

From Full Time to My Time

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A recently retired nurse leader describes the planning and execution of her retirement. Key considerations are presented and dis-

cussed for a successful and rewarding transition from working full time to being in control of your own time.

Large numbers of baby boomer nurse leaders are nearing or at retirement age. Transitioning into this next role can be exciting and fulfilling, or confusing and disconcerting. Many individuals are not approaching retirement with the traditional expectations of totally leaving the workplace.

Images of travel, relaxing, reading, and not doing any health care-related work are being blended with worthwhile contributions to society and purposeful and meaningful activities for personal fulfillment. Nurse leaders may be at the peak of their productivity and knowledge, and want to do more but

are unsure how to proceed. Can retirement incorporate a reduction in workload and still be a rewarding professional opportunity? I think yes.

I retired 2 years ago and am just now feeling that I have successfully moved from full time to my time. Over the 2 years, I have spoken to many nurse leaders, physicians, and other health care leaders who are wrestling with the prospect of retiring. Some of the interesting questions I have been asked include: How did you know it was time to retire? How did you do it? Are you bored with retirement? How do you fill your days? How are you staying productive and using all that you have learned over your career? Did you just wake up one day and say, "Today I will retire"? Of all the inquiries, the comment I was the most troubled by was: "I don't think that I can retire because I don't know what else to do with myself besides work."

The purpose of this article is to share what I have learned about retirement as a transition and to pose some important considerations about how one can make it a successful, purposeful, and enjoyable career move. There is no proposed script, but there are helpful insights that can be considered.

PREPLANNING

No, I didn't just wake up one morning and say that I am retiring. I began considering retirement well in advance of declaring it. At least 2 years before I retired, I was making lists and gathering information about what this decision would entail. The aspects and questions that you may want to consider to strategize retirement include:

1. Can you financially afford to retire? Have you looked at what you want to do in your retirement and considered how you will fund it? Have you coordinated your desire to retire with your significant other or family?
2. What do you want to *actually do* when you retire from full time? Do you want to work part time? Why and for how long? Do you want to consult or be employed in some manner? What hobbies do you have, or better yet, what experiences would you like to explore when you retire? For example, I wanted to raise honeybees. I had no experience in being a beekeeper. To become competent in this new activity, I needed to take a beekeeper class that would require 6 months of preparation before I could begin. I also wanted to take a pottery class, and I could start that right away. Not everything starts the moment you retire, and it is fun to let it evolve. You can talk to others who have retired and hear what they have done as well. One caution: don't rush to fill up the calendar. Take your time.
3. If you want to travel, where do you want to go? Begin creating your list of travel goals so you can think of scheduling trips and building your retirement budget. Also, consider your future health in planning travel. You will want to have the physical stamina to match your travel destinations in the future.
4. Are there activities/projects that you are involved in now that you want to continue post retirement? How feasible will it be to continue them? I belonged to a

nursing learning community in which I wanted to maintain my membership. I have been able to do that, and it remains a very important part of my professional development. These may go to the top of your retirement list because they are important to you. Retirement doesn't mean that you stop learning and participating in your profession.

SOCIAL SECURITY, MEDICARE, AND RETIREMENT BENEFITS

Your age at retirement will impact your Social Security benefits. Be sure to study the options so you can make the best choice to meet your financial requirements. For example, you can retire, but not take your Social Security benefit until you are 70, thus receiving the maximum dollar allocation. Review all the options and consequences to coordinate with other retirement benefits.

You must register for Medicare at age 65, but you can delay the full payment of the benefits if you work past 65 and receive health coverage from your employer. Again, you will need to contact Medicare to see what works best for your circumstances. Although Medicare offers significant coverage, you will want to consider supplemental insurance to cover expenses that Medicare doesn't cover, especially pharmacy benefits. You might be surprised at what you will need to pay out of pocket for Medicare, supplemental insurance, and pharmacy benefits.

Everyone has different retirement benefits from their employer. Consult with your human resources representative in advance when planning the exact date of your retirement and the impact on your employer-related benefits such as 401K, defined benefit, and health insurance. All may change on retirement depending on your final day of work.

Consider using a professional financial planner to assist in coordinating all your retirement considerations to maximize your benefits.

WHAT MAY SURPRISE YOU

Most roles in nursing leadership require you to interact with people on a consistent basis. You may spend as much time with colleagues as you do with family and friends. Daily contact is reduced once you retire. So, although it may be nice to leave the heavy workload behind, you might miss close colleagues. Think about how you can stay in touch—phone calls, e-mail, lunches, and professional meetings will be important links to your networking community. Staying in touch becomes more important when you don't have the routine times to interact with colleagues as you had when you were full time.

If you have had administrative support for calendar management, travel arrangements, and document preparation, you may find that you are now your own administrative support. You might want to learn those new skills before you retire. Also, your resources for delegating tasks may significantly diminish. It will be new workload to manage.

Your daily "routines" will change. The good news is you will be more in control of what you are doing, but you will

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