

# Prepared for a Career in Patient Care

Q & A with Alex Carbone, UNH Nursing '22

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Even as a child, Alex Carbone knew he wanted to pursue a career in the medical field. Dressed in scrub caps and gloves, he would use toy thermometers and stethoscopes to administer care to his “patients”: family members and stuffed animals. Fast forward 15-plus years, and the senior nursing major from Exeter, New Hampshire is preparing to graduate from UNH in May.

“With so many career options in healthcare, I never knew which was the one for me,” Carbone says. “My ultimate decision to pursue nursing mainly spurred from having multiple role models in my life who work in the medical field. After talking about the

profession with them and having the opportunity to shadow a nurse in the Emergency Department at Boston Children's Hospital, the fast paced, team-based caring environment that the nursing staff exemplified was one that immediately caught my eye and solidified my decision to apply to nursing school."

As a self-described "people person," Carbone's ability to formulate bonds and interact with patients and their families is the aspect of nursing he enjoys most. "Nursing is a task-oriented position that requires the use of critical thinking and judgment," he says. "While stressful at times, it is also extremely rewarding to be able to play an integral role in the healing process."

**Q: You plan to pursue pediatric nursing. What played into that decision?**

My decision to pursue a career specifically in pediatrics comes from my general affinity for working and interacting with kids. I worked as a camp counselor for five summers and volunteered as a youth sports coach throughout high school and college. As a child, I was always nervous to go to the doctor's office but was extremely grateful for the caring and witty nurses who, time and time again, managed to distract me and ease my nerves. I have always wanted to take on this role myself and use my personal experiences as a nervous patient to help kids' experiences in healthcare be as positive as possible. It's also no secret that nursing continues to be a female dominated career. I think that a lack of exposure to male nurses in pediatric settings perpetuates the stigma that nursing is a female oriented profession, and consequently steers males in high school away from considering nursing as a career. I believe my presence as a male nurse working with a young patient population will help in normalizing the truth that male nurses exist, and will promote nursing as a profession that anyone can aspire to pursue, regardless of their gender.

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**Q: Explain what it's been like going through UNH's nursing program, including your experience working in clinical environments during the COVID pandemic.**

Reflecting back on my progression through the nursing program, it's pretty crazy to see how much I have grown since the start. Thinking back to my first day of clinical, I was scared to do things as basic as taking a temperature, and even just walking into a patient's room. I remember questioning if I would ever feel ready to be an independent nurse. But as my first clinical day quickly turned into my 25th and then somehow my 50th, I gained the confidence that I once lacked. Now, just a few months away from becoming a nurse, I feel ready to independently care for patients.

Going through nursing school during a global pandemic is something that has really been instrumental in teaching me the invaluable skills of flexibility and adaptability. When COVID first hit, our regular classes went online and so did our in-person clinical

experiences. When we returned to campus, many of us were recruited to assist with COVID testing and when a vaccine became available, we stepped up to help at vaccine clinics at UNH and throughout the state.

Our in-person clinical placements resumed at hospitals where COVID cases were plentiful and healthcare staffing was short. As policies changed daily, we learned quickly to adjust and accept that uncertainty was a part of the new normal. Although frustrating in the moment, I have learned to be more flexible, understanding, and empathetic as a result. For me, experiencing first-hand the nursing shortages that healthcare facilities are experiencing is more motivation to get into the workforce to help address the issue, rather than run away from the profession. While it is difficult to see the vast number of nurses who have experienced burnout from the effects of the pandemic, our healthcare system is counting on the eager, next generation of nurses to fill this immense staffing shortage. To pursue a career in nursing is to make a commitment to helping those in need and rising to the occasion. It is important to remember that now more than ever as I approach graduation and prepare to join the workforce.

**Q: As a current nursing student, you've had the opportunity to learn and practice in UNH's new Health Sciences Simulation Center. What has that been like?**

The Health Science Simulation Center truly is a remarkable facility. The new technology, equipment and space collectively provide us with an environment that fosters growth and development through hands-on practice in low stress situations. From informal skills labs to our formal simulations, we actively participate in scenarios that are preparing us to safely care for patients in our clinical rotations, and as registered nurses following graduation. And with more specialty-specific equipment, we are gaining exposure to the care of a diverse range of patient populations, further strengthening our skills and contributions in our pediatric, maternity and critical care placements. In our critical care course we were able to practice using the new high-tech mannequin that has the ability to simulate a cardiac arrest and can be "shocked" using a real defibrillator. Students in maternity were able to benefit from the lifelike wireless newborn and mother that can simulate a natural birth. For prospective nursing students, this center should really be considered as just one of the many great aspects of the UNH nursing program that will best prepare them for their future nursing careers.



*Carbone in one of the skills labs in the new Health Sciences Simulation Center*

In addition, UNH is unique in the sense that we begin in-person clinical experiences our first semester of sophomore year, which is a semester earlier than most other programs. This is instrumental to gaining confidence in patient interactions and care. Although it might be a little intimidating at first, it provides us the early and indispensable opportunity to get hands-on practice with real patients. Throughout my three years of clinical experience, UNH has provided me with opportunities to see ICU nursing, step down ICU nursing, psychiatric nursing, labor and delivery nursing, home care and hospice nursing, school nursing, pediatric focused nursing, geriatric nursing, nursing in the operating room, and so much more. The environments I have worked in range from nursing homes, to hospitals, to schools, and even the home setting. The nursing faculty are a supportive and encouraging group who work tirelessly to ensure we are on track to pass our NCLEX exam and independently care for patients following graduation. While they set high expectations for us, they also provide us with the necessary materials and assistance to help us meet those expectations and best prepare us for the nursing workforce. Now that I am nearing the end of the program, I cannot imagine having completed nursing school anywhere else.

**Q: Do you have any advice for students interested in nursing?**

I would first, highly suggest volunteering or completing some sort of shadow experience in a hospital or healthcare setting to see if it is something that is truly your calling. As a high school student, I was able to shadow in a hospital setting which gave me the opportunity to see if the medical field was something for me. For some people, even one day spent shadowing in a medical setting is enough to push them away from

perusing a career in the medical field. However, the beauty of a job in healthcare, and specifically in nursing, is that there are truly so many different paths to take and environments to work in. If you decide to pursue nursing, consider looking for a summer job as a medical assistant or nursing aid. The more time and experience you get interacting with patients and practicing the fundamental skills of care and safety, the more comfortable you will feel and the more prepared you will be to positively contribute to the care of patients in your clinical experiences.

- WRITTEN BY:

[Callie Carr](#) | UNH College of Health and Human Services | [callie.carr@unh.edu](mailto:callie.carr@unh.edu) | 603-862-0970

PHOTOGRAPHER:

[Jeremy Gasowski](#) | Communications and Public Affairs | [jeremy.gasowski@unh.edu](mailto:jeremy.gasowski@unh.edu) | 603-862-4465

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