

# Parallel Universe: Why I Moved From Nursing to Law

BY TIM GEARIN

Law was my first love, but not my first career.

As a child, I always thought of law as an honorable profession. Lucky for me, it's proven to be so.

But before I was an attorney, I spent over a decade as a registered nurse and learned some invaluable lessons that have impacted my practice and help make the case for nurses today who are considering careers in the legal field.

In the past decade or so, a number of large enterprises across industries have moved their operations out of the state, but one thing that remains is health care. Nursing was, and still is, a wonderful springboard for a number of careers.

Nursing lends well to other advanced degrees and gives you so many opportunities to learn about life. But the natural ties to the legal field are undeniable. There are so many opportunities from transactional law for health care systems to medical malpractice to intellectual property for medical products and devices and so on.

I know other attorneys who were once entrepreneurs, journalists, and even engineers at NASA. Each of those experiences has rewarded them in their legal careers. My background as a nurse

has given me more in my career than I could have ever imagined.

As a nurse, I truly enjoyed working with people. I wanted to help them, and every day on the job was different. This required me to practice patience, but also to be prepared for anything.

At the drop of a hat, my "plan" for the day could change. And in the legal field, I could receive an urgent client call at any time of day and need to jump into action.

Working primarily in the intensive care unit, usually with very sick patients, made me grow up. After holding the hands of dying patients, you gain perspective and whether it's comforting or traumatic, it's extremely powerful.

After about 10 years in nursing, I had a patient who I'll never forget saying, "You're spinning your wheels. What do you want to do with your life?" I said to myself, "I want to be a lawyer."

I was already at a bit of a crossroads trying to decide whether I should become a nurse anesthetist or go to law school. I spoke with him about my interest in law but said I didn't have enough money and wasn't smart enough.

In that moment, he encouraged me to



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follow my gut and I went home that evening and told my wife I wanted to go to law school.

Years later, I took care of a prominent lawyer in the intensive care unit. We became friends and he later hired me as a law clerk, and then as an associate at his firm.

During law school, I maintained my job as a nurse,

working 24 hours every Saturday and Sunday, and dedicating the weekdays to my classes. Keeping those unusual hours certainly gave me a taste of what life would be like as a busy, young associate.

But it also helped me see more value in the time I did have with my wife and children, and taught me balance in my professional and personal life.

Even after being hired on as an associate, I worked as a nurse every Saturday for almost two years and while it took a lot of sacrifice, I had a very supportive group of family and friends.

I never got burned out or dissatisfied being a nurse. In fact, I maintain my license to this day. My office shelves are still lined with anatomical models.

In some ways, it feels like I never really left the field. I didn't go into law with the idea of defending doctors or hospitals, or cases dealing with bodily

injury, but it was a natural flow. I've been in their shoes and it became an extension of my existing knowledge.

Another parallel is that I have the opportunity to be a counselor.

As a nurse you're counseling patients and, on bad days, the families of patients that didn't make it. And as an attorney, I could be working with a doctor or nurse going through the worst situation in their life, and I'm there to help and make them feel comfortable. It's not an area of law where you win a case and high five each other.

What's most rewarding is the relationships I've built over the years with opposing counsel, with clients and with patients.

Being an attorney comes with battle scars, and when you can heal those wounds and enjoy a conversation with someone unexpected, you know it's all worth it.

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