

# Getting to know incoming ANA President Ernest Grant

This summer, Ernest Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN, was elected to serve as president of the American Nurses Association (ANA) effective in January 2019. This is one of many firsts for Grant and professional nursing. He was the first African-American man to serve as ANA vice president, which is his current role, and to earn a PhD in nursing from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. He also was the first African-American male nurse to lead the North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA) as its president.

An internationally known expert on burn care and fire safety, Grant currently is the director of the acclaimed burn prevention program at the NC Jaycee Burn Center at the University of North Carolina (UNC) Hospitals in Chapel Hill. He's received numerous awards, including being presented with the Nurse of the Year Award in 2002 by former President George W. Bush for his work treating burn victims from the World Trade Center site.

Here are some excerpts from our recent conversation.

### **What do you think about making history as the first man to serve as ANA president?**

I've never thought of myself as being a person to make history on this grand a scale. I'm extremely excited and delighted to be given the opportunity. I know I stand on the shoulders of many giants—both men and women—who have either served as ANA president, ran for president, or supported the profession of nursing. The title of my campaign was "Moving Forward," and I look forward to guiding the organization so we're prepared and proactive in addressing any changes and challenges in healthcare and in the nursing profession.

### **Can you briefly describe your leadership journey? Did you choose leadership roles or did they choose you?**

It was a combination. Sometimes people see leadership qualities and skills in you that perhaps you don't see in yourself. For me, it [the leadership journey] started when I was a staff nurse at the bedside and was chosen to lead and participate in various committees in the hospital. After a friend told me that being a truly professional nurse means joining your professional organization, I became very involved in NCNA and ANA. One chairmanship led to another and then to board positions. I found it really satisfying to take on challenges and make a difference in other ways. All the leadership skills I gained from serving in nursing and other organizations—such as listening to various perspectives, learning to become a consensus-builder, and in some cases, recognizing that you have to take charge and make difficult decisions—have brought me to where I am today.



Ernest Grant

### **What will be your top priorities as ANA president?**

One is to advance the nursing profession and healthcare by fostering high standards. I want to make sure nurses are prepared and have the educational opportunities and tools they need to do their jobs efficiently and have the best outcomes for their patients in the face of healthcare changes.

Another is to advocate for legislation and policies that have a positive impact on nurses and the public. As legislative proposals come forward that impact access to quality, affordable care, it's important that ANA continues to advocate for healthcare for all, not just the privileged few. My mother always said, "The good Lord gave us one body, and we need to do our best to take care of it." That is certainly true, which is why we must educate the public about their healthcare, and the importance of continued insurance coverage for preventive measures. And we need to inform and encourage the public to contact their elected representatives and others who are making decisions about their care and coverage.

I want to encourage diversity in the nursing profession. In 2015, only 19.5% of RNs in the workforce identified themselves as minorities, and only about 12% of baccalaureate and graduate nursing students in 2016 were men. It's important that the nursing workforce reflects the diversity of our patient populations to increase our ability to provide the culturally competent, quality care patients need, especially when they are most vulnerable. And welcoming people from diverse backgrounds into our profession with their unique perspectives and experiences will only strengthen it.

As I visit states, I want to talk with younger nurses and new graduates to see what they want and need, and what ANA can do to help them grow.

### **When it comes to healthcare, what are you passionate about?**

Most of my nursing career I've spent working with patients with burns and preventing those injuries from occurring in others. Every day when I go home, I feel like I've made a difference somewhere – either in the life of someone or in the nursing profession. It can be a patient that I've taken care of at the bedside, fighting for legislation to ensure that people live in a safe environment, or educating consumers about fire safety, such as installing smoke alarms that will give them that early warning. Or it can be sharing the knowledge I have with people in less fortunate countries that do not have the resources we have.

I also am passionate about advocating at the state and national levels to make sure nurses have safe

work environments, and that all nurses can practice to the full extent of their educational level.

### **What's your future vision for nurses and the nursing profession?**

I want all nurses to feel pride in being a nurse and seeing it as a lifetime profession, and not just a job that pays the bills. I believe nurses everywhere should be given the respect they deserve, and that means that we also must respect each other.

Nurses need to embrace technology, because it is the future. At UNC we have robots running down the halls doing tasks like delivering patient trays, and picking up specimens and trash. There is no way that robots will replace nurses – not our empathy or critical thinking. But we need to see new technology as something that will help us provide better care and lead to better patient outcomes.

### **Closing thoughts?**

Whenever I talk with students, I first tell them to join ANA and their state nurses association. Then I tell them that I've never regretted choosing the nursing profession. I can't think of any other job that can make me feel the way I do.

And finally, when people see this big guy coming— I'm 6 feet 6—I want them to know I'm a gentle giant.

— Interview by Susan Trossman, RN, a writer-editor at ANA.



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