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Subject: 2022 Fall TV overview!
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News on nursing in the media

Are nurses getting the respect they need to save lives?

December 8, 2022

Fall 2022 TV Overview!

More good portrayals of nursing are coming on the BBC's *Call the Midwife* and Netflix's *Virgin River*. But *Bob Hearts Abishola* (CBS) returns with a nurse who remains determined to become a physician because she believes it has a higher status. And the prime-time landscape is still dominated by physician-centric programming, including *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC), *The Good Doctor* (ABC), and *New Amsterdam* (NBC).



December 2022 – The fall season on U.S. television seems to offer no big changes for nursing, with a few helpful portrayals amid many damaging physician shows. A few limited series with limited roles for nurses did air over the summer notably

Returning shows



[Call the Midwife](#)



[Virgin River](#)

with limited roles for nurses did air over the summer, notably the short animated series *Baymax!* (Disney+) and the Hurricane Katrina account *Five Days at Memorial* (Apple TV+). But we are not aware of any significant new health-related U.S. prime time fall shows (if you are, please let us know!). Among returning shows, *Call the Midwife* (BBC/PBS; premiering March 19, 2023) will be back for a 12th season about the exploits of skilled and [autonomous](#) nurse-midwives in late 1960s London. It's the best show for nursing on U.S. television. Netflix's *Virgin River* (2023), whose lead character is a smart, resourceful nurse practitioner (NP) in a small California town, will air a fifth season. The returning shows *Chicago Med* (NBC; Sept. 21) and *The Resident* (Fox; Sept. 20) mostly focus on physicians, but *Chicago Med* still has two major nurse characters with real skill and authority. *The Resident* has two minor nurse characters, but that drama has not been the same since the loss of nurse practitioner Nic Nevin. The CBS sitcom *Bob Hearts Abishola* (Sept. 19) has a competent Nigerian-born nurse as one of its two lead characters, but she remains eager to abandon nursing for medicine, reinforcing the [wannabe-physician stereotype](#). One show whose future seems uncertain is *Ratched* (Netflix); its 2020 first season featured the iconic battle-axe and other nurse stereotyping, mitigated somewhat by its characters' backstories and a few redemptive acts. Shows that surely are continuing to air include *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC; Oct. 6), *The Good Doctor* (ABC; Oct. 3), *New Amsterdam* (NBC; Sept. 20), and *Doogie Kamealoha, M.D.* (Disney+, mid-season). They all offer a vision of hospital care in which physicians do pretty much everything that matters. Please join us in encouraging Hollywood to offer more accurate portrayals of nursing!

[Call the Midwife](#)

[Virgin River](#)

[Chicago Med](#)

[The Resident](#)

[Bob Hearts Abishola](#)

[Grey's Anatomy](#)

[The Good Doctor](#)

[New Amsterdam](#)

[Doogie Kameāloha](#)

[Conclusion](#)



[Chicago Med](#)



[The Resident](#)



[Bob Hearts Abishola](#)



[Grey's Anatomy](#)



[Call the Midwife](#) (BBC/PBS; March 19, 2023)

The best current prime time show for nursing will return for a twelfth season in March 2023. The series will continue to portray about 10 nurse-midwife characters providing holistic care to a working-class community in late 1960s London. The show presents nurses as [autonomous](#) professionals who help pregnant women and others overcome a host of health, social, and economic challenges during an era of great transition. Recent episodes have included the new midwife Nancy Corrigan, giving the show the chance to highlight the expertise of the veteran midwives in a teaching context, as Hollywood hospital shows have traditionally done with physicians. The show has occasionally over-credited physicians, but the main impression it leaves is of nursing authority and life-saving skill. [See our webpage](#) featuring analyses of previous seasons, or [the show's website](#), where you can find episodes.

[Virgin River](#) (Netflix; 2023)

This drama follows rural California nurse practitioner Mel Monroe, and it will be back for a fifth season in 2023, having already aired four seasons in less than three years. The show is mostly about romance and personal intrigue, and so there are not many substantial clinical plotlines. Still, Mel has regularly shown advanced skills, managing issues including emergency care, prenatal care, and a physician colleague's regressive views of nursing. The fourth season probably had less clinical care than the prior ones. In episode 2 of that season, Mel's usually great psychosocial care faltered somewhat with a couple experiencing a stillbirth, owing to a past experience of her own. But otherwise she remained authoritative and sensitive in helping distressed patients and families, as in her counseling of a newly-diagnosed lupus patient in episode 5 and the partner of a rape survivor in episode 12. Mel provides expert technical care, but there is a focus on her adept and consistent psychosocial support for her community. For more information see [our review of season 1](#) and the [show's website](#).

[Chicago Med](#) (NBC; Sept. 21)

This Dick Wolf drama, returning for an eighth season, is mainly about a half dozen emergency physicians, and they direct most of the care we see. But for its first six seasons the show also had *three* major nurse characters, which, for Hollywood, is a glut. They were the competent ED nurse April

[The Good Doctor](#)



[New Amsterdam](#)



[Doogie Kameāloha, MD](#)

Sexton, the authoritative ED charge nurse Maggie Lockwood, and the strong hospital executive Sharon Goodwin, who is a nurse. These nurses played key roles in care. Unfortunately, the actress who plays April left at the end of the sixth season, and she has not been replaced, although the character has returned in season 8 for limited appearances focused on personal relationships. The show also has recurring minor nurse characters, although they tend to operate mainly as assistants, absorbing physician commands. Still, Goodwin and Lockwood remain critical, authoritative parts of the care the show portrays. In the seventh season, Goodwin initiated a criminal investigation into a kickback scheme involving one of the hospital physicians and a medical device company. Then, because the hospital board was not thrilled about her whistleblowing, she had to match wits with a management consultant brought in to keep tabs on her. Meanwhile, Lockwood continued to play the ED charge nurse role while attempting to help her daughter manage a physician residency—in the same ED. For more information see [our page on *Chicago Med*](#) or the [NBC website](#).

[The Resident](#) (Fox; Sept. 20)

This hospital drama, notable for presenting a few senior physicians as malevolent and corrupt, will return for a sixth season. It's mostly about a group of brilliant, renegade younger physicians led by Conrad Hawkins. But for years it also had arguably the strongest nurse character on U.S. television, NP Nic Nevin, who eventually married Conrad. Nic saved lives through her skill and advocacy, and she often operated as essentially a clinical peer of the physicians. Sadly, the actress who plays Nic left the series at the end of the fourth season, the show killed the character, and she has not been replaced by a nurse character. The show also has a couple minor staff nurse characters, ED nurse Ellen Hundley and OR nurse Jessica Moore, but they have tended to be no more than competent assistants to the roughly 10 physician characters who run the show. Season 5 episode 14 did have a somewhat amazing plotline about travel nursing, as Jessica actually threatened to leave for a much more lucrative contract and was only kept on board by a senior physician's direct negotiation of a much higher salary and better OR staffing. Of course, the plotline also told viewers that physicians manage nurses, and it's pretty unlikely that a staff nurse could engage in that kind of solo negotiation. Episode 8 had a brief but terrible plotline in which nurses were fawning pathetically over the newly available Conrad in what one physician called a "nurse feeding frenzy." For more information [see our page on *The Resident*](#), or [the Fox website](#).

[Bob Hearts Abishola](#) (CBS; Sept. 19)

One of the two main characters in this popular sitcom, returning for a fourth season, is Abishola, a skilled, no-nonsense hospital nurse who is originally from Nigeria and has now married Detroit sock company boss Bob. Abishola displays clinical knowledge and a holistic approach, and at times she has advocated for her patients. The show doesn't spend much time on clinical plotlines, and it lost points in early seasons for showing Abishola push her son to be a physician, rather than a nurse. But it was still generally helpful until the second season, when Abishola announced that she herself would become a physician, seemingly because of an obsession with status that the show suggests is a hallmark of Nigerians. Since then the show has reinforced the damaging wannabe-physician stereotype. There is also a minor recurring nurse character, the veteran charge nurse Gloria, but she mostly serves to highlight cultural differences and is unlikely to do much to improve the show's portrayal of nursing. For more information, see [our review of season 1](#) and the *Bob Hearts Abishola* page on the [CBS website](#).

[Grey's Anatomy](#) (ABC; Oct. 6)

Back for a 19th season, this prime time TV institution will again show more than a dozen surgeons providing all of the hospital care that matters, while nurses are generally meek, clueless [handmaidens](#) on the rare occasions when they appear at all. Actually, the veteran OR nurse BokHee does appear briefly in many episodes. But she rarely says anything—in fact, one of the questions “People also ask” about her on the Google site is “Does nurse BokHee ever speak?” In episode 18 of season 18, however, BokHee actually got a few short lines about a patient who was the target of an anti-Asian hate crime. But it was nothing about health care, and it was the surgeon Meredith Grey who provided the psychosocial care the patient got. In episode 14, a nurse named “Karen” helped a young physician's brother play a prank on him, then told the physician that the brother had “promised you wouldn't have me fired”—effectively reinforcing the damaging misconception that nurses report to physicians. For more information [see our Grey's Anatomy page](#) with analyses over the years or the [show's website](#) on ABC.

[The Good Doctor](#) (ABC; Oct. 3)

This drama about a brilliant young surgeon with autism is back for a sixth season. As with *Grey's*, the many physician characters on this show do everything that matters, and nurses

characters on this show do everything that matters, and nurse characters have generally been silent order-takers, on the rare occasions when they have appeared at all. And that's how it was for the first two thirds of the fifth season. But in the remaining episodes, there was a boomlet of nurse-related plotlines related to two minor nurse characters, although almost all of it was about the nurses' personal lives. One nurse, Jerome Martel, appeared in the episodes mostly as the boyfriend of Asher Wolke, one of the main physician characters and the estranged son of an Orthodox rabbi. In fairness, Martel was bright and witty. And in a small part of his first episode he showed clinical competence and strength, pushing Wolke to provide better psychosocial care to a patient. The role of the other nurse character, Dalisay Villanueva, was mostly as a target of domestic violence. Villanueva did have a small plotline where she struggled and finally succeeded in getting the attention of a senior physician for her ideas about the nursing schedule—as if physicians had anything to do with that. But Villanueva's main plotline was about her efforts to cope with her toxic boyfriend and the valiant efforts of her “boss,” the senior physician Audrey Lim, to help. The Villanueva plotlines told viewers that nurses report to physicians and have no [autonomy](#). And in the end, both nurses' roles were really about deepening the characterization of the physicians and achieving broader social goals, increasing awareness of domestic violence and LGBTQ issues. For more information [see our page on *The Good Doctor*](#) or the [show's website](#) on ABC.

[New Amsterdam](#) (NBC; Sept. 20)

This drama, focusing on the brilliant and innovative medical director at a struggling New York public hospital, will be back for a fifth and final season. Every major character is a physician and the plotlines revolve almost entirely around them. Two minor nurse characters have appeared, as trusted aides-de-camp of specific physician characters. ED nurse Casey Acosta has shown some skill in assisting and at times even challenging the chief ED physician Laura Bloom. Casey was astute and forceful in season 4 episode 8, when he figured out that Bloom had corruptly managed to secure the creation of an additional ED resident position for her girlfriend. Psychiatric nurse Gladys has played a similar role for the psychiatrist Iggy Frome, but even more than Casey, Gladys is there to serve her physician boss—sometimes she seems more like his secretary—and she rarely has direct interactions with patients. There were a few other notable, if brief, nurse character appearances in the fourth season. In episode 2, a nurse played a key role in holding an ICU together during an overwhelming shift, showing skill and some authority. In the end, she was persuaded to abandon her plans to quit by the physicians' help on that one shift, a typically half-baked effort

by the show to address real issues in clinical care. In episode 9, the trans ED nurse Kai provided sensitive care to a distressed trans refugee from Nigeria who had cancer, although as the episode went on, Kai disappeared and an oncologist gave all the psychosocial care—a good example of the show's overall approach, in which physicians do virtually all the important work. For more information on *New Amsterdam*, see our [review of season 1](#) and the show's [website](#).

***Doogie Kameāloha, MD* (Disney+; mid-season)**

This sitcom, an update of the 1989-1993 ABC drama *Doogie Howser, MD*, will return for a second season. As in the older show, the main character here is a whiz kid who has become a physician before turning 16. But the new twists include that Doogie is a Hawaiian woman. The first episode of season 1 found her basically performing every clinical task perfectly and knowing the answer to every clinical question, except how to cope with losing her first patient. For that she needed the help of her boss, who is also her mom! Every major clinical character on the show is a physician, and nurses seem to appear very briefly to receive commands, in silence. Predictably, the first episode also plot-checked the preschool show [Doc McStuffins](#), another Disney sitcom in which a precocious daughter was headed in the same direction as her physician mother. We hope *Doogie* at least avoids the *McStuffins* route of presenting a nurse character as a hippo doll. For more information see the [show's website](#).

Conclusion

The physician-centric narrative of most U.S. hospital shows is exemplified by dramas like [Grey's Anatomy](#) and [The Good Doctor](#), shows on which nurses tend to be [handmaidens](#), at best. In fairness, some shows, like [Chicago Med](#) and [The Resident](#), have at least offered substantial examples of nursing skill, advocacy, and even autonomy. But only a few— notably [Call the Midwife](#) and to some extent [Virgin River](#)—can be expected to offer a consistently good portrayal of nursing. Please join us in encouraging better portrayals of nursing!

Take Action!

With all these shows, we need your help! Please [sign all our petitions](#), speak to show creators, and consult our [Take Action page](#) for more ideas. Also, since we cannot monitor the world's media by ourselves, please watch one or more of the shows with a nursing element and let us know if you see a good or bad portrayal at info@truthaboutnursing.org. If we all work on a piece of the puzzle, we can build a society that understands the true worth of nursing, helping to strengthen

understands the true worth of nursing, helping to strengthen the profession so nurses can deliver better patient care.

[See all our Fall TV previews over the years—since 2003](#)

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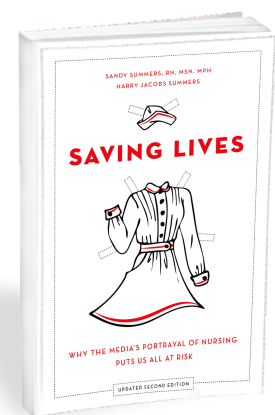
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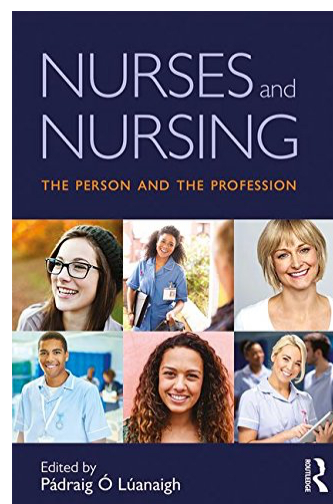
Society of Nursing. The updated second edition from Oxford University Press is now available! All donations and royalties go directly to support The Truth About Nursing, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Thank you for your support!

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Think about the future

New international text *Nurses and Nursing* leads off with chapter by Truth leaders

The exciting new textbook [*Nurses and Nursing: The Person and the Profession*](#) includes a chapter on nursing's image by Truth leaders Sandy Summers and Harry Jacobs Summers. Edited by Padraig O Luanagh, RN, EdD, the thought-provoking new textbook from Routledge "draws on international contributors with a range of backgrounds to explore, engage with and challenge readers in understanding the many aspects and elements that inform and influence contemporary nursing practice." Our chapter is "Nursing's public image: Toward a professional future." We thank Dr. Luanagh for the opportunity to be a part of this important new project. Please consider this book for your classes in professionalism, nursing and society, and nursing leadership. [Click here to request a free copy for review now!](#) See [more about the book here...](#)



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