

Kathlyn Peterson
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Good morning. My name is Kathlyn Peterson and I am excited to be here today to share my story of phased retirement.

When I was 50 years old, my husband and I moved to Madison, Wisconsin. Our children were grown, but I wasn't thinking about retirement. I had 30 years of experience as a medical and surgical transcriptionist and I wanted to work.

So I interviewed with a hospital and a local clinic. But then I interviewed with St. Marys Hospital Medical Center, a member of SSM Health Care. St. Marys really impressed me with what they had to offer. They seemed to be excited to have me and wanted me to start right away.

Fifteen years later, I am 65 years old and still enjoy working for St. Marys. I have a permanent, part-time position in Medical Records as a medical/surgical transcriptionist. I work on Monday, Tuesday, and every other Saturday. Often the hospital is extremely busy, so I also volunteer to work additional days to help out.

I will be 66 in June, and my children often ask me, "Mom, when are you going to retire?" I don't really know. Maybe in a few years. Maybe not. I'm not in a hurry. I love where I work, I love what I do.

I know that there are other things that I could be doing at my age: I could volunteer, do things at home, act more "retired." But working part-time keeps me active and healthy. And I get to continue working in the job that I love.

At St. Marys, I can choose to work part-time and still receive my pension. This is very important to me. My father-in-law died unexpectedly of a heart attack when he was 58 without enjoying any of his retirement benefits. My mother died at 65 and didn't enjoy any of hers either. Because St. Marys allows me to work part-time and still collect my pension, I am enjoying what I have worked so hard for – right now.

And so is my husband. He works part-time at St. Marys as a lab courier. He will be 70 in the fall and also collects his pension while working. As of this week, he is officially retired and planned to start working on an as-needed basis. But that will have to be postponed until next week because he is with me here in Washington today.

In addition to the benefit of collecting my pension, I also enjoy full health insurance benefits at St. Marys. Employees have to work 16 hours per week in

order to receive full health benefits. Other facilities require at least 24, 32, or even 40 hours per week.

This benefit is especially valuable to me because I survived kidney cancer 13 years ago. My medical history would make it extremely expensive for me to purchase insurance independently. And because of my insurance coverage through the hospital, I do not need supplemental insurance.

In addition to pension and health benefits, I have found the hospital to be very flexible in their scheduling. If I can't work on one of my regular days, I can switch to a day later in the week.

Not all of my friends can say that. My friend, Jan, is a 66-year old RN with a local physician group. It is hard for her to switch her days. Not only is her job not as flexible, she cannot draw her pension until she fully retires.

But perhaps the most important benefit is the personal satisfaction of knowing that I am making a difference. Experienced transcriptionists are hard to find and there are always new things to learn – names of new drugs, new terminology. It takes a while to become established. So I know that my contribution of 45 years of experience really helps the hospital.

But that's what older workers bring to the table. They bring experience. They are also dependable, reliable, and loyal.

St. Marys and SSM Health Care want the best employees, regardless of their age. So they bend over backwards to work with us.

As older employees, we are given choices about our pension, hours, and medical benefits. It's a great environment -- we feel valued and appreciated

But it's not just the employees and the hospital who benefit from this relationship. Most importantly, it's the patients who benefit. Patients have the happiest, most experienced staff caring for them. And that's why we're here: because our patients deserve the best.

I'm proud of the exceptional care that we provide and the honors we've received, including becoming the first health care system to be recognized with the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

Thank you for allowing me to be here today to share my insight.

