

Leader to Watch

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Cheri Clancy, MSN, MS, RN, NE-BC, is assistant vice president for Patient Experience at New Jersey-based Kennedy Health, an integrated healthcare delivery system providing a full continuum of health-care services, ranging from acute-care hospitals to outpatient and wellness programs. Kennedy Health has 3 campuses in southern New Jersey: Cherry Hill, Stratford, and Washington Township. Its mission is to enhance the health status of the communities it serves, and the system has an educational commitment as the Principal Teach Affiliate of Rowan University-School of Osteopathic Medicine. Kennedy provides the largest nonpublic physician training program in the state of New Jersey. The system is licensed for 607 beds, employs more than 4000 associates, and provides privileges for over 900 physicians. Ms. Clancy was hired in February 2014 to engage staff and physicians in activities and changes to improve the patient experience. She is an author, educator, and national leadership speaker and has been a member of AONE since 2011, where she volunteers on the AONE Editorial Committee.

JSC: What attracted you to nursing, and what were your early experiences in the field?

CC: I've always been interested in health and wellness. My mother worked for many years in the health field as a medical assistant, and encouraged me by modeling unconditional acceptance and caring for others. I learned from this and translated it into a career in nursing. I started my clinical career in the special care nursery unit; I loved helping compromised infants grow and develop. I knew almost from the beginning that I wanted to pursue a leadership role and took a circuitous pathway as the "epitome of a nontraditional nurse." I worked as a recruiter and an educator in a university setting, then as director of nursing for pediatric ambulatory practices, and now, am the leading efforts toward improving the patient experience at Kennedy. I guess I've always enjoyed the challenge of leading teams and connecting with people—that has been the thread that has lead me to what I am doing today.

JSC: What prepared you to become a nurse leader?

CC: Mainly through formal and informal leadership education, as well as some risk-taking. Didactic theory in leadership built the foundation, and the application of leading others helped solidify the concept. In other words, we can read all we want about politics, power, and conflict in the workplace, but not until you are positioned to deal with certain situations, can you then understand the tie in of broader terms, such as organizational culture or mission and values. Another example is emotional intelligence. You have to learn to apply emotional intelligence to your work. You do this through recognizing that staff around you has "other lives," and they are providing you constant clues to how they are doing, or how those lives are affecting their behavior. In other words, in the classroom, you learned how to understand the definitions of the concept. In the workplace, you apply the concept and learn how to adapt.

JSC: What do you consider to be the major challenges for nurses in healthcare leadership positions today?

CC: I think one of the major challenges is the turbulence in healthcare. For example, value-based purchasing, healthcare reform, and the IOM's *Future of Nursing* report require a different focus, and a different set of "lenses" to see the future. We need to be more proactive than reactive, yet we also need to never lose focus on patient safety, clinical quality, and associate engagement. Some nurse leaders are fearful because they know their educational requirements are changing to be maximally qualified to deal with topics such as generational influences, staff accountability to do hourly rounding, the laws and regulations that govern how nurses practice, or the myriad of other influences that affect the work environment every day. Yet some don't take advantage of the opportunity to further their education until a goal is set by senior nursing leadership that marks a bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN) or master's degree a minimum requirement to remain in their job. The IOM report on the *Future of Nursing* has provided a blueprint for preparing for these changes and nurse leaders need to be proactive in preparing themselves and their organizations for the future.



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