

The seven year itch

At one point in my career, I reached that moment of burnout. I just knew I had to change my profession or die. Many nurses reach a point in their career like this. I look at it as the seven year itch, a term usually used to describe a point in a relationship where you experience doubts and think of running away. I say this because I have noticed that most nurses that I know who are feeling burnt out tend to be somewhere in that range of 5 to 7 years on the job. One study, that is getting kind of old now, but I still believe it to be true says that nurses, on the average, with 5 or more years experience are leaving the field (Schaffzin, 1991). If they are not leaving, they at least want to leave.

I was no different. However, what I discovered was that it wasn't necessarily the job. For me, it was the lack of balance in my life. I felt like my life was nothing but my work. One thing I did was switch to 3 twelve hour shifts. This was helpful because it allowed me to spend 2 days a week doing things I liked to do. I took up rowing lessons and joined a local writers group. Work became only one element of my life rather than most of my life.

I have also found, to a certain extent, that traveling can provide balance to your life as well. Instead of work being the focus, you now have new restaurants to try out, new places to go and people to meet. Work becomes a tool for you to explore. You are more in charge of your life and it feels good. You no longer return home to your same routine day after day. Life is new and exciting. Your work is even new and therefore more challenging.

In life, we are constantly making changes to achieve that fine balance. Perhaps, traveling may be one of those changes.

Schaffzin, N., & Berstein, A. (1998). *Guide to your career*. New York: Random House.