



Association for Leadership Science in Nursing

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# member SPOTLIGHT



**An interview with Michelle Acorn, DNP, NP PHC/Adult, MN/ACNP, BScN/PHCNP, FCAN, FAAN, GCNC**

Michelle Acorn is the Chief Nursing officer at the International Council of Nursing where she oversees 130 national nursing associations around the world. These associations include around 28 million nurses. In addition, Michelle teaches at the University of Toronto in the NP program and at Athabasca University in Alberta.

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

I'm the poster nurse for life-long learning! I began nursing with diploma preparation and have continued my education at the post-doctorate level. I think of myself still as a clinician. I'm certified as both a primary care and an adult nurse practitioner (NP) and hold a Doctorate of NP/Nursing Practice. I first implemented my NP clinical practice role in the emergency setting and then as a hospitalist. My clinical contribution legacy is pioneering an NP-led community hospital model of care, where the NPs are the most responsible provider for older adult patient care from admission to discharge and enhancing team capacity.

I then became the Government Chief Nursing Officer for the largest providence in Canada—Ontario. In this position, I provided strategic, clinical, and technical expertise on everything related to nursing. After three years, I left the ministry executive leadership role to become the inaugural Chief Nurse of the International Council of Nurses (ICN).

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I believe advancing the science of nursing leadership is an imperative for the profession. We must deliberately integrate and connect nurse leaders across the world to support systems that promote the health of our population and our profession.

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

I did not know about ALSN until recently. A colleague told me about ALSN, and I immediately joined. I realized the importance of membership in ALSN during my time at Case Western Reserve as a Miller Fellow. I am currently in the Coldiron Senior Nurse Executive Fellowship Program at Case Western Reserve and have learned more about the impact of ALSN through this program. I'm looking forward to attending and networking at the annual ALSN conference this year.

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

I was competent and confident as a clinician. I was competent as a leader, but I lacked confidence. Like many leaders, I struggled with imposter syndrome. I started to infuse myself in nursing leadership learning opportunities. I moved from novice to expert in different sectors. No matter which setting I found myself in, I learned that nursing leadership is about relevance, connection, valued contributions, passion, and momentum. I think ALSN will open further opportunities to learn different leadership styles, make new connections, and synergize with other nurse leaders.

I strive hard to remain relevant and best informed as a Nurse Executive. For me, it's important to be connected clinically, academically, and as a leader. It's important to walk the talk, be a role model, be a mentor, and remain teachable.

**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?**

I think there are opportunities to combine clinical and academia to leverage innovative practice models. The World Health Organization has outlined four global strategic directions for nursing and midwifery (2021 -2025) to contribute to achieving universal health coverage and population health. The evidence-based practices and policy priorities focus on four pillars: leadership, education, service delivery, and jobs. If we are to accomplish this, we need to consider a redesign of academic positions, to include the opportunity to practice clinically. Value should be based on mentorship, impact, and support of the workforce across systems. Academic, leadership and clinical practice partnership leveraging doctorally prepared (PhD & DNP) expertise, unique contributions, and synergy for the global health work force is ideal.

What are three things about you that you would like the ALSN membership to know about you?

1. I practice clinically, academically, and as an executive nurse leader. This makes me a bit of a unicorn!
2. I am passionate about life-long learning. It motivates me and makes my career not feel like work.
3. Personally, I am married with four children and 3 grandchildren. I love driving my Harley Davison and my corvette. I love to travel!

*Interview conducted by Dr. Kay Kennedy*