Why It Isn't A Good Time To Become A Nurse

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For years we've read that the US faces a looming shortage of nurses. Shortfalls in the hundreds of thousands of nurses are routinely predicted. These predictions have been good for nursing schools, which have used the promise of ample employment opportunities to more than double the number of nursing students over the last 10 years, according to CNN [1].

Yet somehow 43 percent of newly-licensed RNs can't find jobs within 18 months. Some hospitals and other employers openly discourage new RNs from applying for jobs. That doesn't sound like a huge shortage, then does it?

But the purveyors of the nursing shortage message have an answer for that. Actually two answers: one for the short term and another for the long term. The near term explanation is that nurses come back into the workforce when the economy is down. Nurses are female and tend to be married to blue collar men who lose their jobs or see their hours reduced when the economy sours, we're told. Nurses bolster the family finances by going back to work — or they stay working when they were planning on quitting. There's something to that argument even if it's a bit simplistic.

The longer term argument is that many nurses are old and will retire soon, just when the wave of baby boomers hits retirement age themselves and needs more nursing care. Don't worry, the story goes, there will be tons of jobs for nurses in the not-too-distant future. This logic comes through again in CNN's story:

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