Which path should you take?

With an estimated one fifth of nursing students quitting their studies, it’s important to see doubts for what they are.

Last year’s Shape of Caring review highlighted the alarming fact that at least 20% of nursing students are dropping out of their studies.

In light of that fact, it is important to explore what individuals can and should do if they suddenly start having doubts about entering the nursing profession.

According to Nick Simpson, chief executive of healthcare recruitment agency MSI Group, the reasons for nursing students abandoning the profession are manifold.

‘Sometimes there can be family pressures, particularly if the student has children, because placements will involve long hours and unsociable shifts,’ he says.

‘There is also the reality check of moving from theory to practice in pressured settings, which can be a culture shock.

‘Then there are the financial pressures – the full-time nature of nursing placements means that, unlike other students, it is difficult to supplement your income with part-time work,’ he adds.

So what should you do if you start getting cold feet? First, make sure you truly understand what you are experiencing.

‘We all have bad days and have to deal with difficult situations. It is important that you differentiate this from nursing not being for you,’ says John Fulton, principal lecturer in health in the department of pharmacy, health and wellbeing at the University of Sunderland.

‘Perhaps it is just an area of nursing that you do not particularly enjoy. Is it about the studying?’

Start talking

Whatever you are experiencing, the best thing to do is start talking, urges Mr Simpson. Talking to peers, or the student support services provided by a university, can often allay worries.

‘Speak to your personal tutor, as well as your friends and family to get their perspective,’ Mr Simpson advises.

‘If you are on placement, the occupational health department at the hospital should also provide support and counselling for staff.

‘Make sure you take the time to think about all the different paths you can go down, and the different specialisms you can look at once qualified. It might be worth a bit of pain now for the longer-term gain.

‘Nurses have to be resilient. These doubts might be your first test,’ adds Mr Simpson.

What no one doubts is that nursing takes a serious commitment.

‘There is the academic work now, but it’s also a commitment to lifelong learning and continual professional development, as well as the teaching of others. You have to be prepared for that,’ says Mr Simpson.

‘You have to have passion for the profession and a real drive for it. Don’t make a rash decision, but don’t do a job that is going to make you unhappy.’

By Dean Gurden, freelance journalist

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Before you quit – dos and don’ts

**Do:**
- Remember it’s natural to have doubts
- Talk to your clinical mentor
- Think about what it is that has made you have doubts and seek help
- Understand nursing is a diverse career and you cannot like each area equally

**Don’t:**
- Leave immediately without talking it through with someone
- Generalise one bad day
- Confuse a bad placement or a bad day with nursing not being for you
- Forget that experiencing difficulties can skew your thinking

Source: John Fulton, principal lecturer in health in the department of pharmacy, health and wellbeing at the University of Sunderland