

Effective advocacy

Katie Boston-Leary wants nurses to shape the future.



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KATIE BOSTON-LEARY, PhD, MBA, MHA, RN, NEA-BC, is director of nursing programs at the American Nurses Association (ANA). She is also the ANA liaison to the National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing and a contributor to the *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 4th Edition* work group. Boston-Leary has been a nurse for almost 30 years, moving steadily into leadership roles as she earned her advanced degrees. After years as an OR nurse and a chief nursing officer, she came to ANA to do something broader in the realm of social change. She continues to serve as an adjunct professor at the University of Maryland. She spoke to ANA recently about her work.

Tell us about your role in the National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing.

Members of the Commission include ANA, along with representatives from multi-ethnic, education, and leadership nursing associations. I work to advance the Commission's efforts to shine a bright light on racism in nursing at the systemic and interpersonal level with the goal of increasing inclusion, diversity, and equity. Ultimately, nursing will be stronger for addressing what's happening within the profession, and patients and communities will be better served for it.

What insights have you learned so far?

It's been interesting for me, as a nurse who is a Black indigenous person of color, to see a lot happening now that you would have expected to see in the 1960s. Some of the things I experienced that I thought were unique to me, I now know have happened to other people. Culturally, many of the issues we're dealing with in practice started in nursing school. There were expectations about certain groups of people and how they would perform compared to others. Nurses of color weren't given the tools they needed to succeed. That was very revealing.

The first thing nurse leaders have to do to address racism in their organizations is to listen. That requires humility and being open to learning.

How does the revised *Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 4th Edition* reflect changes in the profession?

Our goal was to compile and construct a progressive body of work that would not only address where nursing is today, but where nursing is going and where it needs to be. The revised definition of nursing elevates the fact that nursing is an art and a science.

We also created a new standard, advocacy, which looks at how nursing relates to social justice. Nurses need to elevate their voices and not treat advocacy as something that sits outside of what we do. Nurses were involved in the suffrage movement and, during that same time, the professionalization of nursing, so we've always been in this space. We need to remember that and take it on as part of our practice.

How will the COVID-19 experience inform nurse leadership?

In disaster preparedness, after an emergency event, an after-action review must be completed to discuss lessons learned. Leaders must be open to hearing suggestions to improve future response. Because the pandemic has been such a protracted event, it's going to take time to assess what happened and the aftereffects. Nurse leaders need to really listen to understand how the pandemic affected nurses, and then let that drive what happens next. All the data are showing that mental health is going to be a big issue. We need to help nurses take the time to take care of themselves. And leave those channels open for continued communication and feedback.

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Interview by Elizabeth Moore, MFA, a writer at ANA.