

Nurse Excellence

Tanya Hardison, RN

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Meet Tanya.

Can you tell us about yourself?

I am a Brooklyn girl through and through, growing up in a closeknit family as the oldest of three brothers and the only girl. I am an avid traveler who loves new experiences, fun, and laughter! Don't tell anyone, I am truly a kid at heart, and I go crazy about amusement parks too. Other than working as an OR nurse, I opened a part time travel agency several years ago, working on setting up trips abroad, more as an outlet than a job.

When did you start going after your nursing career?

When I graduated from Boys and Girls High School in Bedford Stuyvesant and later from the College of Mount Stevens, I did not have my heart set on a particular career. Since I knew some people who went after a degree that ended up bringing no use to them, I was not going to advance to a career before I was one hundred percent certain of what I want. No one in my family was in nursing. While still in college, I started out by experimenting various jobs trying to find something I enjoyed. Truthfully, it was starting to get to me as I was not fulfilled by any of them, and I wanted something more. One of those days I spotted an ad in the newspaper from Long Island School of Health (no longer existent) for a one-year program for surgical technology. I enrolled. I will admit that getting acquainted with the clinical instruments was rather intimidating at first, but I love a good challenge and was determined to learn. My interest in something new made the studying a lot easier. My entrance to my medical career was as a surgical technologist at St. Vincent Medical Center OR. That also made my first encounter with nurses. I was truly impressed by the teamwork and dedication I witnessed. While I loved my job, I knew that I would advance further. My mother was a self-made woman growing up without a mother figure. Her mother died young, and her siblings looked out for her. My mother ended up dropping out of school at a younger age, but then she returned to school and got a degree in Social Work. I felt that if my mother got where she got despite the hurdles on the way, I must do more to get my master's. And so, in 2004 I went for my RN program at Mount St. Vincent College in Riverdale, then I continued at Suny

Downstate for my master's. My greatest challenge of nursing was not as much the schooling but rather applying the books to practice. There are so many procedures that are very different from the way they are taught in the books to how they are done in the hospital. While I am also passionate about woman's health and worked several years in the L & D unit, I still have a soft spot for the OR and end up circling back there every so often.

Can you share what it's like to be an OR nurse?

The operating room is a unit where teamwork is at the strongest. There is a sense of "we are here together, and we will do anything to make it easier." Especially in a time when the nursing shortage is so pronounced the togetherness is very helpful. It is a rewarding job where you get to truly encourage people to get through a time that may be anxious or scared. I recall one specific time when I went out to an 18-year-old patient to ask all the questions per protocol, before he would be wheeled in for surgery. He did not answer, staring back at me with a blank stare. I was wondering what is wrong. Until he broke down about how scared he was. He pleaded that I stay there with him to hold his hand. I asked one of my colleagues if she can take over my place to prepare the room while I will stay with the patient. We spoke about school and other distractions just to get the time to pass by. Throughout the surgery I was there and when he woke up, I still held his hand. I was so overwhelmed by emotion when he remembered my name! Though it was nothing big I did, I knew that even something so small means a lot for a patient amidst their ordeals. Sometimes as nurses, we see the worst every day, and it takes a conscious effort to remember that even the milder cases are facing a difficult period of life and they need our reassurance throughout. Additionally, I make it a point to inform my patients to request to be the first surgery scheduled for the day. Very often the surgeries scheduled for later may end up being delayed because of something unexpected on the earlier surgery. Especially when it comes to children, the parents end up getting upset. The patients do not eat from the day before which only adds to the tension.

Can you tell us about your travel business and is it geared for nurse too?

This business idea was truly born more out of passion than anything else. I love travel. Period. I have been to many places; nothing is more exhilarating than getting to know more corners of the world. I just got back from Mexico after scouting out various resorts and hunting for houses in Cancun and other vacation places. I do this every so often to stay fresh so that when clients reach out to me to plan their travel, I can recommend them a most high quality and all-inclusive stay with the best attractions and housing. In 2023, I have a trip planned to Greece, Egypt, a most trending destination, and also to Cuba. It is still on my list to check out Dubai, though I do hear it is pretty overrated. I strongly believe that more than anyone, nurses must do more of what they love, like vacations and extra stuff. I have been there. We always feel guilty about how we can enjoy life while seeing so much suffering and we reprimand ourselves that we should feel grateful that we are healthy and help more people!! But it is important to remember that we are human. Occasional breaks help us maintain caring at its prime.

If you are so great at traveling, do you pick up different travel assignments often?

Sadly, I do not. This is a question I am asked very frequently. If I am such a great traveler, why shouldn't I get the benefit of travel and nursing both in one venture? I agree. I would make a perfect fit for the travel nursing lifestyle. But here comes the *but*.. my husband is successfully planted in Brooklyn. Being that he cannot afford the time to travel with me for three months at once and leaving him behind for this length of time is unthinkable, travel nursing is still a dream I hope to reach someday in the future!

Did you ever get to use your nursing skills on your trips?

Several years ago, I joined a group trip to the Dominican Republic. We spent on one day ATVing on the road in one of the jungles. Children are very often at the side of the roads, either selling little gadgets or begging for money but since it is a busy road, it is impossible to stop while driving.

One couple was driving down their jeep, when one of the children came running dangerously close to the car. We all watched frozen. The couple quickly swerved their car to avoid the imminent tragedy from happening. I will never forget the crushing sound of metal clashing with a tree and the unnatural scream that followed. Looks like while veering off the path in a split-second decision to save the children they crashed into a tree at the roadside. The force of the collision was strong, though we knew it could have ended worse. The couple was safe and ok, but all bruised up, the main impact on their knees. As a nurse on premises, I was able to stitch up the gashes, which were severely bleeding, something I learnt as an NP. I was also able to give them some

antibiotics, while waiting for the emergency team to come and take them to the hospital. I was glad that I was there to help them out with my expertise!

Any message you would like to impart to more nurses?

Take care of yourself, because selfcare is not selfish at all. I was very impressed with the White Glove approach to promote us, nurses, to care for ourselves with the Thanksgiving gifting promotion. **Keep going!**

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