



The Power of Giving: Why Nursing Philanthropy Matters More Than Ever

By Jayne Willis, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, CENP – President, Florida Nurses Foundation

As the newly elected president of the Florida Nurses Foundation, I am deeply honored to lead an organization rooted in compassion, commitment, and community. At the heart of our work lies a powerful force—nursing philanthropy. It's more than charitable giving; it's a movement of nurses and supporters investing in the future of health care, empowering nurses, and ultimately improving the well-being of our communities and our state.

Philanthropy in nursing isn't a new concept. Nurses have always given—our time, skills, and hearts. However, structured, intentional philanthropic support is now more essential than ever. The healthcare landscape is rapidly evolving, and with it are the challenges and opportunities facing the nursing profession. Here are the three most important reasons why nursing philanthropy matters and why we must continue to invest in it.

1. Empowering the Next Generation of Nurses

The nursing workforce is facing a critical shortage. The need is urgent in Florida, where our aging population and healthcare needs are intensifying. According to a report commissioned by the Florida Hospital Association and the Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida, the state is expected to have a shortfall of approximately 59,100 nurses by 2035.

Nursing philanthropy can play a role in closing this gap. Through scholarships, grants, and educational support, we can remove financial barriers that prevent aspiring nurses from completing their education. These funds are not just a financial lifeline—they are a message of belief in the dreams and potential of tomorrow's nursing leaders.

At the Florida Nurses Foundation, we see firsthand how even modest scholarships can change lives. One scholarship can make the difference between a student graduating on time or dropping out due to financial strain. By investing in education, we are helping to ensure a robust nursing workforce and creating a ripple effect of compassionate, competent care across our state and beyond.

2. Advancing Nursing Research and Innovation

Nurses are innovators. Every day, they identify challenges in care delivery and develop creative solutions to improve patient outcomes. Yet, compared to other areas of healthcare, nursing research has historically been underfunded.

Philanthropy can fill that gap. Through targeted funding for nursing-led research, we support studies that improve patient care, enhance safety, and inform policy. Philanthropic dollars allow nurses to ask bold questions and pursue meaningful answers.

Moreover, investing in nursing research elevates the profession as a whole. It reinforces the critical role nurses play not just in bedside care, but in shaping healthcare systems and policy. At the Florida Nurses Foundation, we are committed to expanding our support of research grants to empower nurse scholars across Florida to lead the way in innovation and discovery.

3. Building a Culture of Giving and Leadership

Nursing has always been grounded in service. But philanthropy gives us a unique way to lead beyond the bedside by fostering a culture of generosity and investment in our profession.

When nurses give—whether through time, mentorship, or financial support—they are shaping the future of nursing. They become role models and advocates for sustainable progress. Encouraging nurses to see themselves as philanthropists helps build a stronger, more united profession that proactively addresses its needs.

“When we uplift nurses through philanthropy, we don't just transform individual careers—we elevate the entire profession and strengthen the health of our communities.”

Over the past few years, nurses across our state have faced incredible challenges, including natural disasters that left many in urgent need. Thanks to generous donations to the Foundation, we've provided crucial support to some of those affected. Now more than ever, we're calling on nurses who can give — to help uplift and care for their fellow nurses in times of crisis.

As president of the Florida Nurses Foundation, one of my goals is to grow this culture of giving. We must inspire individuals and institutions to recognize the value of investing in nursing. Hospitals, healthcare companies, and community partners can support scholarships, continuing education, and leadership development. Together, we can build a resilient, empowered nursing workforce equipped to meet the challenges of tomorrow. ■

Dr. Jayne Willis joined the faculty of the University of Central Florida (UCF) College of Nursing in August 2021, following her retirement from Orlando Health after a distinguished 40-year career. Before retiring, she served as Vice President and Chief Nurse Executive for the Orlando Health system. At UCF, she teaches primarily in the Executive Doctor of Nursing Practice program and is passionate about investing in the development of nursing leaders. Dr. Willis holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Florida State University, a Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Florida, and a Doctor of Nursing Practice in Executive Nursing Practice

from the University of Central Florida. She is double board-certified as a Nurse Executive-Advanced by the American Nurses Credentialing Center and as a Certified Executive in Nursing Practice by the American Organization of Nurse Executives. An active leader in the nursing community, Dr. Willis is the President of the Florida Nurses Foundation and serves on the board of the Florida Organization for Nursing Leadership. She is a Team Leader for the Nursing Action Coalition of Florida and on the Governance Committee of the Theta Epsilon chapter of Sigma. Recognizing her leadership, the Florida Nurses Association honored her with the FNA

Presidents Award in 2023. In 2024, she received the Outstanding Alumni Leadership Award from the University of Central Florida. Community service is a deep passion for Dr. Willis. She is a long-standing board member and former chair of the American Heart Association, which recognized her with the Legacy Chairman's Circle Award in 2022. She also serves as Vice President of the Executive Board for the Orlando Ballet, as a Board member of the Central Florida Women's League, and as a Community Board member for the Florida State University College of Medicine.

Florida Nurses Foundation Welcomes Two New Scholarship Endowments

The Florida Nurses Foundation is proud to announce the endowment of two new scholarships that will support the education and growth of Florida's future nurses.



The **Dr. Billie Walker Schmucker Scholarship**, established by the Sarasota County Nurse Practitioners, honors Dr. Schmucker's legacy as an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse in mental health. This scholarship will be given annually to an APRN student in Sarasota or Manatee

counties, with priority given to those in mental health who plan to practice in the state and are active members of a local Nurse Practitioner group. If no eligible candidate is identified, APRN students in any county in Florida will be considered.

The **FNSA Carolyn Keister Scholarship** has been created in honor of Carolyn Keister, who dedicated years of service as a faculty advisor to the Florida State College at Jacksonville chapter of the National Student Nurses' Association. This scholarship will be awarded through the Florida Nursing Students Association (FNSA) and maintained by the Florida Nurses Foundation to support nursing students who demonstrate strong leadership and a commitment to professional development.



These scholarships represent the Foundation's ongoing commitment to invest in the future of nursing and honor those who have shaped the profession. Endowing a scholarship is a meaningful way to give back—creating a lasting legacy that supports nursing education and strengthens the profession for generations to come.

For more information or to donate, please visit www.floridanurses.org/Foundation. ■

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