



Association for Leadership Science in Nursing

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**Kevin Sowers, MSN, RN, FAAN**

**President of the Johns Hopkins Health System; Executive Vice President of Johns Hopkins Medicine  
Baltimore, Maryland**

In anticipation of our upcoming conference and keynote speaker, some insight and perspective of our speaker, Mr. Kevin Sowers, are necessary. Mr. Sowers is the President of the Johns Hopkins Health System and Executive Vice President of Johns Hopkins Medicine. He has been at Johns Hopkins for the past three years after spending 32 years with Duke University Health System. I had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Sowers, virtually of course, about his leadership trajectory and to get a preview of what to expect at the conference.

### **A Unique Trajectory**

Mr. Sowers' path to President at Johns Hopkins is unique. He graduated from Capital University School of Nursing in 1985 into what was then, another nursing shortage. Thrust into leadership within the first six months of graduation, Mr. Sowers began a diverse career leading a hospital unit, in executive roles in multiple acute care facilities, and at the helm of two of the most notable health care organizations in the United States, Duke University Hospital and the Johns Hopkins Health System. Mr. Sowers credited his early success as a leader to some tough feedback from an early mentor. She told him, "In the life of an organization there will be times that the organization needs you to do something that you may not want to do, and, right now, the organization needs you to lead." It is without a doubt that Mr. Sowers has been where healthcare needed him, and his commitment is as strong as ever to lead the Johns Hopkins Health System through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

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### **Resilience: Personally, and Professionally**

There is little doubt that Mr. Sowers' role demands a lot of responsibility. When asked about his greatest worry as a leader during a pandemic, Mr. Sowers' major concern was about health care worker (HCW) resilience. He says that before the pandemic, the issue had already become part of a national conversation. While the amount of resilience all of us in healthcare have is a valid concern, his concern is elevated due to a worry that HCWs may not acknowledge they need help. Adding to the pressure of life during a pandemic, Mr. Sowers' also noted that geopolitical influences have complicated developing a unified, national pandemic response. When a cultural divide already exists in our nation, Mr. Sowers is focused on determining ways to get science-based information to the public, leading large-scale pandemic response efforts, and caring for COVID patients while keeping the doors open for all people his health system serves. Personally, Mr. Sowers shared several ways he maintains his resilience. He relaxes by exercising, cooking, and piano playing, but going deeper, Mr. Sowers shared his personal need of having to seek outside counsel to ensure that he was not taking on other's emotions and create clarity in what he owned as a leader.

### **Reinvigorating Our Purpose**

As we neared the end of our conversation, I asked Mr. Sowers to give me a preview of his keynote at the ALSN annual conference. Without "spilling all the beans," Mr. Sowers provided this, "if there ever was a time in our world that we need to reconnect to our purpose, it is now. It gives us the passion to keep going, and without purpose, we lose sight of our many possibilities." In a time when so many may be questioning their purpose as a leader, or even a nurse, we can expect that Mr. Sowers will provide some fuel for reigniting our purpose. I hope you are as excited for our conference and I am after meeting with Mr. Sowers.

*Interview and Column Written by Thompson H. Forbes III, PhD, RN, NE-BC  
Membership Committee*