

Meet the RN



A Conversation with RN Catherine Brignoni

Find out how life looks for one cancer nurse at the end of her shift at an outpatient cancer unit. She is a registered nurse at an outpatient cancer clinic in California and took the time to talk to us about the benefits of specializing in cancer treatment, how she feels after an average day, and what goes through her mind on a day-to-day basis at work.

Think back to one specific day you'd call average. What did you do, how were you feeling, and what did you enjoy and/or not enjoy about that day?

An average day occurs when everything flows smoothly. On an average day, patients at the clinic come and go with no extra needs. I get off work on time and I'm able to catch up on paperwork before my shift ends. While it's nice, sometimes those days can seem slow.

- **Fact:** Nurses that specialize in caring for cancer patients are known as *oncology nurses*.

Talk about two types of experiences you have as a nurse: first, a stressful day on the job, then a rewarding one.

When I think of a stressful day on the job, I think about my experiences working out east in New Jersey. On any given day, I could be given a day assignment of seven to ten patients at once, because New Jersey did not have a nurse-patient ratio at the time.

That heavy patient load mixed with a lack of ancillary staff made my day a nightmare. I felt like a watchman. I would constantly do rounds on my patients and would often skimp on lunch. I could write a novel about this stressful experience. It's just one reason why I now work in California.

A rewarding day happens when my nurse-patient ratio is correct and I have enough time to educate patients about their care plan, answer all their questions, and research answers for them. That kind of day is a completely different sort of nursing than just getting the job done.

- **Fact:** Over 2.5 million nurses were employed in the U.S. alone in 2008, making nursing the largest health care occupation in the country.

What goes through your mind on the trip home when you come off a shift?

I often just try to decompress from the day. Occasionally I will do a checklist in my mind, making sure I completed everything I was supposed to. But more often than not, I leave work behind me.

- **Fact:** California was the highest-paying state for registered nurses in 2008, with nurses earning \$83,040 in mean annual wages.

What are the overall benefits and rewards of your job as a nurse in an outpatient cancer unit?

Obviously, helping people is great. Nursing is an enriching experience. I also feel intellectually challenged, because I'm working at a teaching hospital. Because I specialize in cancer care, I always see new therapies and drugs coming out.

In addition to the intellectual challenge, I've found that watching patients be cured from cancer and go on to lead normal lives again is a true reward. I have been able to make friendships with patients over years of their treatment courses. Many still come back yearly to say hello and let me know that things are good, that they've started a family or moved on in other ways.

In terms of the job itself, I love working three days a week! There's lots of vacation. You may need to work holidays, but it's a pretty sweet deal overall. It can be very flexible. Travel nursing is great too.

- **Fact:** Travel nurses make their career out of commuting or relocating to short-term or temporary nursing positions.

In general, how do you feel about your career in nursing?

I feel rather content as a registered nurse. I feel that my job requires continuous education and offers daily challenges. I see myself doing this for quite a while.

- **Fact:** The Bureau of Labor Statistics that about 587,000 new careers for nurses should enter the field between 2006 and 2016.