

Passion on and off the Gridiron

UNH football player opts for career in helping

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Jeff Carter '19 is going to be a nurse. The fact that he's a 6-foot-3, 275-pound offensive lineman on the UNH football team just makes his story more interesting. And yet, why wouldn't a 6-foot-3, 275-pound man become a nurse, especially with the role model he's had?

"My mother is an LPN (licenced practical nurse), and she's the best person in the world, so why wouldn't I want to do what she does?" Carter says, adding that his love of helping people, and of science, moved him to "one-up her" and go for a bachelor's

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degree in [nursing](#).

Carter also has a love of football. It started in seventh grade in his hometown of Jericho, Vermont. His father, a youth minister, asked him if he wanted to give the sport a go, and Carter said sure.

Turns out he was pretty good; in 2014 he was Mount Mansfield Union High School's defensive player of the year and lineman of the year.

But listen to him talk about nursing and it's clear that his passion rises above the gridiron. This semester he started his first clinical, working once a week at the Edgewood Centre, a Portsmouth, New Hampshire, nursing home that also provides short-term care and rehabilitative services.

"Everyone has a little light in them," Carter says. "They're holding on to something here, something special. I get to be part of seeing that, and that's been awesome."

The desire to have close connections with patients, and the stories he's heard his mother tell, led Carter to choose nursing instead of considering medical school. "I want to have the kinds of interactions she's talked about," he says. "I've experienced a little bit of that already, and that's what I want to do, have that direct contact."

Carter knew he wanted to be a nurse when he was in high school, and took a few related classes — anatomy and physiology, human growth and development, medical terminology — that provided an introduction to the field while earning him college credit.

"Those courses taught me how to study," Carter says.

Between his studies and clinical work and football practice and games, Carter

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has little free time. Because of his crammed schedule, he has to miss practice one day a week. At first he wondered how his teammates would feel about that but soon learned it wouldn't be an issue.

"They've taken it really well. No one resents that I'm not there," Carter says.

The red-shirted sophomore is not alone in choosing nursing as his major. According to the U.S. Census, the number of registered nurses who are male has more than tripled since 1970, from 2.7 percent to 9.6 percent, and continues to increase. What those statistics don't reflect is the philosophical change: Nursing is no longer viewed as a career only for females.

In fact, though few, men have served as nurses in America since the 16th century. During the Civil War, the poet Walt Whitman volunteered as a nurse after his brother was wounded, later writing about the experience in "The Wound-Dresser."

Right now Carter isn't sure what kind of nursing he will do when he finishes his schooling, although he says pediatrics has a special appeal to him; on Sundays he volunteers in the nursery at the church where his father works.

"That's the highlight of my week," Carter says, adding, "I'm a pretty simple guy; blue jeans and a T-shirt, that's my life. And I'm OK with that. I think there is something to being ordinary that people don't realize."



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