

Nurse and Clinical Practice Specialist: Sarah Delgado, DNP, RN, ACNP- BC

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Lisa Bonsall: Hello, everybody. I'm pleased to be speaking with Dr. Sarah Delgado today. Dr. Delgado works with the strategic advocacy team at the American Association of Critical Care Nurses. I'm very excited to share this interview with our audience as Sarah and I worked together back in the day when we were new nurses in a medical intensive care unit. Since then, Sarah has gone on to become a nurse practitioner, assistant professor, and is now working with AACN, focusing on healthy work environments and health care policy. Thank you for joining me today, Sarah.

Sarah Delgado: Oh, I'm glad to be here, Lisa. It's good to connect with you again.

Lisa Bonsall: Can you tell our audience about your nursing journey? Did you see your career taking this course? So I can't really say that I foresaw the course that my nursing career took. I'm kind of more of a person who will follow where the path takes me and less inclined to set a specific goal and then design steps around that. I actually originally way back when you and I were in nursing school, thought I would become a primary care NP or a psych NP, but then when I worked in the MICU with you, I fell in love with acute care. So I became an acute care in NP. So I've been more of a like see what happens and follow that path kind of kind of approach.

I also think that choices outside of my professional life have affected my career in a, in a positive way. So, for instance, my spouse got a scholarship to business school. So I moved to working at UVA and I was able to get a job teaching there. And that's how I found teaching was because it's where my family located. and then eventually I was able to morph that into a joint position so I could work in the ID clinic with patients who had HIV and AIDS at the health system and also teach, which was a nice mix of ways to contribute. And then we had a second child, my husband and I, and we wanted to be closer to family. So we moved out to California and I felt like I needed a broader clinical experience. So I got a job at the Community Health System here in Whittier, and I did post-discharge care and also palliative care, on home visits and, and that sort of thing. And it was excellent experience. I had been a member of AACN, Critical Care since our MICU days, and so I saw an ad for a job there, and I was like, oh, hey, they're in Southern California, I'll apply. And, the human resources department at AACN called me up and said, have you looked at a map? Because we're not really that close to where you live? I was like, no, I haven't really looked at a map. So I was able to get a position with them where I commute some of the week, but not all of the week, so that wasn't a barrier to working with AACN.

So, I've done a lot. I've been very lucky to get to do a lot of different things and contribute in a lot of different ways. I do think that the themes sort of in my career are that clinically I really look at chronic

complex disease and then also this advocacy piece, which is all of what I do now, but really advocating for patients and nurses and the way I sort of think about it is that the relationship between nurses and patients is a central sacred space. And we want to ensure that everything that surrounds that, supports it. So creating healthy work environments, ensuring that the organization and the larger health system are really positioned so that that relationship can be what is best for the patient supports the best outcomes for the patient and also allows the nurse to thrive as, as a professional. So, so that's really my focus.

Now I work with our primary platform at AACN for advocacy is our healthy work environment standards. And then I also do some work on APRN regulatory issues with the AACN certification team, which is fun.

Lisa Bonsall: So wonderful. I love how you explain that relationship being a sacred space between the with the nurse and the patient, even using your hand gesture. I think that is very telling. And I love that your career has taken you to work with one of our professional nursing organizations. Can you tell our audience about professional association membership and why it's so important?

Sarah Delgado: So, yeah, I really appreciate that question, Lisa, because I feel like my perspective on that has changed, in the last few years. So, there are a lot of benefits, like tangible benefits to being part of a professional organization. You get discounts on conferences and you get, journals in the mail that help you stay up to date or access to online journals that help you stay up to date with the latest, best evidence based practice. And, so there's these sort of concrete benefits... access to online learning, free continuing education, are some of the things that we offer at AACN. But I think one of the many lessons from the Covid pandemic is the danger of feeling isolated and like you're the only one and how important it is to connect. And it's really interesting. You know, the Surgeon General views social isolation as similar to smoking in terms of it being a threat to public health and to our well-being. So I think really a huge value of professional organizations is building a sense of connection to a larger community. At our national conference, one year, the emcee sang a song called, "Ode to a medicine cup," which was absolutely hysterical. And everyone in the room is laughing. And it's like this private joke that people get, and it's crazy, but you feel connected because everyone gets it, right? What this humor is. And then a few weeks ago, I got to go to a UCLA chapter event, AACN chapter event, which was really amazing. It was the first time they'd been in person in a while, and the connection was just palpable from nurses from all different hospitals. It's not just UCLA health system. There's members of that chapter from all different health systems, and they're all there for the same purpose and experiencing some of the same challenges. So that connection is really crucial. So I think that's the biggest benefit of being part of a professional nursing association.

Lisa Bonsall: Right. And some people might not even, you know, think about that. It's just about getting that those credentials or those benefits that you mentioned at first, but that community aspect is so important. So now what do nurses need to know about health care policy? What should it mean to us, and how can we get involved?

Sarah Delgado: So, I think too often nurses feel like policy is not part of what they do. And I believe that we need nurses in all kinds of policies. So I really encourage nurses, if you're interested in health care policy, to look for opportunities to learn more. maybe continuing education or, webinars or even classes on health policy, because I think there is content out there that can help us, learn more about it. Policy

exists in many different forms. So there's hospital policy and then there's state regulation. And then of course, there's what Congress does, congressional legislation and, the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare set regulations and all of those pieces affect our day to day jobs to different degrees and in different ways.

So, in terms of ways to get involved, I think if you have shared governance at your hospital or if you have unit level committees that you can join, go for it, because the policy that is set in those forums really will affect your job. The decisions will be better because of the input that direct care nurses have. And it gives it gives the opportunity to begin to use your voice and to think about what your voice needs. It's sort of like good practice for further steps in in health care policy. So I think getting involved in hospital policy is sort of a great, a great first foray.

Regarding state and national advocacy, there are some professional organizations that do a Hill Day, either with their state legislature or in Washington, DC at the congressional level. And those are great experiences because they prepare, talking points to help you sort of, think about what you're going to say to your congressional representative. And they, I know ANA does these and the Academy of Medical Surgical Nursing also offers these days where they also help you make the appointments to meet with your representatives. Sometimes there are opportunities to do it via zoom. I've done it via zoom, and, it's not quite as fun as being in person, of course, but it is effective. And you do get to talk to the teams that are directing what happens, how the votes are cast at the at that legislature, whether it's the state or national level. So I think those can be really meaningful.

Representatives also have web pages with email addresses, and you can send an email, that may seem like, oh, I'm sending an email. I'm not really doing anything. Representatives do work for us, though. And, the more they hear from nurses, the more nursing can impact how they legislate and what choices they make. So I think it is meaningful, actually, especially if it's done through a professional organization where lots of emails are going out. because that that does make a difference.

Our process here at AACN, we look very, very closely at policy and sort of trying to vet the pros and cons. So, I think it's important for nurses to know that no policy does exactly what it's supposed to do, and only that . There are always other consequences to consider. So we're always trying to think and anticipate what are the other consequences? What else could happen from enacting this? And how can we ensure that the design of the policy mitigates the unwanted outcomes and really advantages what we're what we're trying to make happen. I've read some of the text of bills as part of that work, and I wouldn't say it's like the funnest reading I've ever done, but it is important to know exactly what the bill says and exactly what it's going to do. So that you can understand the impact it's going to have.

Lisa Bonsall: That's wonderful. Thank you, Sarah, for taking on that. That's a big responsibility. But I think, you know, nurses have a perspective that nobody else has. So it's important that we are involved in reading and planning and like you said, being alert to any potential consequences that maybe other people aren't anticipating. So thank you. What advice do you have for new nurses who are out there striving to make a difference?

Sarah Delgado: Well, you gave a great segue into that because saying, you know, nurses have a unique perspective. Absolutely. We do. No one is that the forefront of health care delivery, the way that nurses

are. So I think the first piece of advice I would offer to new nurses who are looking to make a difference is to every single day, write down a few words about the difference you are making, because you are making a difference, right? And we don't always appreciate that. And we go about our jobs, as you know, this is just another day in my job. But calling that out for yourself, that your presence with a patient, the fact that a family member took a moment to say thank you, your kindness, your expertise in catching, changes in a patient's condition or addressing, helping a patient or family member address their concerns. That is making a huge, phenomenal difference. So writing that down to me is a powerful tool. You know, we tend to come home with the list of things we didn't do, but coming home with the list of things we did do is very important to understanding our own contribution. So make that concrete by taking a couple of minutes to write it down. iPhones have a journaling feature, if that's helpful. That I think makes it easier to do rather than, you know, you don't have to do pen and paper. You can do it electronically, too.

So the second piece of advice I would give is to please, please, please vote. So, I've heard younger people, you know, in my in my role as a parent, I've heard younger people say, I'm not going to vote because I don't like either candidate, and I want to make a statement by not voting. But the thing is, nobody is counting the non votes. We got to vote. And, the system is not perfect. It is very far from perfect. But we're only going to change the system if we invest in having leadership that puts the needs of their constituents first. And we can ensure that we're doing that if we use our voice and vote. So, please, please take the time to do that. All of the elections matter. It's not just the national election; all of the people running need to be carefully considered and selected

And then the last piece of advice that I would give if you're striving to make a difference is, if you see something, say something. You know how they say that in the airports? If something doesn't seem right or doesn't seem to make sense to you, it probably warrants reconsideration. So ask the question. Ask why? Ask what if? You know, I think our healthcare system is pretty broken right now. And it needs to change. And the way it's going to change is if we consider new perspectives from folks who are not immersed in this is the way we've always done it. So that question of why or what if allows us to explore the rationale for the way things are and then, gives us the chance to share different ideas and listen to each other. And that's really the way forward, right? Is to have a lot of different perspectives on what we're facing and rebuild and create the change that we want to see.

Lisa Bonsall: Wonderful pieces of advice, Sarah, thank you so much for speaking with me today.

Sarah Delgado: Thank you, Lisa, for the opportunity.

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