



Kellie Rodriguez

Success is not final, failure is not fatal...

It takes courage to keep growing and achieve your vision.

By Kellie Rodriguez, MSN, MBA, RN, CDCES

THE rich and evolving field of nursing provides a variety of ways to positively impact the people we care for and the organizations charged with that mission. The COVID-19 pandemic put a spotlight on the resiliency, commitment, and passion of nurses for the work we do, even when faced with a high degree of self-risk. As nurse leaders, the ongoing question we can ask ourselves is, “How can I have the greatest impact in my role?” Whether it’s caring for the person in front of me or for a population of people needing access to and delivery of quality care, we also can ask, “How can professional development help us work more effectively or efficiently to drive needed change?”

Most of my career has been focused on caring for people living with diabetes. It’s been a humbling and rewarding journey. At the heart of my professional decision-making is my stepfather, who lived courageously with Type 1 diabetes for almost 60 years. Diabetes had a profound impact on his life with bilateral amputations, retinopathy, and eventually cardiac complications taking his life. The chronic and unrelenting nature of the disease helped me realize that diabetes isn’t managed through a prescription, diet education, and provision of a glucose meter. It’s managed by understanding the lived world of the person with the disease so that you can best support their ability to integrate clinical recommendations effectively. I learned quickly in my career that inequities exist in access, delivery, and outcomes of care for people with diabetes, despite the efforts of healthcare organizations and providers.

One way nurse leaders can make a difference in patient care, for people with diabetes or any condition, is to influence how care is designed and delivered. For me, this meant learning more about the business side of

healthcare through a 2-year executive health MBA in health sector management and policy at the University of Miami. I completed the program despite having three children under the age of 5, a full-time job, and a national board role. I was one of only two nurses in a cohort of 23 students, who were primarily physicians. Course components included subjects such as finance and managerial accounting, marketing, organizational leadership, statistical analysis, legal aspects of healthcare, and public policy. The experience allowed me to form lifelong connections with similar-minded health professionals, which remain a rich ongoing resource.

The MBA provided a strong foundation for my current professional roles, both in terms of knowledge and confidence. It helped me achieve my current position as director of the global diabetes program at Parkland Health and Hospital System in Dallas, where I have responsibility for diabetes care delivery design, implementation, and evaluation across inpatient, specialty care, primary care, and community areas. The degree also has supported my role as this year’s national president for the Association of Diabetes Care and Education Specialists, driving both the vision and strategic priorities for the specialty, as well as securing our next chief executive officer.

Establishing professional goals and the path for obtaining them is fundamental to achieving career aspirations. As Winston Churchill said, “Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts.”

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