

# TALK OF THE TOWNE

Spring edition

Choose  
the right  
**CAREER**

Proud to be a CNA



Tips for  
keeping your  
scrubs clean

Keep your  
feet happy

Striding right

*Interview with Terri  
Ann Edwards, LPN*





## Proud to be a CNA

**W**hen I was a little girl, I wanted to be a ballerina, except for when I wanted to be a firefighter. But the thing I liked doing the most was helping my grandmother. Gran used to bake the most incredible pies, and she let me help. In the beginning, I got to pinch the edges of the pie crust so that the pie would have that bumpy look. When I got older, she would tell me to peel the apples for her apple pie and chop peaches into cubes for her peach pie. And then when SHE got older, she would sit on her rocker in the kitchen – my dad moved it for her – and she'd tell me what to do, how to roll out the crust, when to dust the crust with cinnamon, when it was time to take it out of the oven.

I have the strongest memories from those days when she'd teach me. Maybe that's because I was older then, but really, I think it's because I got to help her in so many other ways. She had a really hard time walking by the time I was a teenager, so I would help her move from the living room to the kitchen, and even into her bedroom to help her get ready for bed. She had a full head of long grey hair that she mostly wore up in a bun, so it was really special for me to help her take it down and brush out her hair for her.

I was about 17 when she died. It was awful. I mean, she went peacefully, but I felt like I had lost my best friend... even though I'd never talked to her the same way I talk to my girlfriends. But she was always there for me, you know? And I loved that I got to be there for her too, when she wasn't so strong anymore, when her hands hurt her from arthritis, when she lost her mobility and independence, when her sight betrayed her.

We had this career counseling thing in high school. There was a guidance counselor who was in charge of helping us figure out what we were REALLY going to do when we grew up, since being a ballerina wasn't very realistic considering I quit lessons at age nine. He asked me what I like doing, what made me feel good about the way I spent my time, and I kept thinking of Gran, and how I always left her house content and feeling accomplished. I always felt like I'd been "spending my time wisely," instead of just sitting around with my friends or watching TV or going to the mall.

I didn't even know there was such a thing as a CNA – a Certified Nursing Assistant – until he told me about the program that I ended up attending.

I'll be honest – I never thought of going to law school or medical school. Even all those therapies – speech therapy, physical therapy – they seemed like an awful long time in school. But, then again, I really wanted to be helping people, and I didn't want to teach. When I understood what my career counselor was talking about, it really sounded right up my alley. And, you know what? He was right.

It was amazing. Being a CNA is exactly the right job for me – it feels like the whole profession was designed for me – as if somebody had been watching me with Gran and figured out a way I could make a living from it. Maybe my gran is looking out for me – I hope so, anyway.

I've met some amazing people in my job. There's the vet from World War II – he fought the Nazis, and came home and raised his family... and now he has kidney failure, and likes it when I read to him. There's a whole group of ladies who have a daily competition over their blood pressure stats. I assume they don't really want their pressure to go up, but they do whoop it up over the person who gets the highest numbers. Even the other staff- we all wanted to be helping people, or we wouldn't be here. We're part of people's lives in a real way. It's a time when a lot of the residents' friends have already passed on, and their children are busy, and even their grandchildren are beginning their families. So we become the friends and family. I really wouldn't have it any other way.

As a Certified Nursing Assistant, I am lucky enough to help residents of the residential facility where I work with all the things that improve their quality of life. You know, getting out of bed in the morning, putting on makeup or helping a man shave. I empower them to keep their pride and dignity, even when their bodies betray them. We CNAs take temperatures and pulses, and we make sure that the nurses (and sometimes doctors) know what's going on with the residents. It's an important role in the whole big picture of making sure our residents are healthy and happy. The best part is that we get to know them well – we're the ones who make them laugh, and there's no way to explain in words how that's the best thing in the world. When I was little and helping my gran, I'd be pleased as punch when she'd smile at me, and I'd get her to laugh. Now, I'm proud to say I'm improving the quality of life for the people I see every day. There is no better job!





# Striding Right

**The nursing field requires you to be on your feet for most of the day. When you have a job that demand lots of standing and walking, you need shoes that will support your feet as well as possible.**

**When we surveyed our nursing assistants, we discovered that 32% wear sneakers, 20.5% prefer Sketchers, 23.5% like Crocs and 11.5% wear Uggs. Another 12.5% wear other types of shoes. That means a lot of nursing assistants are not wearing special nurses' shoes.**

## *Do you need nurses' shoes?*

Nurses' shoes are made out of light material, so they put less pressure on your feet when you walk. They are made of spill-proof material so they are easy to clean off. They have grips on the soles so you can walk more easily on slippery surfaces.



And they're usually slip-ons, making them easy to put on and take off.

On the other hand, sometimes sneakers are a better choice. They have the advantage of being able to be worn in your everyday life, so you don't look strange wearing them in public. They are made to sustain lots of walking and running and will be comfortable for hours at a time.

Crocs are both comfortable and easy to clean, but they don't protect you if a sharp object falls on your foot. In some places, Crocs have been banned for nurses because of this problem. Crocs do make a special nursing shoe which has no holes and grips on the sole.

Uggs support your feet but can be hot and will get dirty quickly from the various spills.

Some facilities have rules about what the nurses and nursing assistants can wear on their feet, so check what the regulations are when you start a new job.

## *How do you buy a good pair of shoes?*

Go shopping for shoes at the end of the day, when your feet are the most swollen. If the shoes feel good at that time of the day, they are a good fit. Measure your feet even if you think you know your size, since even in adulthood your size can change slightly. Walk around a bit and make sure the shoes fit you right. Don't let salespeople convince you that they will fit better once you "break them in." Often, what hurts at the end of the day is your arch. If you have a particularly high or low arch, look for shoes that are made for your arch height and length.

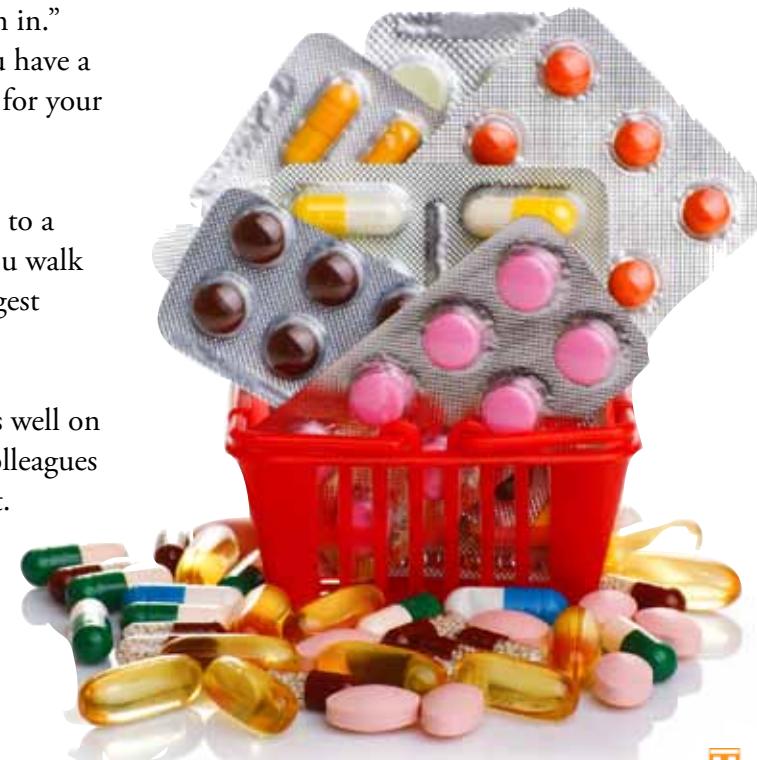
If you're buying sneakers, we've got a great insiders tip. Go to a store which caters to runners and have them check how you walk and suggest sneakers that will stay comfortable for the longest amount of time.

Remember that since everyone's feet are different, what fits well on your friend may not be the right shoe for you. Ask your colleagues for recommendations, but just use them as a starting point. And if the first pair of shoes doesn't feel so good after you've worn them for a few days, it might be that you need to try something else. You might need to experiment a bit before you find the best nursing shoes for you.



## *Plan your shift in advance*

It's tempting to start helping residents as soon as you arrive for your shift, but a few minutes to get organized before you begin will make the entire shift easier. Make a list of what needs to be done and in what order so you can work efficiently. And gather all your supplies ahead of time so you aren't tiring yourself out by running back and forth to get things.



# Q & A

## Nurses answer your questions

On a busy day at a nursing facility, you may not have a chance to sit down and talk to other staff members about your jobs. You may be wondering: What do nurses have to say about the CNAs they work with? How do they see the role of the CNA? What do they enjoy and what do they wish was different? We sat down with three nurses to get the low down straight from the horse's mouth.



**Latisha** has been in the nursing field for 15 years. She started out as a CNA, became an LPN a few years later and has been an RN for the past five years. She is a single mother of two teenagers and a big fan of coffee – lots of it!



**Aliyah** became a certified RN just last June. Congratulations, Aliyah! She was a stay at home mom while her kids were small and entered the nursing field later than most. She and her husband are raising three children, a dog and a goldfish.



**Jasmine** is a grandmother with years of experience in the nursing field. She worked as a home health aide in the first few years of her career, then as an LPN in a nursing facility and has been an RN in the same facility for the past 17 years.

**Q** **What's the most important task that CNAs perform?**

**A** **Latisha:** I think the most crucial thing that CNAs do is report to the RN whenever something seems a bit off. They spend a lot of time with the patients and they notice small changes we don't always see. Since those changes can be important, we always check out the source.

**Aliyah:** To me, the most meaningful thing CNAs do is give the patients dignity. They deal with the most basic bodily functions but when they are matter of fact about it and do their job with a smile, patients can feel that they still have respect.

**Jasmine:** Everything CNAs do is important! I couldn't do my job as a nurse without their help. There are some CNAs who are so dedicated to their patients that they are just a pleasure to work with. I always request to be on shift with them.

**Q** **What would you like to change about the nurse-CNA relationship?**

**A** **Jasmine:** I wish CNAs and nurses talked to each other more. When I was a CNA, I remember that we talked among ourselves about issues that came up with the nurses but we never mentioned it to them. Now that I'm an RN I see that the nurses also complain to each other but don't bring up problems to the CNAs.

**Latisha:** There isn't always respect between the groups and I would like to see that change. We're all on the same side – helping the residents – so we should work together as a team.

**Aliyah:** Since I was never a CNA, I'd like CNAs to tell me more about their day to day challenges. It's easy to forget how hard the CNAs work and how much we need to appreciate them.

**Q** **What's your best advice for CNAs?**

**A** **Latisha:** Residents can be very particular about small things. To get along well with

them, pay attention to the small details and be careful to stick to their routines. Residents can't control much in life, so they hang on to the things they can manage.

**Jasmine:** It's all about time management. There's so much to do in a facility and so little time to do it in. You have to figure out the best way for you to work fast. Ask friends what works for them and try different things till you find what's best for you.

**Aliyah:** Sometimes the reality of working with the elderly isn't the same as what you learned in school. You gotta go with the flow! As you get more experienced, you'll know what works and what doesn't. In the meantime, if you're confused, ask! I'm always open to answering questions.

And there you have it, folks! Thanks to Aliyah, Jasmine and Latisha for opening a window into their lives and careers. Stay tuned for more advice and wisdom from this crew in our next edition.



# When Patients Take Patience

## 4 Tips for CNAs

I need to start by saying that I love my job. Really, I do. But even when you love your job, vacation is pretty much always better. I'm not the kind of person who is always complaining and counting down the minutes until I clock out. Most of the time, when it's a work day, I'm just as glad to be at work. But every so often, I'll admit it: I find myself wishing for vacation.

I've discovered that it's okay for me to feel that way sometimes because imagining myself down in Miami or the Bahamas means I take myself away from whatever is getting to me for a moment, and when I look up again, I can breathe easier... that's good for me, and it's good for my patients.

I wish it weren't true, but people are people – that's no newsflash, and our patients are no exception. Some of them are gentle and rosy and grateful for all we do. And some patients are cranky and ornery, and take that out on us. The problem is that although we can get cranky and stubborn and nasty ourselves, but it's important to be professional, and not the hard cases get to us - not even in the middle of the night. It's especially important because if you don't nip that behavior in the bud, it will only get worse, and you really don't want that!

With a little planning, and with a pocketful of tricks to pull out as you need them, you can manage all kinds of difficult patients. You'll be able to take the wind out of the sails of a tense situation, you'll hold on to your integrity as a compassionate caregiver, and your patient should pick up on the fact that you are calm and respond well. That's the ticket to earning respect and keeping your sanity. Here are a pocketful of tips to help you out when you need them.

### What Happens When Your Patient Is... ANGRY?



When you think about how many changes patients are facing in their lives, and how little control they have over what happens next for them, it is small wonder that some lash out. It's not your fault – and that is an important thing to remember, even if you repeat it in your head or whisper it under your breath to make sure you hear the point in the heat of the moment. Do keep in mind that anger is a secondary emotion – it's often a way to express fear, and if the patient is afraid, you will want to help alleviate that fear. Your conversation will be different depending on whatever is really going on. When you see your patient is angry, even if she is out of control, stop for a moment to figure out what emotion is really driving her. Try to calm her, and start a conversation to figure out how she is really feeling. A useful expression to remember is "I see why you feel that way" – empathy can go a long way in diffusing both anger and fear, and once that tension is diffused, you'll be in a better position to help.

### What Happens When Your Patient... PLAYS GAMES?

When patients play games, they pull out all the stops to try to get their way. They might cry or butter you up or threaten you or throw a temper tantrum like a toddler. Manipulative patients are particularly challenging, because you can't just have a clear conversation with them and move past the difficulty. The best you can do is listen to his version of events, and not engage in whatever unacceptable or argumentative behavior is being thrown your way.

### What Happens When Your Patient... GIVES YOU A HARD TIME?

A good rule of thumb, no matter what grief the patient is sending your way, is to keep your cool. Again, give yourself a minute of "time-out," where you pause and collect yourself so that your reactions are not driven by your own (natural, human) emotion. Speak to your patient calmly and get to the bottom of whatever is bothering her. Work hard to keep any "blame" language out of your side of the conversation. Instead of saying "YOU did (or didn't do) X," engage her by asking how she feels. Speak of potential solutions that recognize her point of view (It seems to me that you see this situation differently..."), and let her express that perspective. Stay firm in your own position without giving in to pestering and the like, but make sure that the language you use treats her with respect. In this way, you help prevent the risk of escalating the situation.

### Some Final Tips



You are working in a situation where non-verbal communication says as much as the words that come out of your mouth – in fact, probably a whole lot more. If, deep down, you are very angry at your patient for the difficult behavior, or if you are carrying an underlying tension yourself, then speaking calmly is unlikely to override the message your body language conveys. This is why it's important to take a moment to collect yourself so that when you speak to your patient you are REALLY in control of your own underlying emotions. Breathe deep, look your patient in the eye with gentleness, and then, when you speak calmly, you will exude the professionalism and control of the situation that you really do have.

## Interview with Terri Ann Edwards, LPN



### Why did you decide to become a CNA?

Growing up I used to always care for my ailing grandmother, so it seemed like the next logical thing for me to do.

### Tell us about your first day on the job as a CNA – how did you feel (nervous, overwhelmed, excited...), were you early, was it anything like what you expected...

My first day on the job was nerve wracking. I got there one hour early. My heart was beating so fast. I kept dropping stuff and spilling water all over myself and the patients. I was lucky to have good mentors and the patients were accommodating. It got better as the days went on.

### Why did you choose to work for Towne Nursing?

Towne was recommended to me by a friend.

### Was it difficult to get your LPN license while working as a CNA?

It was rough working and trying to get my LPN license at the same time, especially during the first half of the program. There were nights I didn't sleep because I was up studying and had to work. The journey wasn't easy but I loved every moment of it.

### Why are you proud to have been a nurses' aide, and now LPN?

I love taking care of my patients. There is no greater feeling than when your patient tells you they are happy you're the one taking care of them because they know they will be well taken care of.

### What do you enjoy the most about your patients?

I love to listen to them talk about their life experiences. I work with a diverse patient population and I love hearing about their traditions and cultures.

### What motivates you to get out of bed and go to work each day?

Knowing that my residents depend on me being there.

### How do you spend your free time (if you have any!!)?

Sleeping...lol. Actually, most of my free time is spent hanging out with my kid.

### What's your best advice for beginners in the nursing field?

The best thing I can say to anyone just starting off is to be confident in yourself and your abilities. No one started off knowing everything. It's ok to admit you don't know something and never be afraid to. In the beginning of my nursing career, I actually felt like giving up at one point. I doubted myself in everything I did. One day one of my resident came up to me and rubbed my shoulder and said, "You're a very good nurse with a kind heart, but baby, you need to stop doubting yourself." She hugged me and said "It'll be ok, you'll see." I never forgot that day. Now I've learnt to trust my gut instincts. I see every day as a learning experience. I am still learning and growing. I always look for ways to expand my skills and learn by asking to observe any procedures I'm unfamiliar with. I absolutely love being a nurse.

## THE SECRET TO KEEPING YOUR SCRUBS CLEAN

We all know how important it is to keep scrubs clean, both for safety and for appearance. But in a job where you're always getting spilled on, how do you keep them looking fresh and feeling clean? We asked some of our experienced CNAs to tell us their tricks and here's what we learned:



### A LITTLE VINEGAR GOES A LONG WAY

Before you wear your scrubs for the first time, wash them in cold water with half a cup of vinegar to set the color and extend the life of the scrubs. Vinegar isn't great for all fabrics, so don't put any other clothes in this wash.



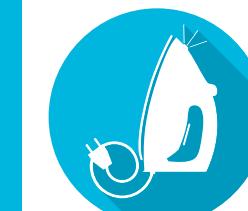
### USE COLOR-SAFE STAIN REMOVER

When you get home from work, check your scrubs for stains. Use stain remover on anything that looks like it may be permanent. If you aren't washing them right away, treat with stain remover again right before loading the washing machine.



### RUN THE WASHING MACHINE TWICE

First, wash your scrubs to remove any stains. Check if there are still stains and make sure to get rid of them before disinfecting the scrubs, so they don't set. To disinfect, add 3/4 cup of color-safe bleach and wash in HOT water. Then run the scrubs through the dryer for at least 30 minutes on the highest heat to kill any bacteria still hiding in the fabric.



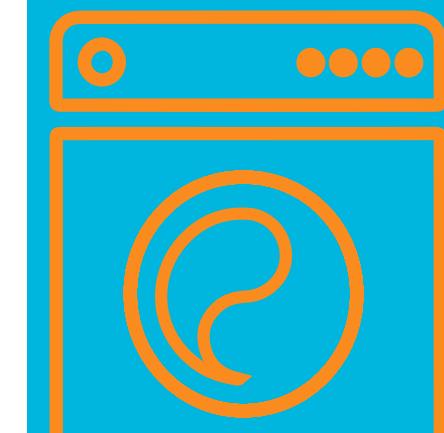
### IRON

Ironing serves two purposes: it kills the rest of the germs and it makes your scrubs look professional and neat. When done ironing, place the scrubs in a clean and dry bag so they stay uncontaminated until you wear them next.



### DON'T WEAR THEM OUT

To keep scrubs disinfected and looking good, wear them only at work. Don't lounge around the house in them or go out to eat still wearing scrubs. In fact, it's best to bring them to work in a bag, change into them at the facility and change back into street clothes before you leave.



Taking pride in your scrubs is taking pride in your work. Wear them with joy and everyone around you will notice how much you love your job!



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