



Association for Leadership Science in Nursing

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An interview with Catherine Alexander,

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

“I started my career as an oncology nurse and have held a variety of positions primarily in the acute care setting. In 2012 when my oldest child left for college, I experienced a “now or never moment” and decided to go back to school to get my doctorate. My goal was to study the link between leadership and quality. After graduation I was selected for a post-doctoral fellowship through the National VA Quality Scholars Program. The 3-year fellowship set the foundation for building my knowledge and skills in quality improvement science and systems improvement. I was honored to work with some amazing people during the fellowship and beyond (QSEN) who supported and continue to support my desire to understand QI practices at the frontline of care. Several publications on barriers and facilitators of QI and the development of a QI competency tool resulted from these collaborations.”

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

“I learned about ALSN from a colleague when we were working on a research project together. She knew I had an interest in leadership research and suggested I join the organization.”

How did you become interested in the study of nursing leadership?

“Leadership concepts have always been of interest of mine as far back as my BSN program many decades ago. I still remember our senior leadership class when the Dean stressed how important it

was for all of us to get involved in a professional organization and engage in legislative issues that impact our profession.

From the start of my career, I learned the important connection between leadership and patient outcomes. I knew there was a critical link between the two, but was unclear about why and how it mattered. While in graduate school I decided to focus my capstone project on the history of nursing leadership and the skills and education needed for the 21st century. It was my very first published article in the Nursing Administration Quarterly!

In my doctoral program I wanted to know more about executive nurse behaviors using the theory of authentic leadership. I interviewed 17 CNO's from across the country and asked them how they operationalize the four constructs (self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, moral code) in their leadership roles. Talking to those CNO's left an indelible mark on my career! The study was later published in the Journal of Nursing Administration. Another proud moment in my career."

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

"I have been such an advocate of academic and practice partnerships over my career. I never understood why this has been a struggle for our profession. It seems to be a "win-win" for our profession. The one area we could make headway tomorrow is engaging students in ongoing improvement projects across the health care system.

What a place to learn these critical skills and advance our practice! These projects have so many components to them- a student can pick just one area of interest and be of incredible value to the health care team. For example – bring back all the existing evidence on pressure injuries and present it to a QI committee to inform the next steps in the process.

What else would you like the ALSN membership to know about you?

I am thrilled to be working on research with such highly accomplished nurses from across the country in expanding nursing science in leadership. It truly a gift to belong to this organization.

I look forward to opportunity to begin testing implementation strategies that inform nursing leadership science. We have gaps that must be filled especially on the practice side. ALSN can be a leader in this effort.