

I found my calling

Nompumelelo Jwili shares how she found her calling as an oncology nurse.

Nompumelelo Jwili (43) lives in the south of Johannesburg. She is a divorcée with three children.

Start of my career

In 2010, I worked as a HIV counsellor at a community health clinic. My job was to do voluntary counselling and HIV testing. I also did adherence to the treatment, whereby I educated patients about the regimen they were going to start, side effects, and how to cope and manage side effects. My goal was to educate people in a way that they considered living with HIV as normal.

In those days a patient had to attend three classes for adherence to treatment. I was really touched by most of the patients I met, they would ask to come to the classes when it was my turn to teach about adherence. Others would say, "If you won't be at work, please don't book me."

I found my calling; finally embracing that I'm a naturally kind, humble person who made it easy for patients to grasp the information as well as making them feel safe as I accepted their status without judgement.

That particular experience made me realise that my personality is well-suited to be a community nurse and serve the community.

My dream comes into alignment

I had a burning desire to study further as I had only done short courses due to lack of funds. I separated from my husband and my mom (my hero) told

me she would help me by paying for my studies. I did my first year at Netcare West Campus in Auckland Park and my overtime was done at an oncology ward. The interest in oncology started there.

The oncology unit manager asked me to come work at the unit when I finished my studies. God always provide angels in our paths. I completed second year and was employed within six months as an enrolled nurse. One of my facilitators encouraged me to apply for a bridging course, which I did and I was accepted.

I completed the bridging course and passed. As a student, you are placed in a ward after passing and I was placed in an oncology ward. I loved the medical oncology ward; you get to know the patients and their families. With my compassionate nature, I managed to nurse those patients with dignity. I learnt that the most important thing is to promote comfort, which will make patients less anxious.

My current job

Currently, I'm an oncology nurse at an oncology practice in Rosebank, where I administer chemotherapy. I enjoy working with people and love the atmosphere. People still have a sense of humour regardless what they are going through and are still able to smile. Patients will actually feel sorry for me if I can't find a vein the first time. Most patients are so humble, it becomes easy to work with them and is so

fulfilling. Oncology patients are amazing.

At my first job, I worked in a hospital ward and mainly treated patients' side effects from chemotherapy. Side effects can really hit so hard, it can even make them review their consent but it's up to the nurses to explain that it does get better. Seeing their willingness to go through chemotherapy and all that comes with it, touches me in the depths of my soul and makes me want to be surrounded by such life soldiers.

The ups and downs

I have always been compassionate and kind but with age, I see I'm even kinder and softer.

I find escapism from reading books; it's my therapy and puts me in a fictional world where there is no illnesses to deal with.


Not being able to find a vein makes me completely miserable and turns my day upside down. When a patient is having trouble with their port, also affects me emotionally. But the best days are when I find those veins once-off and the ports are infusing well. 



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