty members of the program hold the credentials that you are seeking. For example, if you are pursuing a clinical nurse specialist position in child psychiatric nursing, some of the faculty should hold that credential. A recognized nursing body such as the National League of Nursing Accrediting Commission or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education should also accredit your program. Graduating from an accredited program is a requirement for certification. Financial assistance is another factor to consider when selecting a program.

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Some programs can provide stipends for students who are enrolled or tuition waivers in exchange for serving as a research assistant or teaching assistant. Another factor is the method used to deliver courses. Is there a part-time program? Are courses offered through distance education such as the Internet? Are courses offered on weekends, evenings or one or two days a week? All these factors may be helpful in assisting you with your decision making. Before you apply

Master's programs in nursing are usually about two years full time or four to six years part time. Prerequisite requirements often include a statistics course and physical assessment skills depending on the major you wish to obtain. Many schools do require entrance tests such as the Miller’s Analogies Test (a vocabulary type test) or the Graduate Record Exam (verbal, math and decision-making skills). These tests do not measure nursing expertise but test general knowledge; therefore, it is usually a good idea to study or even take a review course to prepare for the test. Sylvan Learning Centers are the distributor for the tests worldwide. There may be other requirements as well that apply to non-English speakers if pursuing a program in the United States. Licensure in the state offering the degree program may be required. Taking these steps will help you determine if a graduate degree will be a logical and rewarding step in your career development. For more information about graduate schools, contact programs in your area or call Sigma Theta Tau at 1.888.634.7575 for career advice from our nurse experts.

Linda Finke, RN, PhD, is the director of professional development services at Sigma Theta Tau International and was formerly associate dean for graduate programs at Indiana University School of Nursing. If you have a career question, we encourage you to call 1.888.634.7575 or visit our web site at www.nursingsociety.org.