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Nursing Runs in Families
Nightingale Awards Program Often a Mother/Daughter Event

When Susan Duclos accepted her Nightingale Award for Excellence in Nursing last year, she simply looked out into the audience and said, "Thanks, Mom." Duclos's nurse mother had inspired her to choose nursing.

This year's Nightingale Awards will be held May 4 celebrating 300 outstanding nurses at regional galas in Groton, Hartford, New Haven and Stamford. Winners will once again be thanking mothers, spouses and cousins, as nursing is overwhelmingly a profession that runs in families.

Duclos, a psychiatric nurse at MidState Medical Center, always wanted to be a nurse like her mother, Maryann Fazzolari. She remembers watching her mother run to help after there was a motorcycle crash in front of their house, and she remembers her mother once again being first on the scene when someone fainted at the beach. It was clear to her that being a nurse meant having the skill to help people at critical moments. Duclos cannot remember ever wanting to be anything else. After 26 years in the profession, she is still enthusiastic about her choice. Duclos cites the variety of specialties to explore, the enjoyment she gets from interacting with patients, the intellectual challenge of nursing – particularly as the profession employs more sophisticated technology – and the pay and mobility nursing offers.

Her enthusiasm has translated to four of her younger cousins entering nursing. And her daughter, Katie Duclos, will become a licensed practical nurse in June. She plans to start working immediately while studying to be a registered nurse.

One reason relatives go into nursing may be early exposure to the profession. Mary Allegra had her daughter, Melissa, volunteering at St. Raphael's Hospital at the age of 15 when Allegra worked there. Mary Allegra is now a nurse recruiter at the Connecticut Visiting Nurse Association. Melissa Allegra is a nurse in Yale-New Haven Hospital's intensive care unit.

"I loved it," Melissa Allegra says of those early days volunteering at the hospital. She felt tremendous satisfaction interacting with patients and their families. "Being in the hospital isn't

such an easy thing," she says. But just letting people know what to expect could make the experience less frightening, she found.

That experience helped her convince a cousin to pursue a career in nursing. The young woman had been planning on medical school.

"Have you ever been to a hospital? Do you know what the doctors do?" Melissa Allegra asked her cousin. When she explained that nurses have far more patient contact, it made the difference. The extended Allegra family now has eight members who are nurses.

Dennis Rozanski was also raised by a nurse mother, but it was the influence of his wife, Donna, that attracted him to nursing as a second career. Donna Rozanski is now an administrator at the Visiting Nurse Association of South Central Connecticut. For years, Dennis Rozanski would go off to work as the vice president of a construction company in Greenwich, where his business was "centered around earning money." His wife would come home with stories about how she'd made a difference in patients' lives.

"I would lay in bed thinking, thinking about things Donna had said," says Rozanski, "I knew there had to be something different."

At 50, he left the construction business. After some soul searching, he became a certified nursing assistant. He went on to become a licensed practical nurse and is currently studying to be a registered nurse. Today Rozanski is 63, but says he feels 20 years younger. He works in a convalescent home where residents greet him with, "Oh you're on tonight…I'm so glad!"

Rozanski says that the role of caregiver is not traditionally associated with men, but it was the right fit for him. All the nurses interviewed for the article talked about their profession as more of a calling than a job and one that requires specific personality traits. Some wondered if empathy for patients is really what runs in families.

For more information about the Nightingale Awards for Excellence in Nursing, call 860-444-1111 x304 in Eastern Connecticut; 203-276-3000 in Fairfield County; 877-722-7324 in Hartford; 203-777-5521 x1710 in New Haven.

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