

Beily Paluch

# A Career in Compassion

In the past, nursing was a rather off-the-beaten-track choice for a *frum* girl, but lately there has been a growing trend towards the profession. Women and girls alike have enrolled in programs launched by local colleges and will soon be taking their places in hospitals, doctors' offices, and clinics.

Is nursing an appropriate profession for a Bais Yaakov graduate? What challenges does it present? How does a busy mother handle the long hours of hospital nursing shifts?





One of the most crucial components in a *frum* girl's choice of professional career is the availability of an appropriate venue for obtaining the degree of her choice. With that in mind, we present some of the nursing schools catering to our community.

## The New Seminary

This article was already in the making when I saw the ad: "The New Seminary would like to congratulate its first graduating cohort of nurses." When I called the number on the ad, Rebbetzin Sora Bulka was enthusiastic about her unique program. "It started with the girls," she was quick to explain. "They were coming in and saying they wanted to go into nursing.

"In the beginning, the girls would earn a B.A. with us, taking the prerequisites they would need later, and then continue on to accelerated nursing programs, where they would complete their B.S. in nursing."

As time passed, the requests became more frequent. Adelphi University, the college with which The New Seminary is affiliated, happens to offer one of the top nursing programs in the United States. Understandably, their admission criteria are not easy to fulfill, and the waiting list is long. Still, it was only a matter of time until, at one of the periodic meetings between the two institutions, the idea of a nursing cohort comprising only female students of The New Seminary was put on the table.

Before going ahead, the seminary consulted with its *daas Torah*, asking whether this was something they should do. "We always, always, check with *daas Torah* before we launch something new,"

stresses Rebbetzin Bulka. The reply was very encouraging: “You would be doing a tremendous *chessed* for Klal Yisrael.” With this blessing, negotiations with Adelphi were finalized and the first nursing class was assembled.

It’s important to note that The New Seminary did not step in or get involved in any academic area, and anyone who

completed the program did so according to the exact requirements of Adelphi University. However, the members of the *hanhalah* were there behind the scenes, helping with scheduling around Yamim Tovim, giving *chizuk*, bringing Rabbanim to discuss halachic and ethical issues in medicine, and providing guidance on general appropriate behavior in the workplace.

this goal, he opened a school of nursing in Kiryat Sanz in 1967, under the direction of a *frum* physician from Bnei Brak. The students would occasionally come to the *ezras nashim* in the Rebbe’s residence to hear *shmuessen* from the Rebbe himself.

As the country drew closer to the Six Day War, the classes in the fledgling school were abruptly discontinued due

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## Nursing schools that cater to the *frum* community

**Touro College,**  
Department of Nursing  
Associate Degree in Applied Sciences  
5-semester course  
(718) 236-9158

**The New Seminary**  
/Adelphi University  
Bachelor of Science in Nursing  
Approximately 2½ years  
(718) 769-8160

**Tessler School of Nursing**  
at Laniado Hospital  
Netanya, Israel  
RN License  
Approximately 2½ years  
09-860-4778

**Philips Beth Israel**  
School of Nursing  
(3-year program).  
Acceptable for RN exam

Rebbetzin Bulka truly feels that the graduates’ success stems from their pure motives in entering this challenging career. Many had first-hand experience with loved ones who had been hospitalized, and they had strong feelings of wanting to provide a caring presence for others in pain.

“These students were not going into nursing because they felt it was a way to make more money. We clearly explained to them that there are many ways to make money! Those who indeed chose to go ahead with this track did so because they wanted to be there for individuals going through a hard time.”

## Tessler School of Nursing at Laniado Hospital

The Sanz-Klausenburger Rebbe, zt”l, who toiled for many years to establish a hospital synthesizing quality medicine with strict adherence to *halachah*, believed in the importance of employing hospital nurses who were trained in Torah *hashkafah* and *halachah*. To achieve

to the call-up of the director, who was a senior reserve officer in the IDF’s Medical Corps. The students were admitted into the Shaare Zedek Nursing School to continue their studies. It wasn’t until 1977, a year after Laniado Hospital opened, that the school resumed sessions.

In a speech given in America in 1982 while raising funds for the hospital, the Rebbe discussed the proper approach to medicine and *refuah* and the great need for a hospital where the doctors are *maaminim*, and the nurses are committed to saving lives and alleviating pain.

In the same speech, the Rebbe related a story illustrating the far-reaching effects of teaching the Torah approach to medicine. A man whom the Rebbe had never met before came to thank him for saving his life. He explained that he had been in a certain hospital and his condition deteriorated continuously until two nurses took it upon themselves to diligently attend to him. They left no stone unturned, and their efforts eventually bore fruit and he recovered. These were nurses who had trained in the Rebbe’s nursing school and had

acted upon the *hashkafos* that the Rebbe had taught them in his *shiurim*.

These same guiding principles still represent the Tessler School of Nursing today. Girls receive a top-notch nursing education, combined with *halachah* and *hashkafah* classes in all relevant areas. The school is run by the energetic, enthusiastic Dr. Ester Strauss, whose passion for her work reverberated across the phone lines to New York. She described the course as a “three-year program condensed into two and a half years,” so that the girls and women can finish up and move on. When they finish, they have an RN degree, and they have the option of joining a bridge program in Bnei Brak to continue on to a B.A.

“But they can work as nurses even before they have the B.A.,” says Dr. Strauss. “And most do. The demand for nurses here is tremendous. Many of our graduates have their jobs waiting for them by the time they graduate. We get calls for nurses all the time.”

The school is located in Kiryat Sanz, Netanya, adjacent to Laniado Hospital. There’s a dorm where students can stay if they come from abroad or prefer not to commute from another city. Some of the newly married students take a temporary apartment in Netanya and live there until they finish.

“It’s really a great place for a *frum* girl to learn nursing. Our student body is diverse, but the *hanhalah* is entirely *frum*. They learn *halachah*, *hashkafah*, everything. I don’t know of another place like this.”

Miriam Shine, a Toronto native who graduated this spring, agrees wholeheartedly. “I heard about the Tessler school when I was still in eleventh grade, and I had my heart set on coming. I was always into medicine, but my parents were concerned that there wasn’t an appropriate place for me to learn. Then my father spoke to an *adam gadol*, and he offered to check out the Tessler school for us during his upcoming visit to Eretz Yisrael. When he came back, he reassured my father that

## The nursing shortage in the United States

Those in the medical profession have been acutely aware of a decline in the availability of qualified nurses over the last decade. Hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice facilities are experiencing a substantial shortage of staff, which is only expected to worsen in the upcoming years.

Some of the factors contributing to this shortage:

### The growth of the aging population.

As the baby boomers require more medical care and the average life expectancy rises, more nurses are needed.

### The small number of nursing students graduating each year.

There is no shortage of applicants, but many colleges can only admit a small number of nurses each year. Since a nurse with a graduate degree (required to teach nursing) can earn more as a nurse than as a teacher, it is hard for colleges to expand their faculty enough to put more students through their nursing programs.

### Nurse burnout.

The nursing shortage is a vicious cycle, with nurses often finding themselves overburdened. They may have additional duties added to their job descriptions, or they may be spread thinner on the floor and expected to handle more patients. This has caused some nurses to retire early, or to look elsewhere for employment.

### Most recently, more stringent immigration laws.

Many staffing agencies work specifically as head-hunters for the medical industry. When they cannot find candidates locally, they import them from overseas. Entire businesses operate from the Philippines, India, and other Eastern nations, training nurses, teaching them English, writing their resumes, and guiding them through the immigration process. However, the new immigration laws complicate this process. As of now, it could take between three and five years from when a nurse is hired until she arrives in the U.S. to work.

the environment was *frum*, and I came here with his *haskamah*.”

Miriam arrived at Tessler straight out of high school and plunged right into her studies, which were all in Hebrew. She did not attend seminary, but was amazed by how much she learned during her nursing schooling. “We learned *hilchos Shabbos*, *yichud*, and *hashkamas haboker*, as well as *parashas hashavuah*. We learned how to work with the patients, to wash *negel vasser* for

them, and really care for all their needs.” Miriam had the full Laniado experience, rooming in the dorm for the duration of her studies, and she has only the highest praise for the school.

As Tessler’s graduates take their places in hospitals throughout Eretz Yisrael, the foresight of the Klausenburger Rebbe benefits patients far beyond the walls of Laniado Hospital, impacting patients wherever “his” nurses practice.

“One major factor is money: the income kollel wives need to bring in can no longer be achieved through clerical work. We need more options and more jobs.”



## Touro College (New York)

Touro College offers a five-semester course that awards graduates an Associate Degree. Towards the end of the course, they bring a recruiter who meets with the students and prepares them for what their job search and interviews might entail. They also place nurses in internships with local hospitals, which can sometimes lead to permanent jobs. “We have girls doing internships in Bellevue over the summer. We have graduates working in Maimonides, and in Lutheran,” says Christy, a representative of the program.

Christy described the attendees at a reunion for graduates: “Almost everyone was in nursing: either they had gone on for more education, or they were talking excitedly about their jobs. Quite a few showed up in their nursing uniforms.”

Dina, a Touro graduate, described her job search. “For six months, I looked around. I wanted day shifts, I wanted something close to home, I was particular about the ward I would work in. Then I realized that I was getting nowhere. I loosened my requirements somewhat, and within weeks, I had a job.

“You also have to think about what kind of job you’re ready for when you finish your schooling,” remarks Dina. “I specifically wanted to start out in a hospital, because I didn’t feel I had enough hands-on experience to be out there on my own. In a hospital, you get real training that supplements your classes.”

## Nursing degrees

There are three levels of nursing licensing, with different paths to achieve them:

### Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN)

Educational requirements:

- A short nursing course, approximately 1 year long, in preparation for the LPN exam

### Registered Professional Nurse (RN)

Educational requirements:

- *Associate Degree* – approximately 2-year course that covers required material for the RN exam
- *Bachelor of Sciences Degree in Nursing* – generally through a 4-year college program. Graduates are eligible for the RN exam.

### Nurse Practitioner

Educational requirements:

- A Masters Degree in Nursing is required before taking the Nurse Practitioner exam.
- Nurses holding higher lever degrees get paid more. Many begin working with an Associate Degree and continue studying for their B.S. at the same time.

Some jobs also require nurses to complete their B.S. within a specified number of years; Dina has five years to earn hers.

## On the Job

From New York to Baltimore, Toronto to Tel Aviv, the chances of meeting a *frum* nurse in the hospital continue to increase. In addition to alleviating physical pain, the very presence of these women can be comforting to an overwhelmed family navigating the unfamiliar territory of hospitals and medical care.

Judi, a bright young nurse from Lawrence, New York, has been in the field for approximately seven years. “When I started out, I did not know even one other *shomer Shabbos* nurse.” If she ever felt a need for support, understanding, or a listening ear, there was no one she could ask. “Today, it’s amazing. There are quite a few *frum* nurses where I work, and we support each other.”

Frumie is a busy mother who works as a nurse in a Baltimore hospital. I asked her what would make a *frum* girl or woman choose nursing as a career. “One major factor is money: the income kollel wives need to bring in can no longer be achieved through clerical work. We needed more options and more jobs.”

Community colleges that offer separate classes have also made it more acceptable for a girl to enter a career that requires a degree. For many, that route leads to a career in special education or therapy, but others have found that their hearts draw them towards nursing.

What are the options, aside from working in a hospital? “You can work for a *heimishe* pediatrician — that’s a great environment where you can contribute tremendously to the Jewish community

**”ויהי כי יראו המיילדות את האלקים ויעש להם בתים” (שמות א' כ"א)**



While we can't guarantee that all our students attain the level of **יראת שמים** of Yocheved and Miriam (the first from Jewish nurses...), they can be assured of the **תמילות** and **ברכות** of our Founder, the Sanz-Klausenburger Rebbe ז"ע, and the wholehearted recommendation and blessings of, **להבלחט"א**, the Lakewood Mashgiach, Harav Matisyohu Salomon, שליט"א, after a personal fact-finding tour of the Tessler School of Nursing.

”יודע אני שהאחריות היא גדולה, אך אקוה כי בית החולים בקרית צאנז נתייסד רק לשם שמים וכל המזכה את הרבים אין חטא בא על ידו (אבות ה', י"ח). על כן בזכות זאת יעזור הש"ת שהתלמידות תגדלנה לבנות ישראל כשרות וצנועות וה' הטוב יהיה בעזרתך כמו שהטיב למיילדות העבריות במצרים כמאמר הכתוב (שמות א', כ') וייטב אלקים למיילדות.”

”ויהי רצון שתזכנה כולן לסייעתא דשמיא ברוחניות ובגשמיות וכמו שאמרתי בעת הנחת אבן הפינה להמרכז הרפואי החדש שאני מקוה שהש"ת ישלח את מלאך רפאל שישכון תמיד בין כותלי בית החולים. ויקיים בהן הכתוב (תהילים צ"א י"א) **כי מלאכיו יצוה לך לשמרך בכל דרכיך, אמן כן יהי רצון.**”

(Excerpts of a letter by the Sanz-Klausenburger Rebbe, ז"ע, printed in שפע חיים ח"ד מכתב רפ"ט)

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you live in. You could be a school nurse and have the same schedule as your kids. Or a camp nurse, which can come with the bonus of a free summer in the mountains. Nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and hospices are also great places that might be less pressured than a hospital.”

Nurses can even obtain jobs with law firms who retain them to do medical research for malpractice suits. That’s an excellent option for those who feel better suited to this than hands-on nursing.

In general, nursing jobs are flexible because the shifts run round the clock. Frumie chose to work night shifts, as she found she was able to be more available for her children that way. Twice a week, she gets them ready for bed early and leaves someone else to put them to sleep, but she’s always home in time to send them off to school, and she is also there to greet them when they come home. She usually has one other shift as well, but that’s it. The rest of the time, she’s really off. No papers to mark, no urgent calls, no clients calling after hours.

Frumie is lucky to work in the labor and delivery ward, so that most of her interaction is with women. “You’re talking to someone who loves, loves, loves nursing!” (Yes, I can tell!) There’s something about it — supporting women through their most intense experiences, stepping into their circle of happiness when the baby is born, and on rare occasions, encouraging them when challenges arise.”

Is nursing a profession she would recommend? It’s a stable job market; there is always a demand for nurses. And there are always opportunities to help. “You can hook up with medical support groups and give injections to those who need them. It’s a great job, and very fulfilling.”

On the other hand, Devoiry, a nurse from Boro Park, cautions those who are considering nursing not to jump in too quickly. Her advice? Do research. Be prepared. Know what’s included in the course material and make sure you are

## What to consider before taking the plunge:

- **Look for a strong academic program with a high pass rate on the boards.**

Some programs are easier to get through, but many of the students don’t pass the boards. Others are really tough to get through, but students who complete the program are pretty much certain to pass.

- **Research the culture of the school.**

Is there a strong support system to help its students succeed? Does the program teach the skills that its students need to do well? A lot of the time, it’s not whether you know the material, but whether you can apply it.

- **Find the right match for your stage in life.**

How much scheduling flexibility does the program have? Will you be able to manage your course load as a wife and mother, if necessary?

- **Make sure nursing is a good fit for you.**

Is this something you will enjoy doing? Do you have the math and science skills and aptitude? You don’t need to be a math genius, but there is a lot of science and number manipulation involved.

comfortable with it. Realize that you will be required to care for both male and female patients. Do you feel ready to take on the responsibility for a patient’s well-being, knowing that if you miss a critical signal, someone’s life may be at stake?

Another long-time nurse seconded Devoiry’s concerns. “I feel strongly that it’s not appropriate for single girls,” she insisted. “Even a married woman should know where she stands and if she’s up to it.”

“It’s definitely a field that’s full of *nisyonos*,” says Devoiry. “I felt it most in

the realm of making a *kiddush Hashem* to the general public. My colleagues and patients were forming their entire opinion of religious Jewry based on my behavior, and that was a tremendous challenge.”

Of course, she acknowledges that this is the case in most professions.

Still, she reiterates that no one should take this step without consulting their Rav. Her Rav specifically told her, “I’m not making a blanket statement. I’m saying it’s okay for you.”

One compelling factor that also lies behind the new trend is the nationwide nursing shortage, which means that nurses are in high demand (see sidebar “The nursing shortage in the United States”). Although new graduates may not find it so easy to land employment, the general consensus is that this difficulty is more a matter of finding the right match for the right person rather than a dearth of jobs.

Most of the women interviewed for this article have been in nursing for five years or more, and every single one of those is in a job she loves. Often, their first positions were not their “dream job,” but they kept their eyes and ears open, and made the move when the opportunity arose. Today, they work as private nurses, nurse managers, pediatric nurses, and other positions that are convenient and satisfying.

Wherever they find themselves, the new generation of *frum* nurses can take pride in sharing *Klal Yisrael’s* defining traits as *rachmanim*, *bayshanim*, *v’gomlei chassadim* — those who are compassionate, modest, and helpful — as they approach their day’s (or night’s) work. With their dedication to their tasks, they ease pain, spread good cheer, and provide care and comfort to aching and often lonely individuals.

May they be messengers of faith and healing, and bring honor to Hashem’s name as they carry out their missions with dignity and grace. **B**

\*Nurses’ and students’ names have been changed.