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Spending Well

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Male Job of the Future: Nursing

WORKING

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and RUTH FREMSON

As the economy shifts, men find opportunity in traditionally female jobs.

Jake Creviston, a nurse practitioner, has been repeatedly mistaken for a doctor.

Adam White says the veterans he cares for as a student nurse at the VA hospital feel comfortable around him because "I'm a big burly guy with a beard."

Glenn Fletcher, after being laid off from a lumber mill, found a new career in nursing. And with it, "a really good feeling putting your head on the pillow realizing you've helped other people."

The experiences of male nurses offer lessons that could help address a problem of our time: how to prepare workers for the fastest-growing jobs, at a time when more than a quarter of adult men are not in the labor force.

Only 13 percent of nurses in the United States are men, but that share has grown steadily since 1960, when the number was 2 percent, according to a working paper by the Washington Center for Equitable Growth. The biggest drivers, the paper found, were the changing economy and expanding gender roles.

In our talks with a dozen male nurses, some were drawn to the caregiving, others to the adrenaline of the work. It's a reliable, well-paying job at a time when that's hard to come by, they said, but also one they feel proud of.

Women have been entering male-dominated fields for decades, but the jobs that are shrinking tend to be male ones, and those that are growing are mostly female.

Nursing is no paragon of gender equality: Even though men are a minority, they are paid more than women. The stigma against men still runs deep, particularly among older patients and in parts of the country with more traditional gender roles, nurses said.

But for some men, the notion that caregiving jobs are women's work is outdated.

"This narrative that men can't provide care in the way that women can is part of that broad cultural narrative that misunderstands what nursing's about," said Mr. White. "We need to talk with young people about caring



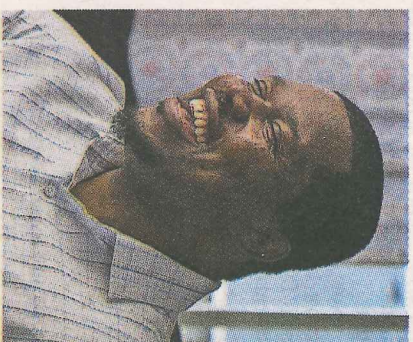
PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUTH FREMSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES
NEVER BORED J.R. McClain, a former Navy mechanic now working in an emergency department, said the excitement of the job led him to nursing.



"When we notice that our boys are gifted in math and science and they say, 'I want to be a doctor when I grow up,' we could say, 'That's great, you could even be a nurse if you wanted to!'"

ADAM WHITE, 35

Nursing student; former banker



"You're a caregiver, providing quality, dignified care. It's not you doing it as a male or a female, but just generally as a caregiver."

JUSTIN KUUNIFAA, 41

Family practice nurse; former in-home caregiver

as a gender-neutral idea, but also as something that's rooted in skills, in expertise."

The researchers also found that economic factors have played a role. Nursing is growing much faster than the average occupation, and wages have increased steadily since 1980. The median salary is \$68,450, about the same

as the median salary for college-educated workers over all.

The paper's authors found that the increase in male nurses was largely uniform across the country, although black and Hispanic men and those in rural areas were less likely to become nurses. Nursing is a career that is often started later in life, in part

because it's possible to become certified midcareer and does not require a bachelor's degree. But as hospitals increasingly require nurses to have a four-year degree, it could become a barrier for men, the researchers said.

Male nurses are more likely than females to have worked as emergency medical technicians, military nurses or lab technicians, and to work in acute care in hospitals rather than primary care clinics.

In interviews, men said they liked the variety of work: Nurses can be bedside caregivers, surgery assistants, educators, technicians or administrators.

Several said they felt an advantage in applying for nursing jobs because men are a minority in the field. Sometimes patients prefer a nurse of a certain sex, particularly for procedures like inserting a catheter, nurses said, and some men feel more comfortable talking openly with another man.

"I work on this floor with people who just had urology surgery or amputations, and they have told me that when I come in the room and shut the door behind me, they feel more understood and can drop the tough guy attitude," Mr. White said.

Nursing became a woman's job because women were seen as natural caregivers, said Patricia D'Antonio, a nursing historian at the University of Pennsylvania. Nursing became such a gendered profession that men were barred from serving in the Army Nurse Corps during the two world wars. Not until the 1960s did the nursing field begin trying to better reflect its patients in terms of both gender and race, Ms. D'Antonio said.

The Oregon Center for Nursing, a work force development group, began recruiting male and minority prospects to nursing in the early 2000s. It started a marketing campaign — "Are you man enough to be a nurse?" — that spread nationwide.

More recently, efforts to recruit male nurses have more on the rewards of the career, with the slogan, "Do what you love and you'll love what you do."

Nurses said they welcomed the change. "I don't think we're doing any favors to society by conveying this message that nursing is this super masculine thing," said Mr. Creviston, a psychiatric nurse practitioner and mental health nursing professor. "If your motive is to bring the right men into the field, show how rewarding it is to hold the hand of a dying person."