

# Leading Change: Holistic Nurses in the Board room

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**H**olistic nurses are among the first to recognize that our healthcare system needs help. We see the whole picture and know there is a better way of doing things. But how often do we act on these instincts by seeking opportunities to lead change? How often do we raise our voice, roll up our sleeves, and do the work to initiate a paradigm shift?

As today's healthcare environment becomes more complex, there has never been a more important time to accelerate and elevate the role we play in creating a healthier world for all. Holistic nurses possess knowledge and skills in the betterment of healthful living and the integration of holistic/integrative approaches that are imperative to the overall health and well-being of the public (AHNA & ANA, 2013). Serving in the boardroom is one very important way we can raise our leadership voice and contribute ideas and expertise to ensure that the nursing perspective is not only heard, but also acted upon.

## Called to Be Leaders

Holistic nurses are called to be leaders. Standard 12 (Leadership) of the Holistic Nursing Scope and Standards of practice states that the holistic registered nurse “engages at local, state, national, and international levels to expand the knowledge and practice of holistic nursing and awareness of holistic health issues” (AHNA & ANA, 2013, p. 77). Just like Florence Nightingale advocated to change the healthcare system of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we have a moral responsibility to raise our voices and promote health and healing wherever and whenever we can. In doing so, we honor the legacy of the profession and provide sustainable, cost-effective, whole-person care to best serve our patients with improved outcomes and quality of life — and improved health and healing for all.

## Nurses on Boards

Individually and collectively, the nursing profession will play a significant and impactful role in redefining health care and improving health in communities across the nation. In the landmark Institute of Medicine report “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health,” one of the four key messages states that nurses should be full partners with physicians and other healthcare professionals in redesigning healthcare in the United States (IOM, 2011). This directive calls for nurses to exercise their individual and collaborative leadership voices in pivotal decision-making positions.

As a direct response to implement the recommendations of the IOM report, the Nurses on Boards Coalition (NOBC, [www.nursesonboardscoalition.org](http://www.nursesonboardscoalition.org)) was launched in November 2014. The American Holistic Nurses Association eagerly joined in along with 27 other national nursing and healthcare associations to advance NOBC's mission and help raise awareness that all boards can benefit from the unique perspectives of nurses.

One of NOBC's strategies is to help ensure that 10,000 nurses are serving on boards by 2020. NOBC has built an infrastructure to monitor and actively place nurses on boards. Currently, more than 12,000 individuals are registered in the NOBC database, with 5,439 of these nurses already holding board seats and 7,892 willing to serve.

## Leading Successfully

It may sound surprising, but most initiatives do not fail due to lack of support or resources, but due to lack of confidence, fear of failure, or a perceived lack of resources. Several key characteristics of leading successfully amid complexity include extending trust, empowering and encouraging others, innovating, and connecting



Have you ever thought about improving the health of people by extending and sharing your nursing knowledge and expertise through service on boards?

Imagine the impact you could have serving on a nonprofit or a corporate board. AHNA is helping place nurses on nonprofit, corporate, and government boards, panels, and commissions through the Nurses on Boards Coalition (NOBC).

**NOBC Mission:** To improve the health of communities and the nation through the service of nurses on boards.

1. Facilitate board placement.
2. Create a dynamic organization focused on transformative growth.
3. Promote collaboration among states and national organizations to integrate strategies.
4. Demonstrate the impact of nurses on boards.
5. Develop member synergy, strategy, and value.



for impact (Benson, 2018). Many of these skills come through education and experience and/or innately for nurses. In fact, nursing is consistently rated the “most trusted” profession (Brenan, 2017). This correlates to fertile ground for nurses to empower others, collaborate, and try new approaches in healthcare delivery in communities across our nation. With a wide range of knowledge in integrative modalities, health promotion, and caring ways of healing, holistic nurses are in a prime position to provide leadership for the future healthcare trends of our nation (AHNA & ANA, 2013, p.39). The skills and compassion demonstrated every day by holistic nurses translates well into significant and expanded leadership roles.

This edition of *Beginnings* magazine features holistic nurses from all around the country who have worked to make a difference by serving on local and national boards (see pages 18-27). From healing and spirituality centers to hospice homes, these nurses are serving in leadership positions on organizational boards, using their skills and expertise to promote health and healing.

### Connecting with Your Passion

For those of us new to leadership, joining a board may sound like a daunting task, but it’s actually much easier than you may think. All nurses are uniquely prepared for service on boards. The skills nurses bring in relation to communication, strategic planning, advocacy, and others are not the same set of skills usually held by our colleagues who may be serving on the same boards. Nurses are able to connect in a way that is unique, and most nurses find that their talents and skills are exactly what boards are looking for. Though some nurses new to board service might possess a self-imposed lack of confidence or fear of

failure, in the right board position, nurses are highly likely to be successful. The secret is connecting to your passion and finding the right “match.” Joining a board that’s mission connects with your personal values, interests, and beliefs will usually result in positive outcomes for everyone involved (Benson, Harper, & Weston, 2018). Many nurses have commented how gratifying it is to contribute their time, treasure, and talent, often receiving back much more than they give.

So where do you start? The first step is to decide where you want to have an impact and make a commitment to do so. There are many different types of boards that would benefit from the voice of a nurse. Hospital and health system, public/private company, government commission, or foundation/nonprofit boards all create positive experiences for nurses as board members.

Write down your goals, create an action plan, and set a timetable. Don’t wait for an opportunity; take the initiative to contact an organization whose mission you are passionate about and ask to be kept in mind for a board seat. Many organizations are looking for diverse candidates and will likely appreciate any interested individuals (and strongly consider them as candidates). Doing your “homework” in selecting the right match is an important part of this process.

Many times, locating the right board involves relationships with other board members. Current board members are often asked to recommend potential candidates for service. Networking with colleagues both inside and sometimes more importantly outside of nursing can be an important factor in being invited to serve on a board. Once you have identified a board you feel would be a good match for your values, share your goals with others and enlist their support. Consider who you might collaborate with to advance your shared goals. Lastly, make sure you celebrate your progress and success along the way!

### Resources for Taking the First Step

The NOBC website ([www.nursesonboardscoalition.org](http://www.nursesonboardscoalition.org)) has a number of resources to help you on your journey to the boardroom, from how to create a board-ready resumé, to providing access to articles and free webinars to help you prepare for board service, as well as examples of mock board meetings.

*continued on page 12*

### Tips for Joining a Board

- Start with an open mind.
- Understand your mission.
- Perform an assessment.
- Prepare your bio.
- Contact organizations.
- Register with NOBC.
- Don’t underestimate your value.
- Report your board position to NOBC.

## Step Up and Be Counted!

Our country is facing many challenges that affect the health of its citizens. Now is the time for nurse leaders in every community across the nation to raise their voices to shape strategy and policy decisions to promote a culture of health. Here's how to get started:

1. Step up and be counted and/or indicate your interest in future board service at [www.nursesonboardscoalition.org](http://www.nursesonboardscoalition.org)
2. Encourage colleagues to register on the NOBC website.
3. Share your story at [www.nursesonboardscoalition.org/resources/for-nurses/share-your-story](http://www.nursesonboardscoalition.org/resources/for-nurses/share-your-story)
4. Contact local nonprofits or other organizations and ask them to consider having a nurse serve on their boards.
5. Engage in your state. Support one another as you prepare to serve on boards.
6. Contribute and encourage others to do the same!

Another suggested resource for nurses seeking board placement is the reference guide, *Nurse on Board: Planning Your Path to the Boardroom*, by the late Connie Curran (2016), a nurse pioneer and role model in advancing nurse leaders to the boardroom. Curran's goal was to articulate a clear path for nurses to become board members, and this how-to book offers practical advice and inspiring examples.

### Making a Difference

Nurses are making a difference in the boardroom. As President Emeritus of Truman Medical Centers (TMC) and past Chair of the American Hospital Association John W. Bluford, III noted, "The last twenty years or so, TMC has had an employee representative on its Board. Frequently those employees selected were nurses. Without exception, nursing representatives on the Board proved to be invaluable. They were not so much an advocate for nursing but they advocated for the needs of patients. As the Board focused on matters of care quality – the voice of nursing was both critical and creditable" (personal communication, September 22, 2017).

Remember, nurses possess a broad range of skills, including strategic planning, critical thinking, communications, quality and process improvement, human resources, finance, and complex problem-solving. Accustomed to working in teams, nurses fit seamlessly into the boardroom environment with an understanding of challenges, opportunities, and implications of decisions on many levels (Benson et al., 2018). Holistic nurses should be asking themselves if they are interested in leadership activities such as serving on local, state, or national boards, influencing healthcare legislation, or getting involved in wellness initiatives.

We all make choices each day to act (or pass on acting) on leadership opportunities. We encourage you to release your own personal leadership voice in new ways that are meaningful to you. Where will you choose to serve? The first step for those who are interested is to express that interest, including registering in the NOBC database. We want to hear from nurses across the country! NOBC looks forward to learning about the impact you are having in your community and how we can help. Thank you for your commitment to the nursing profession and for all those you serve every day.

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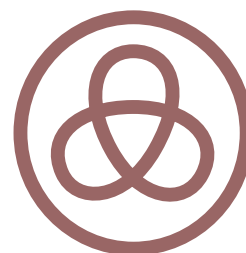
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