

Portraits of Nursing Leadership

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Driving policy change from the national stage

DEBORAH GREENWOOD is the diabetes program coordinator and a clinical nurse specialist for Sutter Health Integrated Diabetes Education Network in Sacramento, California. She also serves as president of the American Association of Diabetes Educators for 2015. Greenwood is a nurse and 2014 alumna of the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis Doctor of Philosophy program, a member of the inaugural doctoral class. Greenwood earned a Master's in Education from Boston College. Her professional focus on and personal passion for diabetes education drives her development of systemwide approaches to diabetes care, interprofessional collaboration and leveraging technology to improve the lives of people living with this chronic illness.

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Q. *What prompted you to pursue a leadership role in nursing and health education?*

A. The health and wellness aspects of health care attracted me early in my career. The opportunity to empower people to live healthier lives appealed to me greater than focusing on sickness and disease. More than 100 million Americans either have diabetes or prediabetes. I recognized my passion for health promotion, coaching and partnering with these people, which then led me to roles with increased visibility.

As a child, I was extremely shy. Becoming a nurse gave me confidence and helped me grow as a leader. When you spend your day engaging with people, their families and other members of the health care team, you have no choice but to open up. What was hard at first

became easier with each interaction. My involvement in diabetes associations and groups spans my career. Working alongside educators, such as myself, engrossed in their work and passionate about caring for people with diabetes, really clicked with me. When I moved to California in 2006, I assumed the role of president of a local chapter of diabetes educators, which led me to serve on a national committee and ultimately the board of directors and president of the American Association of Diabetes Educators in 2015.

The first time I delivered a speech to a large conference gathering, I was shaking like a leaf. Yet the leadership skills that I learned at the School of Nursing enabled me to focus on the bigger picture and not squander any opportunity to educate people and promote better health.

Q. *Why focus on chronic disease management?*

A. I have witnessed the challenges faced by my friends who have diabetes. I have compassion for them. By nature, nurses focus on coaching, behavior

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change, partnering with and encouraging people to integrate self-management into their life. With chronic conditions, we can translate the ideal into what is workable and realistic. Not everyone has the same goals or resources. We cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all approach.

Now I'm focused on how technology fits into the puzzle of care. From mobile apps and social media to electronic health records and remote monitoring, technology permeates every aspect of our health. My national position enabled me to meet with telehealth experts and bring the voice of a diabetes educator to the table. Evidence shows that diabetes self-management education is as effective as medication and both Medicare and private insurance pay for that education. I want to change the conversation from one of compliance and adherence, to that of self-management, in order to raise national awareness of the value of education and encourage referrals from physician groups.

Q. *How did your experience at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing shape and enhance your future?*

A. While enrolled in an online informatics course hoping to learn how technology could advance diabetes management, I learned about the School of Nursing. The core attributes of bold system change, innovative technology and interprofessionalism resonated with me. People with diabetes are not meeting national outcome goals, so we need bold system change to improve these outcomes and quality of life. Technology offers great promise in developing a solution. Finally, the school's focus on interprofessional education made sense to me since the field of diabetes education involves collaboration between exercise scientists, nurses, dietitians, social workers, psychologists and physicians — the focus of my entire career.

The faculty and programs at the school gave me confidence to use my voice to affect change and my skillsets to question things. The unique opportunity, an experience for which I will forever be grateful and cherish, allowed me the freedom to say, "This is what I think and this is why I think it." My classmates and I had no preconceived notions about what the program would be. We brought our own ideas to the table and the faculty supported us to make those dreams happen. The leadership component improved my skills and sharpened my focus on strategy, program development, quality improvement and visioning for our health system. I even consider my presidential term as a leadership postdoc of sorts!

Q. *Why would you recommend advanced nursing education?*

A. I believe in lifelong learning. I always want to improve myself and make sure I am equipped with the necessary knowledge for the changing times. Colleagues recognized how my doctoral studies helped me grow. My enthusiasm for learning was contagious, prompting three people I am connected with to pursue advanced degrees. I'm a person who loves change, but not everyone does. My advanced education stimulates me to think through strategies, get others engaged and envision the long-term benefits for all concerned.

I recall Dean Heather M. Young telling our class that if she does not feel uncomfortable every day, she's not doing her job. I've channeled that perspective. As a leader you effect change. It's not always easy to have those difficult conversations, but I believe that having the confidence, knowledge and fortitude to do what's right elicits the best outcomes. Thanks to the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing and some incredible opportunities along the way, I can confidently surge forward in hopes of improving the lives of people with diabetes and the health systems they rely on to support them every step of the way.



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