

Caring and Compassion

An Interview with Maureen White, RN, Executive Vice President, Chief Nurse Executive and Director, Institute for Nursing, Northwell Health

INSTITUTION BRIEF Northwell Health (northwell.edu) delivers world-class clinical care throughout the New York metropolitan area, pioneering research at the Feinstein Institutes for Medical Research, and a visionary approach to medical education, highlighted by the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell and Hofstra Northwell School of Graduate Nursing and Physician Assistant Studies. Northwell Health is the largest integrated healthcare system in New York State with a total workforce of more than 72,000 employees – the state’s largest private employer.

EDITORS’ NOTE Maureen White has served in various roles at Northwell Health including Nursing Care Coordinator, ICU and Open Heart at Long Island Jewish Medical Center (LIJMC); Administrator, Patient Care Services at LIJMC; Associate Director at LIJMC; and Vice President, Patient Care Services at North Shore University Hospital and LIJMC. She received the American Organization of Nurse Executives Mentorship Award in 2011, was the Queensborough Community College Humanitarian Partner of the Year recipient in 2008, and served as a faculty member at the Institute of Healthcare Improvement from 2002-2005. White earned her BSN and B.A. degree from Malloy College and her M.B.A. from Fordham University.



Maureen White

Will you highlight your role and key areas of focus at Northwell Health?

My role is to oversee the standards of practice and care for all nursing services and patient care delivery throughout the health system, inclusive of not just the hospitals, but the ambulatory areas, home care, hospice care – wherever nursing care is delivered. My focus is ensuring that we are living up to the highest standards possible and ensuring that we are creating the appropriate environment for our team members to provide the highest levels of care. In my role as director of Northwell’s Institute for Nursing, my focus is to create a professional practice environment to advance the art and science of nursing through the melding of nursing education, nursing research and nursing practice. Healthcare is such a dynamic field with new breakthroughs in medical treatment and advances in technology and it is critical to make sure the nursing workforce are kept abreast of these changes and how they will impact their practice. When you talk about the art and science of nursing, it is about research since nurses play a critical role in research which is not always well understood.

Will you discuss the role that nurses have played in battling COVID-19 and how proud are you to see the strength and resilience of Northwell’s nursing team during this difficult time?

It has been amazing as this is something that none of us had experienced and while we have faced crises before, none compare to this

pandemic. There was a tremendous amount of fear from the general public and from healthcare workers because what we originally thought this was going to be was much different than what it became and there was so much uncertainty and unknown. We prepared for this as a health system as we began to hear about it in late November/early December. We always prefer to prepare for the worst and hope for the best so we brought in tremendous amounts of supplies which turned out to be so critical as it was even worse than we had originally thought. I have always been proud to be a nurse, but I have never been prouder than during this pandemic. Our nurses responded in every way. I believe that the true value of nurses is underestimated. I know that our nurses are touched and moved by the accolades they have received, but I don’t think it is fully understood what it took for these courageous, brave individuals to put their fears aside and to come in every day under immense pressure to do what they were trained to do which saved many lives.

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What has struck me the most about this pandemic is that the one thing that never left was caring and compassion which is a hallmark of nursing. The amount of caring and compassion

that these nurses exhibited with their patients, especially since their patients could not have visitors by state law, was amazing to witness. These nurses were not only taking care of the patient, but they were taking care of the entire family, making sure that they stayed informed and connected and could interact with their loved one by video chat or FaceTime. As much as our nurses could not wait to get home to their families when their shifts were finished, they could not wait to get back the next day to take care of their patients.

Do you worry about a nursing shortage as you look at the future needs of the healthcare industry?

I think that there is going to be a healthcare worker shortage in general and I worry about the industry because we are in an interesting time. In regard to nursing, we are in a time when the largest segment of the population over the past four generations is the baby boomer generation, 77 million baby boomers. The birth rate went down dramatically in generation x and went up a little from there in generation y and generation z, which means that the largest segment of the population has begun to retire. Unlike other generations, they are retiring with more chronic and complex healthcare issues which requires more intensive nursing care. This means that the demand for nurses is escalating dramatically while the supply for nursing is shrinking. It is estimated that roughly one million baby boomer registered nurses will retire over the next seven to ten years which is a dramatic drain when you think that we have about four million registered nurses in total in the United States. This means that about a quarter of the nursing population will be retiring at a time when the need is so great. It is critical for the industry to continue to change and adapt, and advances in technology will play a major role in helping alleviate any shortages that we will see in the nursing world.

One of the things I admire most about Northwell is that we have this philosophy and attitude that comes from our CEO, Michael Dowling, to create the healthcare system of the future. We never want to forget the past, but we are not so locked into the past that we can’t adapt and change in order to be prepared for the future. We use a phrase with our team members that, “the best way to predict the future is to create the future” which is indicative of our focus to not wait for things to happen, but rather to make things happen. ●