

A Legacy of Service and Vision for ONA's Future

Jane Nelson, CAE



For the past 25 years, I have had the privilege of working alongside the Oklahoma Nurses Association Board and our dedicated members to advance nursing across our state. It has been an extraordinary journey—one filled with collaboration, growth, and a shared commitment to strengthening the profession we love. These years have passed quickly, but the impact of our collective work is lasting. Together, we have built meaningful opportunities for nurses to connect, learn, and advocate. Our annual convention and the Oklahoma Nurse publication continue to serve as cornerstones of professional engagement. Our membership has grown, and we have expanded our support for both new-to-practice nurses and experienced professionals. While there is still important work ahead, I am deeply proud of what we have accomplished as a community.

After thoughtful reflection, I have shared with the Board my intention to retire at the end of 2026. As part of this transition, the Board has identified Kristen Vencl as the next CEO/Executive Di-

rector. Many of you already know Kristen through her outstanding work as ONA's Event Manager over the past three and a half years. In the coming months, she will serve as CEO/Executive Director Designate, working closely with me to ensure a smooth and seamless leadership handoff.

As we prepare for this transition, one of my primary areas of focus is advancing modernization, inclusivity, and member engagement. Working with our members and the Board, we are defining what the next era of ONA should look like. Our goal is to build a financially vibrant, member-centered organization capable of adapting to rapid changes in healthcare, workforce trends, and the evolving needs of nurses. Additional updates will be shared through our electronic member newsletter and the House of Delegates as this work continues.

ONA—like nursing itself—is not one-size-fits-all. It represents nurses across every specialty, practice setting, and role. Each nurse contributes uniquely to the health and well-being of our communities. Our collective power grows when we

show up—not only for our patients, but for one another. Whether through membership, volunteering, advocacy, or leadership, involvement in ONA is an act of empowerment. It affirms that nurses deserve a seat at the tables where decisions are made and that our voices matter.

Participation in ONA strengthens our professional identity by creating opportunities for leadership development, education, mentorship, and connection across the full spectrum of nursing practice. When we support each other, we reinforce nursing as a trusted, respected, and essential profession—today and for generations to come.

As we look ahead, our shared mission remains clear: to advance all of nursing and ensure that nurses maintain their rightful place in shaping the future of healthcare. I remain fully committed to supporting this work and helping position ONA for continued success in the years to come. ■

What I Wish Someone Told Me My First Year as a Nurse

By: Elyssa Jones, BSN, RN, Emerging Nurse Director

My first code as a new graduate nurse brought on so many different emotions. Everything around me felt overwhelming, and in that moment, I remember feeling underqualified. At the same time, I also felt prepared because I had recognized that my patient was declining quickly and had time to call for help. I had help

at the bedside because I asked for it when things started to feel off. My supervisor immediately came to the bedside, along with two other nurses who had more experience than I did.

That experience taught me one of the most important things I wish someone had told me my first year: asking ques-

tions and asking for help does not make you a bad nurse. It makes you a safer one.

As a new nurse, it is easy to feel like you must prove yourself or look like you have it all together. The truth is, none of us know everything when we first start. Nursing school prepares you in many ways, but it cannot fully prepare you for the reality of