



Christine Pacini

The power of perspective

Christine Pacini wants nurses' expertise to drive change.

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CHRISTINE PACINI, PhD, MSN, BSN, has spent her career—as a staff nurse, professor, administrator, and executive leader—making sure nurses' perspectives are valued in every aspect of healthcare. Currently a professor at the University of Detroit Mercy, she served as dean of the university's College of Health Professions and the McAuley School of Nursing from 2010 to 2017. Before that, she was director of professional development, research, and innovation for nursing at the University of Pennsylvania Health System in Philadelphia and has worked in a similar capacity at other organizations. The American Nurses Association spoke with Pacini about empowering nurses and supporting the profession.

How have your varied nursing roles informed your career?

My executive leadership experience in the practice arena forged and strengthened an intellect of patient-centricity in all that I do. Whether one teaches or serves as an academic administrator or executive leader, we must never lose sight of the core values and work of nursing practice. As a faculty member, I use storytelling to facilitate student comprehension of the curriculum. My practice experiences help me ensure that we prepare individuals who are engaged, demonstrate intellect, advocate, and implement the highest level of nursing care.

What can nurse leaders do to address the nursing faculty shortage?

The nursing faculty shortage is fueled by several forces coming together to get in the way of securing appropriately prepared individuals with clinical and functional expertise. Frequently, salary is a barrier. When an advanced practice RN with sufficient credentials applies for a faculty position in an academic setting, that individual will likely experience a significant pay cut.

Going forward, we may want to consider partnerships with clinical facilities that support a model of “joint appointment.” Innovations

like this might provide mutual opportunities for contributions that benefit both organizations.

You taught a course called History and Politics of Nursing. What did you want students to gain from it?

It was my perspective that nursing as a “force” wasn't sufficiently engaging in policy development, influence, and advocacy. As the largest professional group in the healthcare sector, our voices and agendas haven't been sufficiently attended to in the political arena and within policy development sectors. Fundamentally, it was my interest to inform and motivate entry-level nursing professionals to adopt a larger view of the work of nursing and their obligations to advocacy and agency in the policy sector.

You serve on a number of boards and hold leadership positions in nursing organizations. Why is it important for nurse leaders to be involved?

It is critical that the unique perspective of nursing isn't overlooked or dismissed. In particular, opportunities to serve on hospital boards are beneficial. The medical perspective is well-represented. However, nurses' perspectives and experience at the front lines also need to substantively drive priorities and decision-making. As hospital boards juggle priorities and demands, strong nursing leaders' voices are essential so that the patient experience is central.

What leadership lessons can you share?

Surround yourself with individuals who think and process differently than you. There is much to be gained from recruiting and hiring colleagues who provide challenges to assumptions. Avoid reacting. Take time to reflect. If one is faced with a challenging situation that provokes a defensive posture, take time to interpret what the real message might be. Articulate passion and pride for the work of nursing. Be informed and continually express the importance of the profession and the discipline.

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