

Fifty Years Later: A Revolution in Nursing

Category: Healing

written by Cathy J. Peters | September 20, 2025

I began my nursing career in 1975 at a hospital in New York City. I was a young woman from a small city in upstate New York, eager to grow professionally and also to broaden my worldview. Although I later relocated to advance my education, the experience of living and working in New York City changed my life in countless, positive ways. It was a great honor to volunteer after September 11th, as a way to give back to this wonderful city.

Through fifty years in the nursing profession, I have witnessed not just an evolution but a revolution in health care. When I began, the patients were housed in wards with a clipboard (chart) at the end of the beds, and we used handwritten notes. It was a badge of honor to read and decipher all forms of cursive writing! We used glass IV bottles, and regulated them manually. In those days, we poured our medications by hand. And the patients' hospital stays were much longer than they are today.

I was mentored by nurses from two, three and four-year nursing schools, and was in awe of their collective skill. A master's was the terminal nursing degree. Almost all the nurses were women, and almost all the physicians were men. In those days, physicians had their own dining room.

Fast forward to the current state with electronic medical records, a massive pharmacopeia, and god-like technology. Despite the rapid pace and practical constraints, patient care remains sacred work, and healing still takes place in the context of a relationship.

With thoughtful planning, healing can still happen, even in brief encounters. A dollop of patient education here. A kind word there. Gathering bits of helpful information that may improve outcome. All are ways to remain connected to the heart of patient care.

It is and has always been a great honor to be a nurse.

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