

## Chapter 5 Nurse Life Care Planning

### Definition:

According to the American Association of Nurse Life Care Planners (AANLCP), a nurse life care planner “assesses, identifies problems, plans for appropriate interventions, implements and evaluates the plan in the Nurse Life Care Plan process.” (<http://www.aanlcp.org/>)

I had the wonderful opportunity to interview Shelene Giles, a leader in the nurse life care planning specialty. Below is the interview packed with useful information about nurse life care planning:

1. What is your exact job/position title?

Nurse Life Care Planner

2. Are you employed by a company or do you work independently?  
Please explain.

My career in this field and related fields began many moons ago. Beginning with case management in 1989, I began working in the non-profit sector of case management and eventually transitioned into the private/for-profit sector of case management. Examples of private/for-profit companies include case management companies which contract with insurance carriers, employers, and attorneys to handle insurance claims, such as workers' compensation, auto, liability, short term disability, and long term disability. My case management role naturally progressed into life care planning and other related roles. Having worked in the private sector for 15+ years, I also had opportunities to excel into supervision, management, marketing, and business development. This prepared me for owning/operating an independent corporation, FIG Services, which was founded in 2002.

3. Do most life planners work for a company or independently?

According to a recent Life Care Planner survey (*Life Care Plan Survey 2009: Process, Methods & Protocols, published in Journal of Life Care Planning, Vol 9, No. 4, pg 131-200*), 80% of Life Care Planners are independent/self-employed with and without subcontractors/employees. The remaining 20% are employed with private rehabilitation/case management companies.

4. How did you hear about Life Planning?

Being employed in nursing case management, I eventually began handling catastrophic cases (spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, amputations, burns, and chronic pain). Referral sources requested projections of long term future care and costs with these catastrophic cases. I became interested in a specialization of the catastrophic cases which prepared me for the formal role of life care planning in 2002. I learned of the American Association of Nurse Life Care Planners (AANLCP) which provided further information on life care planning.

5. What made you decide to become a life planner?

Case management demanded long hours, extensive traveling, and prompt deadlines with reports/billing. I found myself becoming burned out and not seeing a brighter future. I enjoyed the catastrophic cases and life care planning was a natural extension into a more specialized role. I saw the opportunity to expand my knowledge in life care planning – as well as pursue a dream of owning/operating a business.

6. What qualifications/certifications did you have to become a life planner? Are those standard?

There are no specific qualifications/credentials required to be a life care planner. However, there are nationally recognized qualifications, credentials, and standards of practice in the field of life care planning. These qualifications, credentials, and acknowledged standards of practice indicate a specialized body of knowledge as well as ongoing education within the field of life care planning. This is especially important if a Life Care Planner is handling litigated cases and practices in the role of an expert witness.

There are two national certifications: Certified Nurse Life Care Planner (hosted by CNLCP® Certification Board) and Certified Life Care Planner (hosted by International Commission on Healthcare Certification). Depending on the certification of interest, there are different qualifications for each certification. The CNLCP certification is exclusive to registered nurses. The CLCP certification is available to select medical/healthcare providers. Information regarding these credentials can be found at their websites: [cnlpcertboard.org](http://cnlpcertboard.org) & [ichcc.org](http://ichcc.org).

There are other areas of specialty which recognize life care planning, such as rehabilitation counseling, case management, and legal nurse consulting.

There are two life care planning associations: American Association of Nurse Life Care Planners (AANLCP, [aanlcp.org](http://aanlcp.org)) and International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals/International Academy of Life Care Planners (IARP/IALCP, [rehabpro.org](http://rehabpro.org)).

#### 7. How long have you been a life care planner?

I have been practicing as a Nurse Life Care Planner since the late 1990's. I have been a Certified Nurse Life Care Planner (CNLCP) since 2002.

8. Can you give us a brief overview or a “day in the life of a.....” what you do day to day? (related to life care planning)

A day in the life of a Life Care Planner would include tasks from the office or off site. Office tasks would include reviewing medical records, medical research, typing reports/letters/emails, determining cost of medical care, and speaking with medical providers/referral sources/ clientele. The majority of Life Care Planners work from a home office. This provides a more relaxed, casual environment. Offsite tasks include traveling to conduct interviews with the client/family members/care givers, meeting with medical & healthcare providers, meeting with referral sources, and testifying in depositions and trials. Depending on the Life Care Planner’s geographical location and decided territory, some Life Care Planners travel nationally and internationally. I specialize in catastrophic burns in life care planning, which requires an extensive travel. I also had the opportunity to travel to the country of Trinidad in 2011 to complete a Life Care Plan.

9. What is the most pleasant/rewarding thing about life care planning?

The most pleasant/rewarding aspect of life care planning is continuing to use my nursing skills each day without providing ‘hands-on’ care in a hospital/facility setting. This is a misconception of life care planning – that nurses do not practice nursing once they leave the hospital/facility setting. Our clinical setting is outside of the hospital/facility walls – we practice in the community. Millions of nurses use their critical thinking/clinical skills every day without providing ‘hands-on’ care to a patient. (We use the term client – instead of patient.) My role in life care planning is much like an educator. I am educating the client/family members/care givers and other parties involved (insurance carrier, employer, attorneys, judge, and jury) on the client’s medical condition, symptoms,

functioning/limitations, need for future medical care, associated costs, and concerns of complications/secondary diagnosis that can arise in the future. Also, I thoroughly enjoy teaching and mentoring other nurses in the field of life care planning.

Another pleasant/rewarding aspect about life care planning is owning/operating my own business and having more quality time for family, friends, and me. I can set my own schedule and allow time for the school activities, unexpected sickness and appointments, and family vacations – without having to ask the boss for time off. Working from home provides a relaxed environment with a casual dress code. Pets are allowed at the office.

10. What do you dislike most about life care planning?

Life care planning is a rewarding field, both personally and financially. Some nurses new to life care planning have a misconception that financial gain will come once certified. Financial gain is not without effort. Novice Nurse Life Care Planners are encouraged to allow time for growing their business and be patient with success. Also, the legal arena can be intimidating to life care planners who are unprepared.

Dislikes about life care planning are more toward my personal characteristics. I have a tendency to work more rather than less. I also have a difficult time saying no or being unrealistic with deadlines.

11. What skills do you think a nurse needs the most to thrive in a position like yours?

Nurses interested in life care planning should have a strong foundation and understanding of the nursing process. This is what we learn in nursing school. Regardless of your nursing position, we all practice the nursing process in a variety of settings. Nurses

who thrive in the field of life care planning are critical thinkers. They are self-disciplined with an eye for detail. They have a strong work ethic, time management skills, organizational skills, and communication skills. Nurses who succeed in life care planning do not lose sight of why they became a nurse – care and compassion.

**12. What general advice would you give to someone considering becoming a life care planner?**

Stepping out into a different field of nursing can be scary. Don't worry. There is a network of nurses and resources to advocate for your success. Get involved with the life care planning associations. Attend one of the life care planning conferences or webinars to get your feet wet and network with other nurses. Research the various educational programs for life care planning and choose which best suits your needs. Align yourself with experienced Life Care Planners for mentorship.

**13. What excites you most about life care planning? Do you see potential for growth or movement to other related positions?**

What excites me most about life care planning are the endless opportunities for nurses. Life care planning is nursing beyond the hospital walls. The field of life care planning will never be saturated due to the variety of practices – how we utilize life care planning in so many different settings. Life care planning is not just in the legal field – we are in rehabilitation settings, discharge planning, home health, case management, disease management, loss prevention, elder care, foster care, special needs planning, insurance health care programs, governmental health care programs, financial planning, education, etc.

Absolutely, there is substantial potential for growth and enhancement in life care planning. Statistics show a vast number of nurses will retire within the next 5-10 years. This is also true for the field of life care planning. This will create a gap and an even stronger demand for Life Care Planners.

14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a life care planner?

Nurse life care planning can be a rewarding field, both personally and financially. Our field is growing and we have a need for nurses to join our field. Please visit [figservices.com](http://figservices.com) or call 828/698-9486 to learn more about life care planning.

### **Associations/Resources**

- American Association of Nurse Life Care Planners  
- <http://www.aanlcp.org/>
- International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals  
- <http://www.rehabpro.org/>
- FIG Services – Nursing education and consultancy  
- <http://www.figservices.com/>