

Leader to Watch

Robyn Begley, DNP, RN, NEA-BC

Maria W. O'Rourke, RN, PhD, FAAN

Robyn Begley, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, is chief executive officer (CEO) of the American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) and senior vice president and chief nursing officer of the American Hospital Association. Interviewing Robyn was truly an enjoyable experience; she is affable, thoughtful, confident and down to earth. As AONL begins its rebranding effort, the role of CEO is perfect timing for her and AONL. With her leadership skill and experience, she has what it takes to move the organization forward. However, what makes her unique and timely is her longstanding belief that inclusivity is foundational to successful change and transition. This core value will help her weather the storms that come with such an organizational transformation. We wish her well as she takes the helm.



MO: Why did you seek and accept the CEO position at AONL?

RB: As a member on the AONL Board of Directors, I was inspired by the passion, knowledge, and remarkable talent of my fellow board members and the AONL staff. I didn't see myself leaving AtlantiCare prior to my retirement as I loved my colleagues and nursing team. However, a compelling opportunity to lead this influential organization presented itself last spring. So, here I am!

MO: What in your career best prepared you for this new role?

RB: Patient safety, workforce, quality, and value are of top of mind for health care leaders. Through my 35 years of experience as a nurse leader in hospitals and health systems, I intimately understand the issues. I previously served on the board of directors for the Organization of Nurse Leaders New Jersey and AONL. I am a passionate and outspoken advocate for nurses and nursing leaders.



MO: What is your greatest challenge during your role transition?

RB: In my few short months in this role, I have learned that navigating association work has its differences from health care operations. We serve members that are very busy in their respective leadership roles, and we have to deliver services and products that are meaningful and provide value. Membership is voluntary, and we have to consistently deliver. Learning and navigating this new space is a welcome challenge!

MO: What do you hope to accomplish as CEO?

RB: AONL's strategic plan for 2019-21 is forward thinking and large in scope, focusing on advocacy, education, and community. Our organization believes every nurse is a leader and is dedicated to inclusivity of all nurse leaders. Our strategic priorities and core work aim to support all nurses in their leadership journey. AONL this spring changed its name to the American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL) to communicate inclusivity. Through the rebrand, we hope nurse leaders from across the continuum of care and with various leadership career trajectories look to AONL as the specialty organization for nursing leadership.

MO: What will your leadership help AONL to accomplish?

RB: I will work with my team, board, and members to focus on the strategic plan, and operationalize the tactics necessary to achieve this. Our commitment is to be an inclusive, innovative, and influential organization. I will lead (by example, I hope) the organization to take thoughtful risks, to be present and advocate, and to al-

ways keep our members and nursing leadership community as the north star when making decisions.

MO: What are some aspects of the AONL strategic plan that are critical at this time?

RB: AONL's strategic priorities include advocacy, workforce, thought leadership, and inclusion. As a nurse leader myself, I know how incidents of violence and disaster impact nurses, the need for academic-practice partnerships and the need to strengthen the nursing workforce. I have experience in initiating partnerships with my interprofessional colleagues, community leaders, and academia.

MO: What are some key responsibilities you have in your leadership of AONL?

RB: One of my most important responsibilities is making sure the operational plan aligns with the strategic plan and needs of our members. Although my role as CEO is more strategic, my responsibility is to ensure our team delivers on our promise to support all nurses in their leadership journey. Throughout AONL's 52-year history, the organization and its membership continues to evolve. My responsibility is to ensure that we continue to maximize the organization's efficiency, influence, and inclusivity. We can accomplish this through constant communication, evaluation, innovation, and teamwork.

MO: What is your greatest hope for AONL?

RB: My greatest hope is that nurse leaders across the continuum and career trajectory view the organization as inclusive, innovative, and influential. We changed the name because AONL provides educa-



tion, advocacy, and community for the specialty field of nursing leadership.

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**Name:**

Robyn Begley

Hometown:

Folsom, New Jersey. However, I am based in Chicago.

Current job:

American Organization for Nursing Leadership chief executive officer, senior vice president and chief nursing officer of the American Hospital Association

Family:

I am the oldest of 6 sisters. I learned persuasion and supervision skills early in life. I am married to my husband Jim and have 3 children—Chris (Aby), Marisa (Mike), and Jessica (fiancé Josh)—and 4 grandchildren.

Education:

Doctor of Nursing Practice degree at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, New Brunswick, New Jersey, master's degree from Widener University, Chester, Pennsylvania, and bachelor's degree from Georgetown University in Washington, DC. I am board certified as an advanced nurse executive with the American Nurses Credentialing Center.

First job in nursing:

I began my career as a staff nurse in obstetrics at Framingham Union Hospital, Massachusetts.

What people, philosophy, books have influenced your thinking:

I am blessed to have many great influences in my life. My parents were incredibly encouraging, particularly in regard to higher education. My grandmother was my role model as a working mother. Widowed with a young child, she went to work on Wall Street in the 40's. I always admired her work ethic and ability to see the good in people.

The Starfish Thrower by Loren Eiseley. Dorothea Orem's theory of self-care is the lens by which I see nursing care. As a health care leader, I have the opportunity to advocate for patients, nurses, and communities in a different way than I did as a clinical nurse. My first CEO, George Lynn, was probably the most influential person in my career development and taught me that as a nurse leader, I could influence other health care leaders and lead nurses, who in turn, care for many patients.

My best advice to aspiring leaders:

Don't be afraid to take a few risks! Perfection is the enemy of good. Just get started. Don't get paralyzed in the planning process.

One thing I want to learn about or do:

Travel.

One word to describe you:

I would say tenacious. Others might describe me as optimistic.

One word that best describes your leadership:

Inclusive.

Greatest accomplishment:

As CNO, I led AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center to achieve the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Magnet designation 4 times. However, my stellar team deserves all of the credit.