

Nurse to Know: Terra Thibault

What is your present role? (What do you do in that role?)

I currently work as an RN at the Nova Scotia Cancer Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I am a primary nurse for a radiation oncologist and I recently finished my first term as a clinical instructor at Dalhousie University.

What drew you into nursing? (What influenced you to become a nurse?)

I guess I took the scenic route to get to nursing. I first started university doing kinesiology. After a year of that I changed my mind and went into architecture. As much as I love and appreciate architecture, I soon realized that I needed to be in health care in some sort of capacity. I went back and did a degree in neuroscience and, after much deliberation (I was torn between the idea of medicine or nursing), I decided that nursing was where I should be.

What drew you into oncology nursing? (What influenced you to become an oncology nurse?)

I remember leaving nursing school thinking I wanted to be a street nurse. I was told that in order to do that I would have to do some time in the hospital to become proficient in my nursing skills. I had done an independent study in oncology with a professor at Dalhousie, Brenda Sabo, and she really inspired and motivated me to do oncology nursing. I started in hematology and, after a month of being there, I knew I had found my passion and there was no turning back.

How would you characterize or describe the driving forces for you regarding your practice as a nurse?

I think the patients are the driving force behind my practice. I am

passionate about patient-centred care and about empowering patients with the education to take an active role in their cancer journey. I guess you could say I'm a bit of a "tough love" nurse in that I work with patients to make sure they understand the importance of taking care of themselves (even when it is hard to do) to help minimize symptoms during treatment.

What do you find most exciting about being a nurse?

I love that I have the privilege to know and be a part of a person's story. I am constantly meeting people that shock, surprise, and exceed all my expectations every single day. I meet fighters, people who are passionate about living and wanting to live. I think this, in turn, makes me a better person, because I can no longer take any day for granted. You see how fast things can change for a person and all of a sudden you start to realize how precious your life really is. I love my work and I love that I wake up each day excited to do this work.

What have you seen as the biggest changes for nurses over the years of your career?

Well, I am only five years out of university, but the biggest change for me has been the introduction of electronic medical records in the radiation area. Everything is not electronic yet, but it is slowly starting, and it is going to be amazing. I know there are barriers, too. But the Pollyanna mentality in me is screaming from the rooftops! I love the idea of everything being in one place and the idea of nurses having more time to do real nursing work rather than to recopy medical charts and prepare charts. I just think it will be fantastic.



What do you see are the biggest challenges for oncology nursing/nurses today?

I think time is, and always will be an issue for nurses. Hopefully, with the addition of tools like the electronic medical record, some of these issues may change. I say change, not resolve, because no one will ever have enough time in a day.

What is your greatest hope for the future of oncology nursing?

I hope nurses are able to work in places with enough support to allow oncology nurses to work to their full scope of practice and potential.

What is the best advice you would give to an individual who is considering becoming a nurse/an oncology nurse?

I would say to explore your opportunities. Take the time to shadow an oncology nurse on the floor and in the clinic. It is important to determine whether it is the right fit for you. Oncology nursing is an amazing field, but that does not mean it does not come without challenges. It can be a very emotional job. Nevertheless, for me, it has been one of the best decisions I have ever made. Good luck!