

Editorial

ONLINE LEARNING

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Learning online is all the rage today and with good reason. It provides a level of access and convenience that is not possible with traditional forms of education. This is especially true for rural nurses who may be miles away from academic centers and wish to pursue a degree. It also may be a convenient source of continuing education and staff development for working nurses who need an update on information in their area of practice.

As an educator who provides a graduate program on line, I am often surprised at how nurses who are usually very cautious about products and services are not always cautious when it comes to their own education. I have students who attempt to transfer in credit from institutions that are not properly accredited and they are totally unaware that they probably will not be able to use that transfer credit towards their degree.

If you are considering an online degree, there are certain questions you should ask to make sure that this is the best choice for you. First and foremost, make sure the nursing program is properly accredited by the Commission of Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) or the National League for Nursing (NLN). Do not attend programs that do not have one of these accreditations.

Other issues you should examine before enrolling in online nursing programs is to:

1. Ask about the support services for online students. How will you access the library, student services, and financial aid and how will you purchase books? You will need to use these services and the program should have these available to you.
2. Who are the faculty and what are their credentials? Are they doctorally prepared? Are they faculty employed by the academic program or are they contracted from outside the institution? Faculty for online programs should be as well credentialed as faculty that teach in more traditional settings.
3. Will you have an advisor and good access to your instructors? You want to be able to ask questions if you do not understand material or contact the instructor if you have a crisis and can't complete an assignment.
4. Make sure that your computer and equipment is up-to-date and compatible with programs and software the program may utilize. They should be able to provide you with requirements before you enroll.
5. What kind of financial aide or scholarships are available to you?

Online learning is a great approach for nurses who live and work in rural areas. Shop around and find accredited and quality programs. Be wary of programs that are not properly accredited and faculty not that are not suitably credentialed. Always make sure that you will be able to get the support and services you need to be a success with your program.