

# A Calling Beyond Careers: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Late-Career Changers in the Nursing Profession

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## Abstract

This study explored the experiences of individuals who transitioned into the nursing profession later in life. Guided by the constructivist paradigm and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry framework, the research examined how late-career changers constructed meaning, reshaped identity, and navigated challenges during their transition. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry design, six participants aged 30–52 who previously worked in non-nursing professions were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. In-depth semi-structured interviews were analyzed using the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place.

Findings revealed five major themes: (1) Push and Pull of the Vocation, wherein exhaustion and lack of fulfillment prompted reconsideration of career directions while encounters with compassionate nurses inspired pursuit of nursing; (2) Midlife Reinvention through Education and Purposeful Career Transition, characterized by courage, renewed purpose, and self-discovery; (3) Family Influence and Support, where emotional, motivational, and financial assistance played a critical role in sustaining persistence; (4) Identity and Belonging, reflecting struggles with age differences, role adjustment, and eventual integration into the nursing community; and (5) Resilience and Perseverance, capturing moments of doubt, physical strain, and emotional burden countered by faith, determination, and meaningful patient encounters.

The study highlights the importance of understanding non-traditional pathways into nursing, especially amid workforce shortages. Implications suggest enhancing institutional support systems, developing age-inclusive learning environments, and strengthening emotional and academic scaffolding for adult learners entering the nursing profession.

**Keywords:** adult learners; career transition; late-career changers; narrative inquiry; nursing identity

## 1. Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction

The nursing profession is most severely impacted by the extraordinary demand on healthcare systems across the globe. The enormous demand for Filipino nurses abroad and the significant number of registered nurses who are not actively practicing in the Philippines have made the nursing shortage a major national problem. The Department of Health estimates that around 190,000 healthcare professionals are now needed in the country to cover shortages in both public and commercial healthcare facilities (Herbosa, 2025). The local supply of skilled and resilient nursing personnel is unable to keep up with the growing demand. Despite continuous efforts by the government and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to improve workforce retention and support, healthcare institutions are finding it more and more difficult to recruit and retain qualified nurses.

Even while these kinds of changes are happening more often in the job market as a whole, they are still not well understood in nursing research. People often become nurses not because they need the money, but because they truly believe that this is the right thing for them to do since it fits with their values of service, empathy, and importance. Most beliefs on how to improve professionally say that people should only work in one area and follow a straight path. Some people chose nursing as a career because they want to help others, believe in the value of their job, or desire to achieve spiritual satisfaction. This is not true. Their existence in the healthcare field creates major problems with changing careers, rebuilding oneself, and figuring out how to adapt to and find purpose in new job duties.

There may be some benefits to changes that come late in a person's career, but there isn't a lot of qualitative research that looks at how individuals feel, what they want, and how they think about these types of changes. We may learn a lot about how to be strong, grow as a person and a professional, and find meaning in nursing by hearing more of their stories. This research utilized a narrative inquiry technique to examine the experiences of individuals who began their nursing careers in mid to late adulthood. The objective is to improve strategies for workforce development in healthcare, ease admission for persons who do not adhere to traditional criteria, and get insights into the nursing profession by analyzing their viewpoints on entering the field.

A lot of research from around the world has looked at the lives of adult and second-career nursing students. In the Philippines, there is a noticeable lack of qualitative study that looks at the personal stories, identity shifts, and sense of purpose of workers who are beginning their last few years of work. (Christensen, M., & Craft, J., 2021) This study mostly looks at structure and intellectual issues, but it misses the important chance to look at how these people make sense of their lives and their feelings. Narrative questioning will be used in this study to get more information from late-career changers in the Philippines who had problems as they made the switch from nursing to another job. (Christensen, M., & Craft, J., 2021)

Although several studies have looked at nurse migration, early-career development, and workforce retention in the Philippines and abroad, the experiences of late-career professionals who decide to pursue a career in nursing have not gotten much attention. Most of the already published literature focuses on

younger nurses who enter the sector directly out of college, neglecting the growing number of mid- to late-career nurses who switch occupations in pursuit of fulfillment, stability, or purpose in the medical industry. Given the ongoing nursing shortage in the country, which will be projected to be at 127,000 in 2023 and is predicted to reach 250,000 by 2030, this discrepancy is particularly significant (Department of Health, 2023; Manila Standard, 2025). In spite of this urgent need, little is known about how these latecomers to the nursing profession deal with job satisfaction, professional flexibility, and identity rebuilding. This gap has to be filled in order to provide institutional, educational, and policy solutions that are relevant to the particular problems and motivations of non-traditional nursing entrants.

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide to get narrative-driven insights into how participants managed and expressed their transition into nursing. The purpose of the handbook's open-ended questions is to encourage readers to consider their own values, ways of thinking about problems, and things that bring them happiness. With open-ended follow-up questions, the researcher could go further into the topic at hand and participants may express themselves at their leisure. Using this strategy, participants may joyfully and freely share their stories. By fostering impromptu dialogue, it enhanced the study's narrative component.

Based on the goals of the study and data collected from related research on adult learning, late-career transition, and nursing professional identity, an interview guide will be create. The data underwent extensive verification and evaluation to ensure its accuracy, usefulness, and conformity with the study's objectives. Participants were invited to think on and share their own experiences with change and adaptation in the nursing profession. This is made possible by the pragmatic design of the final version, which allowed for the collecting of rich, contextual, and real data.

### **2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique**

Six licensed nurses aged 30–52 participated in the study. All had previously worked for at least two years in non-nursing professions such as human resources, call center, teaching, driving, policing, and virtual assistance. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and expanded through snowball sampling to identify additional qualified informants.

### **2.3 Research Instrument**

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#### **2.4 Data Gathering Procedure**

Data were collected through in-depth online or face-to-face interviews depending on participants' availability. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality. Field notes and reflective memos supplemented data collection.

#### **2.5 Data Analysis Procedure**

Careful handling of participant narratives is required for data processing in narrative inquiry research. This involves being transparent and honest about how the information is used, preserving people's privacy, and taking tangible steps to acquire, secure, and use these stories. Research is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with prospective nurses who have already made the career decision.

Every interview is thoroughly documented verbatim. To safeguard their anonymity, we used pseudonyms and eliminated any identifying information from the transcripts. Extra copies were preserved on a secure cloud server accessible just to approved research personnel. Documents, including authorization documents, are stored in a secure cabinet at the primary investigator's school. Distinct audit trails have been created to record each phase of data management and analysis to maintain the integrity and rigor of the research.

The researcher has maintained reflective memoranda and field notes during the data collection and analysis phases to monitor the evolution of their ideas and to engage in reflexivity (Harding & Whitehead, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). All data will be securely stored for five years after publication, in accordance with institutional and ethical norms, and thereafter removed securely.

This study used thematic narrative analysis within a narrative inquiry framework to examine how nurses changing careers construct, articulate, and contemplate their narratives of professional success. Clandinin (2016) contended that narrative inquiry serves as a methodological framework employing narratives to clarify individuals' perspectives of pivotal life changes.

This type of analysis combines techniques from theme analysis with the way the stories were told and what they were about. In this way, people can see big trends while still understanding that each story is straight and covers a lot of ground (Riessman, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The point of this study is to find out what nurses who are moving careers later in life think about their choice to become nurses. The people who took part told stories about how their morals, goals, and events from the past affected the work decisions they made. The process of making meaning is very personal, and it gave them a new reason to live.

In order to investigate how nurses who were changing careers saw their career pathways, stories that remained the same, and changes in identity were employed. According to Nowell et al. (2017), since auditors and peers discussed the data often, it is more comprehensive and understandable. Researcher may be able to comprehend real events more fully if we combine theme analysis with narrative analysis and find similarities even if each person's stories is unique.

## 2.6 Ethical Considerations

To protect the rights, welfare, and dignity of the participants, this study strictly adhered to ethical research norms. The ethical framework followed the rules set forth by the institution's policy on research ethics and is based on the proposals made by Subia (2018). In order to reduce bias, the researcher employed reflective journaling, which encouraged a critical review of their thoughts and results. In order to guarantee that their perspectives were correctly expressed, participants were asked to carefully review and confirm the content.

Prior to the commencement of the research, those whose informed consent has been acquired are apprised of its objective. Participation is totally optional, and participants may discontinue at any time without consequence; the researcher also discussed the study's goals and methods of data collection in both the written and spoken formats. The participants gave their written consent before any interviews were conducted. When participants are informed about the study and their rights, they are less likely to feel pressured to participate.

## 3.0 Results and Discussion

Narratives revealed five overarching themes that encapsulate late-career changers' experiences.

### Stories of the Participants

#### Story of P1: From HR Office to Hospital Ward

A woman used to work in human resources for six years. She handled payroll, addressed employee complaints, and completed a number of forms. At first, she enjoyed her job, but gradually, the strain of it all began to wear her down. Her life was irrevocably changed when her mother was ill and needed to be admitted to the hospital. As she saw the nurses caring for her mother and offering comfort to her family, she realized the actual significance of their work. Their generosity really moved her, and after considering her options, she decided to become a nurse.

At 44, she decided to take the chance of going to nursing school. Even though some people made fun of her age, her family supported her throughout. She first felt uneasy being around by much younger students, but she eventually grew to love their company.

Nursing school was difficult. Her muscles ached from the long shifts and difficult medical language, and she was exhausted, sometimes sobbing. But she kept going because she wanted to help others. Because of her HR experience, she was very good with paperwork and patient interactions. She is now happy to be a nurse since her experiences have increased her sensitivity and tolerance. She views nursing as more than just a job; it's about giving kind, religious care.

### **Story of P2: From Call Center Agent to Nurse**

For fifteen years, a guy endured long, tense night shifts in a contact center. Because of his work, he had discomfort, high blood pressure, and insomnia. But all changed when his father was brought to the hospital. As he saw the nurses' dedication to the patients and their families, he was struck by their perseverance. Their empathy affected his choice to change careers.

He quit his work and went to nursing school when he was 48. His family supported him even if his friends made fun of his choice. It was more difficult than he thought to get used to this new existence. Long periods of standing were now required of his body, which was used to sitting at a desk. But he persisted with prayer and resolve.

His background as a call center representative was helpful. He discovered that he could reassure patients and allay their fears thanks to his communication abilities. He was proud of every patient grin. He came to see that nursing was a calling rather than just a job. In contrast to his previous employment, he now works with passion and purpose.

### **Story of P3: From Teacher to Nurse**

A committed educator molded young brains for two decades. However, after so many years, the continual barrage of parent complaints and mountains of paperwork started to wear them down. She was touched by the generosity of the nurses who cared for her spouse when he became unwell. She made the decision to give something new a go.

She quit teaching at age 46 to obtain a degree in nursing. Some of her coworkers questioned her choice, while others applauded her bravery. However, her kids provided invaluable assistance. The change wasn't simple. She felt uncomfortable in class with pupils considerably younger than her and had to get used to a lesser salary. But she persisted.

Even though she found studies like anatomy and pharmacology difficult, she was able to easily convey medical ideas to patients because to her strong communication abilities. She become more understanding and tolerant over time. She found her purpose again in nursing. Being a nurse meant continuing to educate, but in a deeper sense, in her opinion. Nursing evolved into more than simply a job; it became a means of achieving satisfaction and assisting others.

### **Story of P4: From Driver to Nurse**

A man supported his family for twenty-five years by operating jeepneys and family automobiles. When he was younger, he had studied nursing, but he had to resort to driving to support himself after failing

the board test. Years later, his eldest daughter, who is now a teacher, encouraged her father to reapply for the nursing board. Despite his self-doubt, she stood by him and even paid for his review center.

When he passed the exam on his second try, he was ecstatic and would never forget it. Returning to nursing, however, wasn't easy. He had to retrain his mind, get acquainted with the medical sector, and adjust to new hospital protocols. Nevertheless, he worked hard, regained his confidence, and was happy with his achievements.

He now views his line of work differently. He used to help travelers reach their destinations, but now he helps patients on their path to recovery. He has a sense of dignity and purpose because of nursing, and his family and community are extremely proud of him.

### **Story of P5: From Police Officer Back to Nurse**

One lady chose to enlist in the police force after receiving her nursing degree, and she spent 10 years there. She enjoyed what she did, even if it was dangerous and challenging. However, she couldn't help but feel guilty when the COVID-19 epidemic hit. At the age of 37, she quit the police service to pursue her first calling after seeing the dire need for nurses.

It was challenging to get used to nursing again after spending so many years elsewhere. She felt rusty since many medical techniques and gadgets had changed. But she eventually recovered her confidence with the help of younger nurses.

She was disciplined and self-assured from her career as a police officer, but nursing gave her empathy and calm. It was difficult to lose people, but it was rewarding to see others become well. She believes she has at last discovered her real home. Although both nurses and police officers help people, she feels that nursing enables her to provide more individualized care, and she intends to remain in the profession permanently.

### **Story of P6: From Virtual Assistant to Nurse**

For three years, a young lady with a degree in computer engineering worked as a virtual assistant. Despite earning a livelihood, she felt lonely and dissatisfied. She was inspired to become a nurse by her family, who were mostly in the medical industry. She was reluctant at first, but after realizing the opportunities and stability that nursing may provide, she made the decision to change careers.

The change wasn't simple. Considering her lack of medical training, topics like anatomy and pharmacology were daunting. She often found herself crying because studying was difficult. She continued her education while working part-time as a virtual assistant to help support herself.

She overcame the difficulties to finish nursing school, pass the board test, and start her career as a nurse. After two years of work, she feels more content and safe. She now realizes that nursing has provided her with a genuine sense of purpose and the chance to assist others, even if she still sometimes misses her ambition of being an engineer.

### **3.1 Theme 1: Push and Pull of the Vocation**

Tables should be referenced in the text using the term "Table". The tables incorporated must adhere to the following specifications: they should be formatted with a font size of 8, centered, and created using the Microsoft Word table editor. Tables presented in the text mustn't be included as images; instead, they should be generated using the designated word processing software. The table title should be placed above the actual table. See the sample below for the table presentation.

### **3.1 Theme 1: Push and Pull of the Vocation**

Participants expressed strong push factors such as emotional fatigue, lack of fulfillment, and health deterioration in previous careers. Pull factors emerged from witnessing compassionate nurses during family illness, spiritual convictions, and the desire for meaningful contribution. These findings support Christensen and Craft's (2021) assertion that career shifts toward nursing often stem from a search for purpose and authenticity.

### **3.2 Theme 2: Midlife Reinvention through Education and Purposeful Career Transition**

Participants demonstrated courage in restarting their careers at midlife. Returning to school involved significant adjustments, including age-related self-consciousness and academic pressure. Yet, the process facilitated self-discovery and renewed purpose. The theme aligns with Reeves (2023), who argues that midlife transitions can foster psychological growth and identity reconstruction.

### **3.3 Theme 3: Family Influence and Support**

Family played a central role in sustaining motivation. Some family members initially responded with humor or doubt, but ultimately provided emotional encouragement and financial support. These findings reflect Lopez and Dizon's (2024) assertions that adult learners' persistence is strongly influenced by familial affirmation and shared sacrifice.

### **3.4 Theme 4: Identity and Belonging**

Participants initially experienced discomfort due to age differences with younger classmates. Over time, they developed a sense of belonging through competence, empathy, and meaningful interactions. Their prior careers informed their emerging professional identities, consistent with Ramirez and Cho (2024) who highlight the integration of past and present selves in midlife identity reconstruction.

### **3.5 Theme 5: Resilience and Perseverance**

Moments of doubt, exhaustion, and comparison with younger or more financially stable peers challenged participants' confidence. However, faith, patient encounters, and family support strengthened resilience. These findings resonate with Oducado et al. (2023), who emphasize perseverance as a defining feature of nursing students navigating adversity.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

This study highlights the transformative experiences of late-career changers entering the nursing profession. Their narratives reflect a complex interplay of motivation, identity, adversity, and resilience. Family support, meaningful encounters, and spiritual grounding emerged as significant enablers throughout their transitions.

The findings underscore the need for:

- age-inclusive learning environments in nursing education;
- flexible academic and psychosocial support for adult learners;
- workforce policies recognizing the value of midlife entrants; and
- mentorship structures that integrate diverse professional backgrounds.

Future research may explore institutional strategies that support non-traditional nursing students or examine long-term career outcomes of late-career changers in healthcare.

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