



Lana Ferreira

FORMER CAREER **BOOKKEEPER**

On second thought...

Registered Nurse Journal talks with three RNs who may not have immediately embarked on careers in nursing, but who are uncovering a true passion for the profession. They each offer something unique as a result of their different experiences in the workplace. And they all agree: their second career choice is their best to date. BY MELISSA DI COSTANZO

LANA FERREIRA

When Lana Ferreira was a little girl, she remembers listening to her babysitter talk about how much she wanted to become a nurse. Fuelled by her passion, Ferreira had the same dream. Sadly, it was a vision that remained unfulfilled for more than two decades. Beginning in high school, Ferreira encountered a number of roadblocks that prevented her from pursuing a career in nursing. She finally realized her dream in June, when she graduated from the Humber College-University of New Brunswick collaborative bachelor of nursing program. “I think there is something profoundly wonderful (about) helping people,” she says, “and that’s just what I want to do.”

Raised in Brazil, Ferreira finished high school and was accepted to a college course similar to Ontario’s registered practical nursing program. Her goal was to complete the program, and then take steps to become a registered nurse. But a few weeks before the fall term began, classes were cancelled because of a lack of funding and applicants.

Crushed, Ferreira was left to decide between her two backup career plans: teaching or accounting. She settled on the latter,

thinking she’d quickly find a job that would eventually pay for her nursing education. For a year during and after college, she worked in Brazil at a small accounting/tax firm doing bookkeeping and data entry. Nursing was “still in the back of my head,” she says. Then, she met and married someone who wanted to move to Canada, and everything changed.

In 1992, Ferreira arrived in Toronto’s west end. To make ends meet, she worked as a restaurant dishwasher, then as a nanny. She also cleaned houses and served coffee. Soon after, she separated from her husband. A single mom, with no friends, no place of her own, and little grasp of English, Ferreira’s goal of becoming an RN was relegated to the back burner, even though it “never left my thoughts,” she admits.

A connection forged through one of her part-time jobs led to a filing position at an accounting firm. Ferreira did that for one year, and then found her way to a Toronto-based publishing company, where she took up a financial assistant post. She managed accounts payable and receivable, ordered supplies and managed inventory for just over 10 years. She continued to consider nursing, but began to doubt she would ever get there.

In 2007, the company Ferreira worked for was sold to a bigger corporation. Ferreira lost her job in the shuffle and was forced to ask herself if accounting was still right for her. "I wasn't happy... and I wanted to be happy," she says.

She decided to seize the opportunity to "do what I was supposed to do 20 years ago." In her late 30s, Ferreira returned to high school to upgrade her math, English, chemistry and biology grades. She was accepted as a mature student at Toronto's Humber College, finally fulfilling her dream to become an RN.

Financially, academically and personally, she admits it has been a challenging four years. There were times she thought about tossing in the towel. She sold her car, moved to a smaller living space, took out a student loan, and raised her daughter, now 17, on her own.

Sleepless nights spent studying contributed to her struggles.

Working during the day to fund her education (Ferreira helped to co-ordinate consumer shows) was equally taxing. Her family was supportive of her plan, but friends would often ask: "Why not continue with accounting?" Ferreira knew "that's not what I want to do. I still have 20 years to work, and I might as well work in something (that will make me) happy (to get) up in the morning," she says.

The challenges and range of experiences during her clinical days made day-to-day responsibilities, such as staying on top of domestic duties, tough. She wasn't the straight-A student she wanted to be, mostly because the subject matter was difficult and different from what she had learned when she was preparing to become a number-cruncher.

With the CRNE exam behind her, Ferreira can now focus on starting the career that has been decades in the making. She hopes to eventually end up in mental health, but will start working on a medical/surgical unit to build her skills.

She's not the only one excited to embark on a nursing career: her daughter, Camilla, starts the University of Ottawa's nursing program in the fall, and Ferreira couldn't be happier. "(That) passion (for) being a nurse...never went away," she says. "I always looked up to nurses, and I never gave up."

CELGEN YACAPIN

When he was eight years old, Celgen Yacapin was admitted to a hospital in the Philippines, his native country, with a second-degree burn. He'll never forget the pain, or the nurse who cared for him: she was gentle, and helped make him feel comfortable, especially during agonizing dressing changes. That interaction stayed with him, cementing in his mind the idea that "nursing provides the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others...(and) to care for people from all walks of life." As profound as the experience was for a young boy, the thought of becoming an RN did not occur to him until much later in life.

Twenty years ago, Yacapin began his career as an agricultural engineer in his country of birth. His titles and responsibilities

changed over time. He supervised workers plotting irrigation systems, conducted research at a banana plantation, sold agricultural chemicals, and was a senior agriculturalist for the provincial government for seven years, helping to plan trade shows and honouring exemplary farmers.

It was a profession Yacapin's father encouraged his eldest son to pursue. But after 12 years of working in the field, Yacapin craved variety and longed to interact with people, travel, discover different traditions, learn, and use his critical thinking skills. Harkening back to his time in hospital as a youngster, he says "the scars (on) my back...reminded me that I should give back." He began thinking about becoming an RN.

A desire to help people at all stages of life drew him to the profession and, in 2003, Yacapin

enrolled in a three-year nursing degree program in the Philippines at the age of 33.

The transition from agricultural engineer to nurse was one of the steepest slopes Yacapin's ever endured, he says. He remembers sitting at his desk at the beginning of his very first class thinking "here I am in school again. Am I going to finish?" He kept his job as an agriculturalist while he studied, going to school after office hours and on weekends. He never

had a day off, completing his hospital placement hours (a curriculum requirement) on Saturdays and Sundays. During this time, he also tended to his now 14-year-old daughter while his wife worked abroad.

Making the leap into the profession was a "now or never scenario...I challenged myself, and it was worth the journey. Nursing is...a never ending (learning) experience," he says.

His first position as an RN was on a medical/surgical inpatient unit at a small hospital in his homeland, a role he held for one year before he moved to Nunavut in 2008 with his family. Relocating from a tropical climate to the harsh, cold north in another country was a shock, but Yacapin insists he loves the snow. When he was younger, he always wanted to visit a place with an abundance of the white stuff. Now, he jokes "be careful what you wish for."

Yacapin was an inpatient staff RN at the Rankin Inlet Health Centre, a job he enjoyed because he learned about local customs. The little hospital in a community of less than 4,000 also meant Yacapin had more time for one-on-one interactions with patients and their families. The Inuit, he says, are warm people who maintain close-knit relationships with family members, similar to Filipino culture. He misses working with the area's elders, and is considering returning to work in Nunavut in the future as a community health nurse.

For now, Yacapin is busy realizing another dream. Last September, he and his daughter moved to Toronto. Even before he arrived in Ontario's capital, Yacapin knew he wanted to venture into emergency room nursing so he could immerse himself in the frenetic unpredictability of an ER.



As an agricultural engineer in the Philippines, Celgen Yacapin craved variety and longed to interact more with people.



Celgen Yacapin

FORMER CAREER **AGRICULTURALIST**



Trish O'Connor

FORMER CAREER **KINESIOLOGIST**

In January, he became a full-time emergency room staff nurse at the Rouge Valley Health System. He admits that caring for critically ill patients in the ER can be overwhelming. “I’m fearful of patients dying in my arms,” he says, “but in an ER...you can’t avoid that.” With time and support from his colleagues, Yacapin has built up his confidence, and is on the road to conquering his fear. He admits he still has a lot to learn. Luckily, that’s one of the reasons he chose nursing as a second career.

He plans to specialize in this role by taking courses pertaining to advanced cardiovascular life support and trauma nursing care. “I don’t want my age to be a hindrance to learning something new,” he says. “I don’t want to stop teaching myself and furthering my nursing (knowledge).”

TRISH O’CONNOR

Fourteen years ago, then-19-year-old Trish O’Connor had no idea what she wanted to study in university. She liked athletics and anatomy, and acting on advice from her high school teachers, signed up for a bachelor of science in kinesiology degree at Sudbury’s Laurentian University.

Four years later and fresh out of school, she was hired as a kinesiologist in cardiac prevention and rehabilitation at Newmarket’s Southlake Regional Health Centre. Practising offsite in an outpatient program, O’Connor worked with patients who experienced heart attacks, arrhythmias or bypass surgery. She determined their exercise capabilities and mapped out personal fitness routines. She helped them understand how to eat better and manage stress, and kept an eye on their blood sugar if they had diabetes. She enjoyed dealing with clients when they were “vulnerable, but willing to get better.”

O’Connor’s career satisfaction was evident to at least one of her patients: a man she had helped to walk almost five kilometres following bypass surgery. “I can tell you really like what you do,” he told her after reaching the milestone many of her patients aspire to. “That was the biggest compliment I could receive,” she says. “I loved being part of (patients’ lives) as they were travelling through their...rehab process. They were given a second chance, and I think a lot of them realized that.”

After four years on the job as a kinesiologist, O’Connor was practising to full scope. She tracked blood pressure levels, monitored EKGs while patients walked on a treadmill, and designed and organized personal and group training programs. Ready for her next challenge, she contemplated a master’s degree in health promotion or adult education. That’s when Karen,* an RN and O’Connor’s supervisor, asked if she had ever considered a career in nursing.

The seasoned kinesiologist admits that becoming an RN was something she hadn’t considered. She was already familiar with the role of nurses in rehab. RNs conduct initial assessments before kinesiologists initiate patient exercise tests. The nurses in Southlake’s program also teach and coach, two aspects of her own job that O’Connor found particularly rewarding.

Curious to learn more, she sat in on a class for patients and their loved ones on the emotional impact of heart disease, led by Karen.

The course made her realize “nursing wasn’t just about healing physical wounds, but also acknowledging the emotional and social impact of illness,” she says. “It also helped me realize that nurses treat not only the patient, but the family and friends of patients.”

With Karen’s encouragement, O’Connor signed up for the two-year accelerated nursing degree at the University of Toronto. She quickly discovered how closely linked nursing and kinesiology are. Both promote enhanced quality of life, she says. One focus of kinesiology is physical activity, and how that helps to improve health. By contrast, nursing draws on psychological, psychosocial, emotional and social determinants, and how each of these affects an individual’s health.

Though thrilled to discover both professions work hand-in-hand, as a student, she questioned her future in the field. “I felt like I didn’t really fit in with my peers because they...knew (the moment) they wanted to be a nurse.” They talked about personal experiences with the health-care system, or family members who became RNs. O’Connor couldn’t relate.

Her struggles continued as a staff nurse in cardiology, her first job out of nursing school. She felt frustrated when patients left the unit with little knowledge about next steps. “There were a lot of missed opportunities to teach

people,” she says, “and that discouraged me.”

Less than 12 months later, O’Connor accepted a primary care opportunity at Orillia’s Couchiching Family Health Team. For almost three years, she taught healthy weight management, diabetes and pre-diabetes programs, and developed an osteoporosis education course. It was a much better fit. “My whole life, people said ‘you’ll be a teacher like your mom,’” she says. “The defiant teenager in me said ‘there’s no way I’m becoming a teacher.’ (Ironically) that’s what I enjoy doing the most.”

O’Connor hit her stride 18 months ago, when she took on the role of diabetes educator at the Barrie Community Health Centre. Her background in kinesiology allows her to help patients understand how physical activity impacts their disease. She likes tailoring treatment plans for her patients, and would like to incorporate more kinesiology into her role by designing exercise plans for people with target heart rates, and adapting exercises based on physical ability. “Ultimately, whether a kinesiologist or RN, we are all health promoters,” she says.

Despite her rocky transition into nursing, O’Connor’s current role solidifies her decision to become an RN, a move she credits to Karen. In fact, O’Connor recently called her mentor to tell her she’d be leading a session similar to the moving class she watched Karen teach eight years ago. “I questioned (going into nursing) for a number of years, but I have finally found my nursing niche,” she says. **RN**

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We asked some of our members who chose nursing as their second profession to tell us the top three reasons why they made the shift. Find out what they had to say at www.RNAO.ca/my2ndcareer. And write to editor@RNAO.ca if you have your own reasons for switching to nursing from another line of work.

* Pseudonyms have been used to protect privacy.