

Sacrificing for Others during the Pandemic*

A Nurse Tells her Story

Bethie Jean Merci

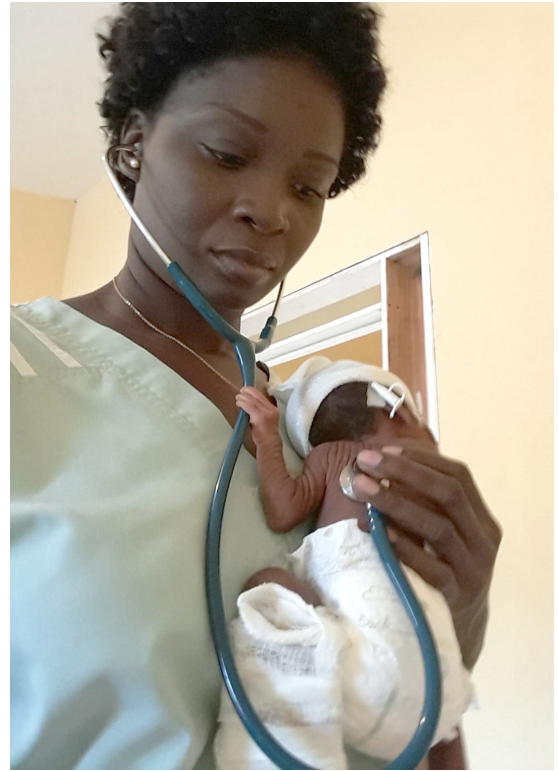
BEFORE YOU READ: Think about the words *pre-mature* and *malnutrition*. What do the roots and the prefixes mean? Have you heard of Plumpy’Nut? If not, look it up.

I am from Haiti. In my county, I was a nurse. Before the pandemic, I worked in a clinic where we treated cases of *malnutrition* and cared for *premature* babies. The children we treated were in critical condition. A family can have 12 children, the majority of whom are malnourished. In the nutritional program, we gave milk, rice, and Plumpy’Nut, depending on the age and the level of malnutrition. We also gave medical care to the children.

When the Covid-19 pandemic came to Haiti, the head of the clinic sent a message to the staff.



These are some of the little babies I cared for who were premature and malnourished.



I am listening to the baby’s lungs. She was premature and her lungs were not fully developed yet.

“Sorry to announce that because of the Covid-19, you cannot wear your own clothes. Therefore, we will be deducting 15% of your pay to buy new nursing clothes for the staff.”

The message continued: “Unfortunately, some of our funders have died. We have to find other funders. We don’t know when you can have your pay. If you want to stay with us, it is okay, but if you want to leave, no problem.”

All of us on the staff remained because it was hard to find a job, and the community really needed us at the clinic. I remember once when the entire staff went on vacation, we had to close the clinic for two weeks. Several children in the nutritional program died during that time. Remembering this, we decided to stay.

However, it was difficult for the staff and families because we had to deal with drug and food shortages. In addition, the number of children increased because other clinics and hospitals

* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 4-5) and beginner (p. 6).



In this picture, I am taking the baby's temperature because he was sick.

closed due to the pandemic. The majority of the children were in critical condition. I could not leave them with their parents.

Our schedules changed as well. We often worked 24-hour shifts. We were all exhausted. When I had to eat, I asked another nurse to watch my patients. Sometimes, it was difficult to take a break. The emergencies came at any time, and I could not delay the treatment, especially for those who needed oxygen. Sometimes, I took a nap on a chair in the room, other times, it was not possible. When I got home after a long shift, the only thing I could do was sleep. I did not have enough energy to take a shower or to eat.

Nevertheless, I loved my job. The well-being of the children was my priority. However, due to the long hours spent in the clinic, I had to find someone to help me with my two school-age children, who were in remote school because of the pandemic. Fortunately, I found a wonderful adolescent who needed help. I opened our home

to her. I taught her how to cook, to take care of the children and the house. When I had to come to the U.S., she was the trusted person, who stayed behind to care for my family.

This has been a difficult time, but we were able to continue helping these children at the clinic. We did it! The clinic is still open and helping children to this day.

Bethie Jean Merci is from Haiti where she worked as a nurse with Doctors Without Borders. She is a student at the Center for New Americans in Northampton, MA. She came to the United States in the middle of the pandemic, and she plans to continue her studies to become a registered nurse in the U.S.



AFTER YOU READ:

1. What are some of the ways the author made sacrifices during the pandemic? Be specific.
2. Who helped her so that she could help others?
3. Read more articles about nursing and explore career pathways in healthcare. See the box below.

Explore a Career in Nursing

We put these materials into **one packet** to help you explore a career in nursing.

- Sidonie Gbazale, a student from Rhode Island, describes how she got her nursing degree in the U.S.: "From Impossible Journey to Successful Career."
- Hoai Do, a student in Arkansas, worked as a nurse in her home country: "My Beautiful White Blouse."

Plus: sample career pathways in the field of health care.

Find more career exploration activities under "Extras" for **Issue #53**.

Sacrificing during the Pandemic*

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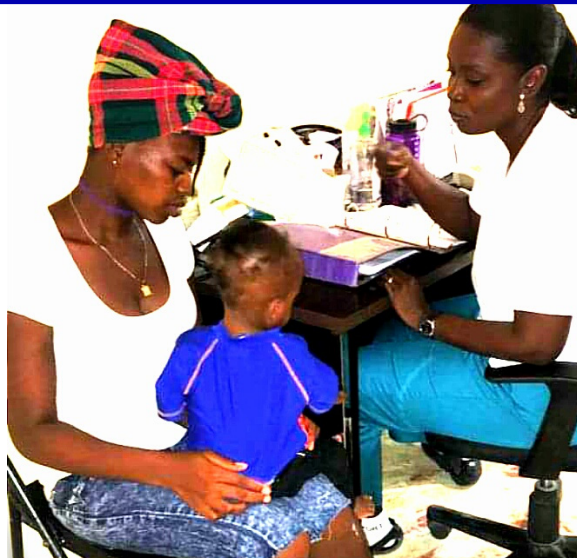
I am from Haiti. In my home country, I was a nurse. I took care of babies and children. Some of them were very sick.

2



Their families were poor. They did not have enough food to eat. We gave them food and took care of them.

3



When Covid came, we worked many hours each day. We did not get paid. We could not leave the children. They needed us.

4



I had to find someone to take care of my children. Now I live in the U.S. I study English. I would like to become a nurse here.

* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 4-5) and beginner (p. 6).

From Impossible Journey to Successful Career

It takes a village.

Sidonie Gbazale

A Dream Resurfaces

As a child growing up in the Ivory Coast, my dream was to be a midwife. However, for financial reasons, I had to drop out of school. I thought I would not be able to pursue my dream. When I immigrated to the U.S., I did not expect miracles because I did not speak English. Still, I enrolled in ESL classes in Providence, Rhode Island, to begin my new journey.

Once I started feeling more confident in English, my dream of becoming a midwife resurfaced. My teachers encouraged me to get a high

school diploma through the National External Diploma Program (NEDP), which I accomplished in just three months. With a high school credential in hand, I had more employment options. I enrolled in a skills training program, became a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), and I moved on to a better job.



"Midwife" comes from the old English "mid" (with) and "wife" (woman). Source: <weknownyourdreamz.com>

Career Steps

What steps has Sidonie taken so far to realize her dream? List them here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What steps do you think she will need to take to reach her ultimate dream? (Hint: see the career pathway on p. 7.)

1. _____
2. _____

Getting Support to Go to College

The next step in my journey was to find a way to enroll in college to study nursing. It was then that I met the Transition to College (TTC) team at Rhode Island Regional Adult Learning (RIRAL). TTC played a significant role in my education. Through this program, I worked closely with teachers who encouraged me to excel in subjects where I had previously struggled. Moreover, they provided the guidance necessary for me to enroll in the Community College of Rhode Island Nursing Program. The TTC team was with me every step of the way – checking to make sure I took the right courses and getting help when I needed it. Believe me, navigating the sea known as the U.S. higher education system would have been much rougher if I had not received support from TTC.

After years of working hard and receiving the guidance to pursue my education, working as

Believe me, navigating the sea known as the U.S. higher education system would have been much rougher if I had not received support.

a CNA, and raising a family, I finally passed the nursing entrance exam and am proud to have “RN” at the end of my name. I faced many hurdles along my way, which I believe contributed to making me the strong woman that I am today. Not being a native English speaker was one of the biggest barriers I faced. In addition, being a mother of five who also needed to work full time meant that I could not always study as much as I needed to. Thankfully, I was able to overcome all those hurdles to becoming a nurse.

Despite the many challenges, I learned to adjust by working harder than I ever had in my entire life. Over time, I excelled in my courses and even started helping other struggling nursing students. After years of hard work, sacrifice, and countless challenges, I graduated as one of the top students in the nursing program and landed a job as a nurse in a local nursing home shortly after graduation. Moving from an entry level job, to a better job, to a great career in nursing took time, a village, and a strong commitment for a better life.

Still Working on My Dream

Regarding my dream of becoming a midwife, I am still working toward it. Unfortunately, for now, due to the various financial responsibilities that I have, I am going to be working to support my family. But hopefully in the near future I will be in a better financial situation, and I will return to school.

Sidonie Gbazale is from the Ivory Coast in West Africa. In 2010, she graduated from RIRAL's Transition to College program and went on to complete her degree in nursing at the Community College of Rhode Island.



Healthcare Occupations with the Most Projected Job Openings in the U.S. 2010-2020

	Job growth number (in 1000s)	Job growth percent increase	Job openings due to growth & replacements (in thousands)
Registered Nurse	711.9	26.0	1,207.4
Home Health Aides	706.3	69.4	837.5
CNAs and Orderlies	302.0	20.1	496.1
LPNs and LVNs	158.5	22.1	369.2
Physicians	158.3	24.4	305.1
Medical Assistants	152.9	30.9	243.8
Pharmacy Techs	108.3	32.4	166.3
Dental Assistants	91.6	30.8	154.0
Pharmacists	59.7	25.4	139.6
EMTs and Paramedics	75.4	33.3	120.8

Make several true statements about the information in the chart. Explain how RNs could have higher job growth in numbers than Home Health Aides but a lower percent increase. **Source:** Bureau of Labor Statistics

Look at Language

Read the pull quote. Find three words that Sidonie uses to create a metaphor that describes her experience going to college. Write a new version of the sentence using a different metaphor.

What does she mean when she says it required a “village” to help her become a nurse? Who was in her “village”?

Who is in your village? Write about what supports you have and some specific ways they support you. What supports could you add to your network?

Look at the career pathway on p. 7. What steps should you take if you want to become a nurse?

My Beautiful White Blouse

Hoai Do

When I was a child, I went to the hospital with my mother one day to visit my aunt. After seeing a nurse in a beautiful white blouse, I told my mother, "I want to become a nurse when I grow up." When my mother asked for an explanation, I told her, "Because they look like little angels."

I grew up in a poor family in a poor country. We worked very hard and still were not able to make enough money to buy food. My career goal

seemed like nothing more than a dream. Fortunately, my uncle's doctor gave me a scholarship so that I could study.

Those days were difficult... But I still felt happy because of my white blouse.

I went to a medical secondary school, and it was there that I had the most beautiful days of my childhood. Every morning we were awakened by loud music in the gymnasium before we went to the lecture hall or to train in the hospital. I still remember how happy I felt the first time I tried on my white blouse! But those days were also difficult. We were only given two meals a day consisting of white rice, a little bit of soup, and some vegetables. But I still felt happy because of my white blouse.



Making your dreams come true isn't easy. After graduation, I worked for six months without getting paid. I woke up every day at 5:00 a.m., made food for my family, and rode my old bicycle six miles to the hospital. The workday began at 7:00 a.m. and ended at 5:00 p.m. I worked at that hospital for 20 years until my family decided to move to the United States.

Now, I work at a nail salon and go to school to learn English.

Now, I work at a nail salon and go to school to learn English. When my English improves, I hope to go back to nursing. I know that it won't be easy. Although I have a lot of knowledge from my experience working in nursing, I still need to improve my communication skills and learn vocabulary. However, I have learned that you are never too old to learn. I believe that my hard work and interest in English and nursing will help me to succeed.

Hoai Do studies ESL at the Adult Education Center in Fort Smith, AR. A 49-year-old mother of four, Hoai became a U.S. citizen in 2016 after living in the U.S. for five years.

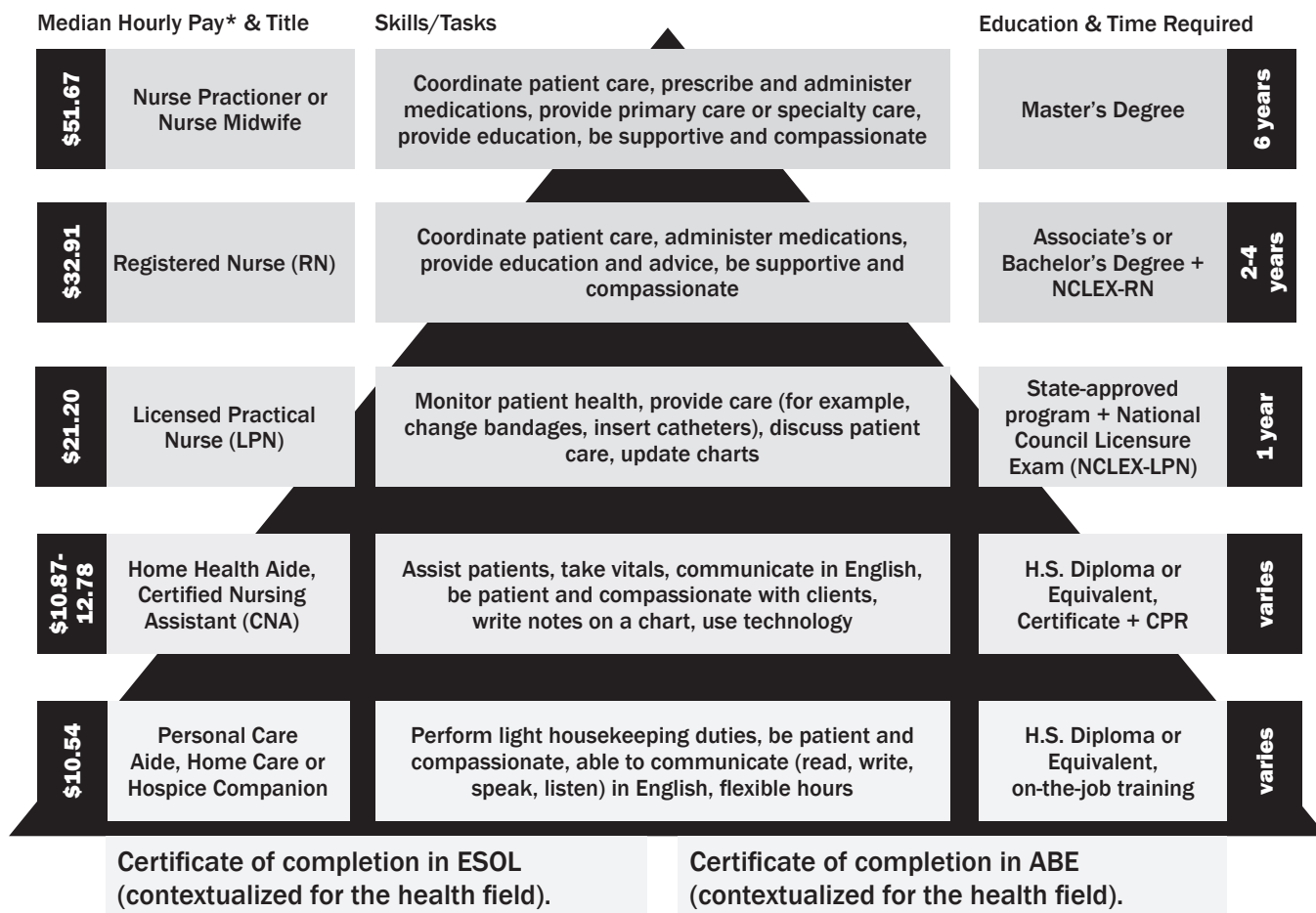
Take It Further

What is the sequence of events that led to Hoai Do becoming a nurse?

Read the article on pp. 4-5. How are their stories similar and how are they different?

What is your dream? Do you have a memory from childhood that inspired your dream? Write about it.

Nursing Career Pathway



* According to www.bls.gov. Sources: Melissa Sadler-Nitu, Alamo Colleges IBest Program; <centraliowaworks.org>; <www.onetonline.org>

Pyramid vs. Lattice

For another model, see the Career Lattice Pathway on p. 8. How would you describe the difference in these models? Which model would be more useful to you? Why? Make your own career pathway graphic.

Discuss the meaning of “median” vs. “mean.”

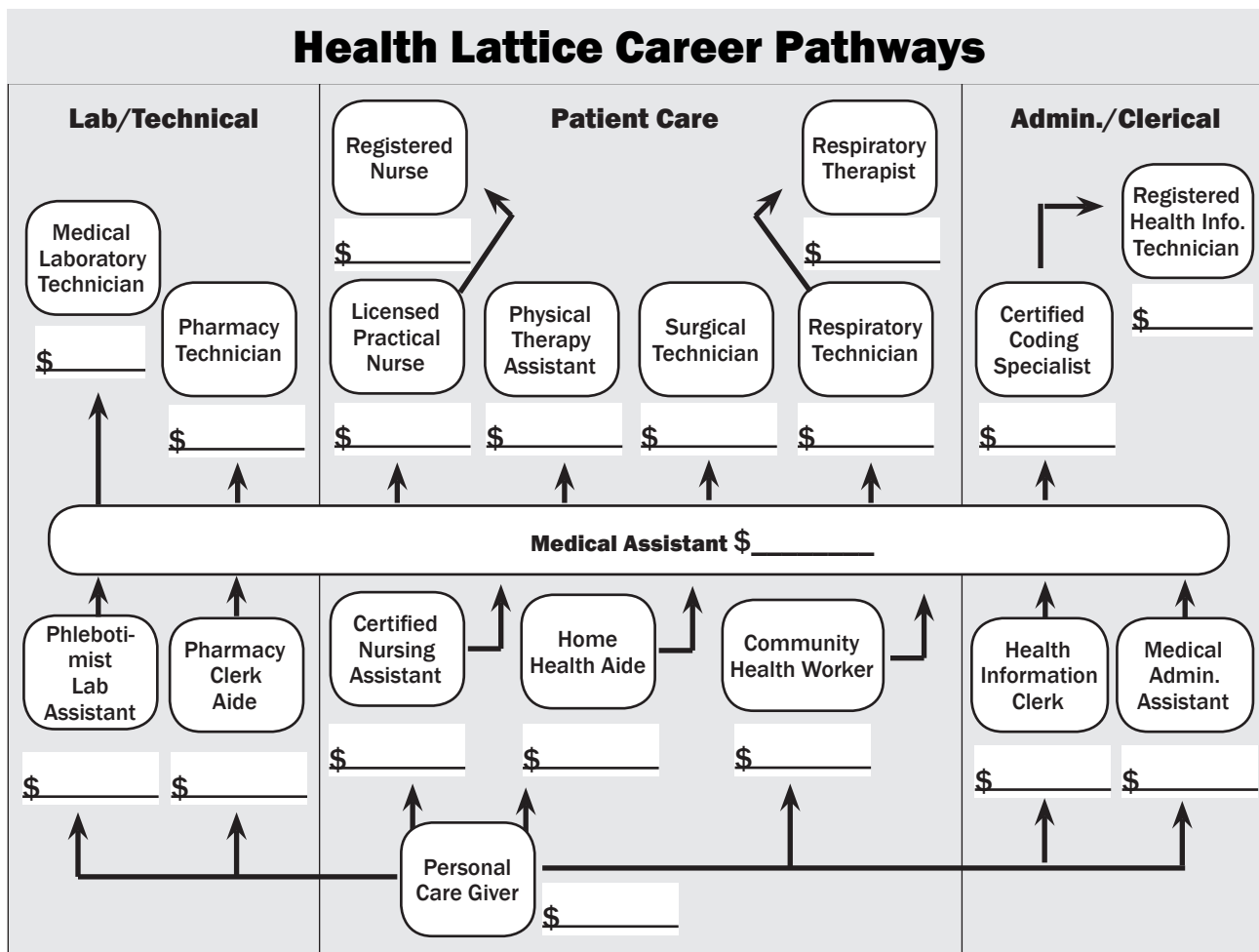
NOTE: “Vs.” is short for “versus.” It means “against or in opposition to.” You can use it to describe sports teams: *Tonight's game is the Red Sox versus the Yankees.* Or to describe two options: *When I consider the bus versus the train, I pick the train!* In legal cases, use the abbreviation “v.,” as in: *“Brown v. Board of Education” was a Supreme Court decision that struck down segregation.*

Explore “Lattice” Pathways

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a lattice? How is a lattice different from a pyramid? Look at the pyramid-shaped Nursing Career Pathway on p. 7. Which approach—the pyramid or the lattice—is most helpful to you?



Photo by Flying Stag via Wikimedia Commons



STUDY THE CHART: According to this chart: 1) What are the three main areas of work in the health field? 2) What jobs does training as a Medical Assistant help prepare you for?

RESEARCH: Pick a pathway and research on <bls.gov> the median hourly pay for each job along the path. Write the dollar amount in the space provided. Share what you find with others, and see if you can fill in the whole chart. Find a medical assistant training program near you. How much would it cost? How long would it take? **Source:** Adapted from <blog.bamasf.com>