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## Putting Medical Skills to Work

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# Putting medical skills to work

**W**hen Iuri and Maia Cernev, both '10, moved to Salem from Moldova, they were trained as doctors and knew the English alphabet, but couldn't speak a word of English.

Six years later, they are putting their medical knowledge to work by completing nursing degrees at Linfield College – Iuri through the 18-month accelerated program and Maia through the online RN-to-BSN program.

Iuri and Maia left medical careers in Moldova to be near her family. Neither can practice medicine in the U.S. without passing licensing exams and completing residencies. Iuri passed the exam, but was unable to find a residency. He volunteered at the Salem Free Medical Clinic for two years before shifting to nursing.

Maia completed her RN through Chemeketa Community College before enrolling at Linfield. The program allows her to do her coursework any time of the day or night. That's been critical for both of them as they balance classes and work while raising their two sons, ages 7 and 3. Like many students, they rely on her mother and other family to help.

While learning English has been the biggest challenge, the ability to speak Russian, Ukrainian and Turkish has been beneficial for Maia who has served as a translator and nurse at Salem Hospital.

Iuri laughs as he recalls that when they began to learn English, they papered all the walls of their apartment with English words, phrases and sentences to help them practice. The notes are long gone and both speak clearly, but they admit language is still a struggle. Reading takes longer and writing can be frustrating.

"Sometimes it's hard to express your thoughts and ideas in writing – it can be difficult to express what you want to say," Iuri said.

While there are some advantages to having a medical degree, nursing school is vastly different.

Medical school focuses on diseases, diagnoses, treatment and medications. Nursing focuses more on patient care and communicating with patients and families, as well as how to deal with diverse populations. The Linfield-Good Samaritan School of

Nursing has taken the lead in educating more minority nurses and teaching cultural sensitivity to all of its students.

The decision to give up their careers as doctors wasn't easy. But the cultural and language differences coupled with the U.S. requirements for practicing medicine, resulted in their decision to switch to nursing. That allows them to put some of their skills to work and provides many opportunities once they complete their degrees.

"I hope that I will use my (medical) knowledge and skills in nursing," Iuri said, adding that skills he learned in medical school have been valuable in nursing school.

Maia enjoys both professions, even though her responsibilities are vastly different. Her medical background gives her an understanding of patient diagnoses and treatment that can help her with patient care.

Neither of the Cernevs has selected a nursing specialty, but they don't rule out returning to school in the future.

"When I started the BSN program my plans were to get a master's degree and be a nurse practitioner," Maia said. "I'm still looking at that, but I may take a break. I've been in school since 1994 without stopping and I'm looking forward to a little break." ■

– *Mardi Mileham*

Like many families, Iuri and Maia Cernev balance school and work while also spending time with their sons, Andrey, 3, left, and Stanislav (Stan) 7. Because the Cernevs understand the challenges of adjusting to a new culture, they recognize the difficulties some patients face when they are struggling with language and cultural differences. Maia's language skills have allowed her to serve as a translator for some patients at Salem Hospital.

