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Self and identity of emergency nurses who pursue higher education in Ireland

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Continuing education is an essential component of professional nursing practice. Working in increasingly complex and varied environment requires that nurses are appropriately educated. Changing patterns of disease and subsequent impact on health service delivery means that pre-qualifying education can only ever be an initial preparation for nurses. However, orientation among nurses to higher education is inconsistent in Ireland. While nurses find themselves with few opportunities for upward mobility, there is no requirement by the professional regulatory authority for registered nurses to participate in educational activities in order to maintain professional registration. Those who do commit to educational endeavour, do so from a platform of significant personal and financial contributions. Additionally, nurses undertaking higher education programmes are shaped and make decisions against a background of personal, socio-cultural, and disciplinary structuring and actions. Underpinned by the Foucauldian concepts of governmentality and disciplinary power as best interpretative frame, a narrative inquiry approach to this study has been employed to uncover the influences, decision-making, and experiences of emergency nurses who pursue higher education. This study also takes the theoretical stance that these elements cannot be understood fully without being illuminated by the concepts of self and identity. A total of 22 emergency nurses were interviewed to explore their decision-making, influences, and experiences of higher education in Ireland. While results are consistent with previous studies on higher education uptake among nurses generally, a number of new findings have been uncovered. It has emerged that areas such as social background and solace have been influential in Irish emergency nurses' desire to pursue higher education.

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