



## The Nurses: A Year of Secrets, Drama, and Miracles with the Heroes of the Hospital

By Alexandra Robbins



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A *New York Times* bestseller. “A funny, intimate, and often jaw-dropping account of life behind the scenes.”—*People*

*Nurses* is the compelling story of the year in the life of four nurses, and the drama, unsung heroism, and unique sisterhood of nursing—one of the world’s most important professions (nurses save lives every day), and one of the world’s most dangerous, filled with violence, trauma, and PTSD.

In following four nurses, Alexandra Robbins creates sympathetic characters while diving deep into their world of controlled chaos. It’s a world of hazing—“nurses eat their young.” Sex—not exactly like on TV, but surprising just the same. Drug abuse—disproportionately a problem among the best and the brightest, and a constant temptation. And bullying—by peers, by patients, by hospital bureaucrats, and especially by doctors, an epidemic described as lurking in the “shadowy, dark corners of our profession.”

The result is a page-turning, shocking look at our health-care system.

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## **The Nurses: A Year of Secrets, Drama, and Miracles with the Heroes of the Hospital** By Alexandra Robbins Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #84943 in eBooks
- Published on: 2015-04-14
- Released on: 2015-04-14
- Format: Kindle eBook

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"A funny, intimate & often jaw-dropping account of life behind the scenes.." —*People*

"...a detailed, sympathetic, and eye-opening portrait of how nurses work, deal with stresses, and fulfill their mission of serving patients...An insightful perspective on the realities of crucial health care providers." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"After interviewing hundreds, Robbins narrowed her focus to the personal narratives of four nurses.... Their stories are compelling in every way." —*Bookpage*

"...dishes eye-opening material." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Anyone who has ever set foot in a hospital—or might in the future—would do well to read this book. With page-turning prose, Robbins pulls back the curtain on a world rife with joy and challenge. It's brutally honest, emotional, and most of all, a paean to nurses—the people who help us live, die, and survive every day." — Rachel Simmons, author of *Odd Girl Out*

"Nurses are the unseen warriors of the hospital system, part of a 'secret club' of heroes with its own rules and codes. They're also strong-willed, flawed human beings made of flesh and (unafraid of) blood, rendered here in stunning detail. This fascinating and compulsively readable book even has a few tricks that could save your life. First tip: Don't get sick in July." — Mickey Rapkin, author of *Pitch Perfect*

"A fascinating and somewhat alarming examination of the contemporary nursing profession...Robbins not only shows, she tells in this revealing expose of the modern day state of nursing. It is an eye-opener not to be missed." —*EarlyWord*

"Readers... will find themselves guided by an excellent stylist and a first-rate mind." —*Houston Chronicle*

"Alexandra Robbins writes reality TV in book form." —*New Jersey Star-Ledger*

"A rich, fast-paced book about heroic, neglected professionals; editor's recommendation." —*Barnes and Noble*

"The Nurses' is exciting and honest, from admission to release. Robbins... busts myths, shows the inner workings of emergency rooms, offers golden advice, and explains behind-the-scenes events and why nurses deserve way more kudos than they get." —*The Daily News*

"...dramatic and riveting...Robbins has done an excellent job of bringing the world of nurses to life." —*The Examiner*

#### About the Author

Alexandra Robbins, winner of the prestigious 2014 John Bartlow Martin Award for Public Interest Magazine Journalism, is the author of four *New York Times* bestsellers, including *Pledged* and *The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth*. She has written for *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times*, and other publications, and has appeared on numerous television shows from *60 Minutes* to *The Colbert Report*.

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## Prologue

Four hospitals stand within a fifty-mile radius of a major American city. On the surface, they are as different from one another as fairy-tale sisters.

Pines Memorial Hospital is a pleasant-looking cream-colored building with a sixteen-story tower and broad, welcoming windows overlooking a quiet tree-lined suburban avenue. After decades of independence, the neighborhood's favorite hospital was bought out by Westnorth, a large healthcare corporation, which is slowly diluting the local flavor. With 190 beds, Pines Memorial serves a highly educated, wealthy population with a large percentage of academics, retirees, and nursing home residents. Because it is close to a major highway, Pines' emergency room, which has approximately 60,000 visits per year, often treats victims of major-impact car accidents. Nurses joke that the hospital should be called Highway Memorial, because the risks of the highway are far more relevant to the medical staff than the quiet red pine forests outside of town.

Several miles away, South General Hospital occupies a mostly gray edifice curved away from the road, as if to shield its inhabitants from the gang violence that occurs frequently nearby. The Level-1 trauma center—designated as such because it has the resources to treat every stage of injury, from prevention through rehabilitation—has 300 beds to serve one of the most indigent areas outside the city. South General's ER sees 95,000 ER patients annually. The reputation of "The South" is like that of the proverbial kid from the wrong side of the tracks, hoping to keep up with her peers, but unable to overcome the disadvantages of living on the poverty-stricken south side of town.

Forty-five minutes west, in a peaceful corner of the city, Academy Hospital, proud and prestigious, inhabits several white-pillared, brick structures that wind around courtyards and patios, reflecting the storied architecture of its surrounding university campus. With approximately 425 beds, Academy treats a ritzy demographic of young and middle-aged residents in the nearby million-dollar homes and the students at the elite university. The Academy ER treats fewer than 45,000 patients per year, partly because it simply does not have the building space to expand its emergency department walls.

And Citycenter Medical, a longtime teaching hospital, is split between two dusty beige high-rises, perhaps representative of its dual personalities: a stalwart institution with top-notch doctors and an ER so poorly managed it is considered dangerous by many of its own staff. A 390-bed Level-1 trauma center, Citycenter has an emergency department that is crumbling beneath the weight of the 85,000 annual patients it does not have enough nursing staff to treat properly. While Pines Memorial treats more blunt force, multisystem traumas because of the car accidents, Citycenter's traumas are typically isolated injuries, such as gunshot wounds. Easily reached by public transportation and in the heart of a densely populated city, Citycenter is a destination of choice for homeless people, drug-seeking addicts, and the uninsured.

In each of these disparate institutions, pale blue curtains shroud pods of frightened people. In each, seasoned healers perform routine procedures and medical feats behind bleached sterile walls. And in each, tracking invisible undercurrents through hallway mazes, nurses connect doctors to patients, carrying out copious orders in synchronized steps, entwining themselves intimately in convalescents' lives.

## **Users Review**

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#### **James Henderson:**

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