



# member SPOTLIGHT



## DEBRA FOWLER, PHD, MBA, RN, CNE, NEA-BC

*1. Tell us a little about your career path, background, and passion for advancing the science of nursing leadership.*

My real clinical love is home care. When I started my first leadership role in the early 80's, a lot of things in health care were changing. DRGs had just come into play. I already had my clinical master's in nursing. I discovered I was not prepared for a leadership role. I did not know how to talk to the finance people. I did not have any knowledge about how to deal with HR issues. If there was a graduate degree in nursing leadership around at the time I could not find it. So I got my MBA. I studied the science of business.

Then in the early 2000s I moved to Texas and decided to teach full time.

It was right after the IOM Future of Nursing report. I began to realize how much error was in acute care settings. I began to realize how important the issues of quality improvement and good leadership skills were. Teaching these topics got me interested in these subjects. Teaching got me passionate and determined that students understand these issues when they leave my classroom.

Educators are really influencers. We are no longer the sage on the stage. We help students learn, hope they catch some passion about topics we are passionate about. We hope we influence them to make a difference out in the world.

I have been able to advance that influence in an associate degree program where I taught leadership, and then here at the university in the undergraduate and master's programs and I also helped develop the DNP track here in this school. My path started out in one place and all led to another.

*2. How long have you been active in CGEAN/ALSN?*

I had the good fortune to work with Dr. Terry Carroll. I was taking over the lead in the master's in nursing leadership from Dr. Carroll here at the school. She was one of the initial leaders of ALSN and she was retiring. She handed me the paper application CGEAN had at the time, and said if I did not belong to any other organization, I had to belong to CGEAN.

The first conference I went to was 2011 in Denver. I got to meet the people who were doing amazing work. I was sitting in the audience with my mouth open, listening to nurse leaders making big strides in leadership. I got to talk to these people. I felt like I had found my tribe. They had the expert knowledge I needed to be a better teacher for future nurse leaders. I've been a member over 10 years now.

*3. How has your involvement in ALSN/CGEAN influenced your career trajectory – what has been most valuable about it?*

Membership in ALSN has introduced me to some fabulous people. I served on the planning committee for the 2014 conference in Dallas with Dr. Barbara Cherry. That was amazing. I called and talked to nurse leaders and invited them to come speak. It was my job on the committee. It was energizing doing that. In 2015 I joined on the Board as the Treasurer. I am finishing that position in a few months.

*4. What doors have opened to you as a result of your involvement in ALSN?*

Meeting all these people has really made a difference in the development of our master's program. I was being stimulated to read and become even more aware of what was being published. Around 2012, CGEAN developed a white paper on nursing leadership education and specifically the DNP. They wrote about what was needed as well as the number of hours in clinical practice that was needed in the leadership programs.

At the time we had 135 practice hours in our master's program in nurse leadership. We revised our curriculum as a result of GCEAN's analysis. We now have 360 hours. We made that curricular improvement because I was a member of CGEAN. The greater number of hours is a very important aspect in the success of our program.

Then we developed the DNP executive option here at the school. Being in CGEAN gave me the courage and confidence that I knew the latest evidence. I knew what was going on around the country in nursing leadership education.

And in terms of my development here at the school, membership and participation in ALSN reinforced that I really was the leadership expert and gave me confidence I needed to drive essential changes. Thankfully we have since recruited a number of faculty with that expertise. . It influenced my promotion to Associate Professor and was important to the success of the educational programs here at the school.

*5. What would you say to nurse leaders who are considering joining ALSN right now?*

About 20 years ago we really began using an evidence-based approach to clinical practice. It is so important. I think nursing leadership started using that approach 10 years ago. So much science has evolved over the last decade. Many nurse leaders are getting doctoral degrees, both PHD and DNP, and they are influencing leadership education. Many are going into practice. Their doctoral preparation is leading them to ask many important questions: what is the science? Where is the evidence? Consequently, leadership science in nursing has exploded.

*6. Let's look at your vision of the future. If you were in a hot air balloon 5-10 years from now looking down on our ALSN colleagues, what would our membership be doing?*

I see that every nurse leader from the CNO to managers belong to ALSN. Every academic teaching in nurse leadership programs belongs to ALSN. ALSN conference has at least 1000 attendees with 20 leaders from across

the globe. Our members are elected to political office and influence health policy from a leadership role. Some of our members are being elected to the state and US Senate. We have nurse leaders and members in major roles of health policy, and we start having a positive influence.

*7. Anything else you would like to add that we may have missed?*

ALSN members are amazing people who are dedicated to making a difference. There are not a lot of big egos in the organization; just good people. Barbara Cherry and Pat Yoder-Wise are great examples of the kind, considerate, fun people – and brilliant - working in the organization. Meeting Pat Yoder-Wise and getting to work one-on-one with Pat has been personally and career changing as well. Pat wrote the nursing leadership textbook I was using at the time. Sometimes we think of the people writing our textbooks as being on this pedestal and with a golden aura around them. But Pat is down to earth. She is active promoting nursing leadership and influencing nursing education as the new NLN president. Her energy is amazing. I will always appreciate getting to know her. And Barbara Cherry's thoughtfulness in her leadership – she is an amazing leader. She gets things done and makes it look like it was so easy.



Which ALSN member do you think we should highlight?  
Let us know by emailing [office@nursingleadershopsience.org](mailto:office@nursingleadershopsience.org)