Leading the Way to Community Care

AS ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR ACADEMICS for the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing, Deborah Ward oversees the education, research and community engagement missions of the School of Nursing with the goal to transform health care through nursing education and research. She guides the creation of curricula for the School of Nursing, connects with community partners to design community-based programs and leads faculty development.

The first faculty member recruited to the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis and a nationally recognized expert in health policy, Ward brings to the school a passion for Healthy Systems and Healthy People.

Further details about the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis and Associate Dean for Academics Ward are available at http://nursing.ucdavis.edu.

Q. What prompted you to pursue a leadership role in nursing?

A. There are many routes to, and in, the nursing profession. It’s good for nursing and for health care when people can choose to become nurses at different points in their lives and bring different perspectives to the table.

Like my mother, my route started with a college education. She earned a master's degree before returning to school in the late 1920s and early 1930s to pursue her nursing degree and license. Similarly, I first earned a bachelor's degree in political science before pursuing a nursing license and an advanced practice nursing degree. I worked in a clinical setting for eight years as a nurse practitioner.

After seeing an ad for a fellowship and doctoral degree program in health policy and politics funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, I knew I wanted to put nursing and politics together. I ultimately received the fellowship and started work toward a Doctor of Philosophy degree. I was ready to have my ideas questioned. I watched as one of my friends, who worked in an emergency room, applied her nursing skills and knowledge to identify the signs of domestic violence, the first step in recognizing such situations and providing appropriate support for abused and battered women. These were new ideas in the ’80s. Our group of friends talked about these issues, asked questions and pushed for change. I wanted to be part of this change.

Q. What brought you to the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis?

A. When Dean Young called me, I knew it was what I wanted to do. Joining the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing was a once in a lifetime chance.

“The stance of ‘I know best’ does not work in communities.”

continued on next page
Q. What motivates you to focus in your particular area?

A. Nursing satisfies me in a million different parts of myself—the feeling of having my feet on the ground, of competence and the human-to-human capacity. Political science, my undergraduate degree, is founded on human values and American ideals such as equality, absence of class, striving against racism. Nursing is the epitome of those values. A nurse can accept you at your most fundamental state of being a human.

My leadership, research and teaching philosophy is based on a strong passion for the nursing profession— the personal and political expression of nursing can be a way to improve public health, health care and the currently broken health-care delivery system.

Q. How can the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis transform nursing education and health care?

A. The school has two big goals—Healthy People and Healthy Systems in education and research. The school’s curriculum will be less about taking care of each individual and more about taking care of communities and groups. Communities and groups require different perspectives—ethical, cost and cultural perspectives. In order to achieve these goals, nurses need to look at many complex factors and share their findings in order to guide Americans to better health.

There is so much change required to move from the current care system to community care. That change requires a humble partner with the community. It’s already proven that the stance of “I know best” does not work in communities. Nurses and nursing researchers have to approach communities as a true partner.

Plenty of schools and campuses are teaching students to focus on this complex picture. The Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing will build on this communal knowledge and add innovation in teaching and learning because we’re starting fresh. We’re not discovering totally new knowledge. We get to draw from others and bring it together in a new education model. The School of Nursing comes in to a community with terrific resources, and a university that is truly interdisciplinary, in a region with some of the greatest health disparities to be found.

The curriculum has a spectrum from individual care to public health care and everything in between. We take nurses and look at populations and systems. We join with our public health colleagues and policy leaders in the capitol city of one of the biggest economies in the world, the state of California. UC Davis is a land grant campus and we are grounded in the true reality of how life is built—with boots on the ground, dirt—and that influences nursing care. We work with our colleagues in agriculture, water, veterinary medicine and many others to reach a more complex and true sense of health.

Q. What would you recommend for faculty or graduate students interested in the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing?

A. Early in the school’s launch, we knew there was intense interest in the school based on responses at regional and national meetings. We are supported by the biggest grant in nursing ever. We have an ideal location and infrastructure to support the school. And we have a great challenge and enormous opportunity to improve health.

Plus, I would tell everyone to look at Dean Young’s background. She represents a new paradigm for innovative leadership. Her mentorship skills to students and young faculty are second-to-none. The opportunity to work with her is a draw.

There is great opportunity for growth, colleague-ship, and starting something new. There are so many great partners across the board—here at the school, the campus and nurse leaders and faculty across the country. It’s an opportunity to start fresh, yet work from a strong platform of support.