



Association for Leadership Science in Nursing

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Interview with Shelly Fischer, PhD, RN, CNE, Assistant Professor, Adjunct, University of Colorado College of Nursing and Co-chair ALSN Membership Committee

Tell us a little about your career path, background, and interest in advancing the science of nursing leadership.

Shelly graduated with her BSN from the University of Iowa amid a significant nursing shortage in 1982. She went from new grad to charge nurse of a 32-bed neurotrauma unit in six short months. She then assumed a Director role with two years of nursing experience, and has been in leadership roles ever since, serving in acute care, rehab, and long-term care. Shelly completed my Master's (Clinical Nurse Specialist) degree at the University of Colorado in 1995 and PhD (Systems/Quality Outcomes) in 2014. "My interest in the science of nursing leadership has evolved from a very narrow view of learning what I need to know to be an effective leader to feeling passionate about helping EVERY NURSE learn what they need to know to be an effective leader. Leadership is an essential competency for all effective nurses."

How did you hear about ALSN and what has been your experience with this organization?

A colleague suggested that Shelly consider joining ALSN. She presented at the first annual meeting she attended and says was "wowed" by the people in attendance. "In the audience were the authors and researchers I was citing in my research studies! While the experience of presenting to my gurus was daunting, I knew that this group was where I wanted to be as I aimed to influence the body of science and knowledge related to nursing leadership. I have learned so very much from my affiliation with these people and this organization."

How did you become interested in the study of nursing leadership and how has ALSN influenced this interest?

Shelly says her passion for nursing leadership largely emerges from recognition of the profound influence nurse leaders have on clinical outcomes as well as on the workforce they serve. “Great leaders move us forward both personally and professionally, while incompetent or ignorant leaders harm people and the profession. My goal has become finding ways to teach Transformational Leadership behaviors at all levels of nursing, from the bedside to the boardroom.”

One of our goals is to create a better balance between academic and practice partners. What are your ideas on how this could be accomplished?

“As we develop more partnerships and affiliations between academic settings and practice, shared understanding of our equal but different contributions and value emerges. Shared roles and responsibilities between academia and practice will advance a common view of nursing leadership between the two.” Shelly believes the organization should continue to include representatives of both settings in all committees and on the board to assure first-hand input for value of membership for leaders in both settings and encourage the development of partnerships among academic and practice organizations. “Our research agenda should include methods for measurement and evaluation of partnership effectiveness.”

What would you say to nurse leaders in academia or practice who are considering joining ALSN right now?

Shelly did not pause for a moment as she shared “ALSN is my favorite nursing leadership organization and the best annual conference for me to attend. It is small enough for individuals to have an influence on the direction and outcomes of the organization yet large enough to make a difference in nursing leadership globally. We have tremendous potential to become THE organization to serve the shared goals and needs of nursing leadership, with views from both academia and practice, by continuing to grow our culture of inclusivity and appreciation for diversity in our membership.”

Well said, Shelly, well said!