

Leader to Watch

Loressa Cole, DNP, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, FACHE

Amy E. Trueblood, MS, RN, NE-BC

Loressa Cole has been a nurse since she was 20 years old. She grew up in rural West Virginia in a time where her passion to become a nurse began early on and was solidified when she was a teenager, when she saw first-hand the wonderful work of nurses, as they cared for her mother during a time of illness.



Loressa Cole was drawn to the caring aspect of nursing and the awesome responsibility that comes with being in a caring and serving profession. Dr Cole further recognized how intelligent the nurses were and how critical nursing care was to the overall experience her mother had during this time. The nurses were the caregivers spending the most time with her mother, and their ability to respond to her physical and emotional needs is what inspired Dr Cole to pursue nursing as a career.

Dr Cole's career has been spent mostly in the acute care hospital setting in a variety of staff and leadership roles, including CNO at the hospital and system level. She has also served on the Virginia Nurses Association Board and was president of that

organization for 2 years prior to being appointed chief officer and executive vice president for the American Nurses Credentialing Center. Dr Cole has been in her current role, as chief executive officer of the ANA Enterprise since May of 2018. In this role, she provides strategic leadership and is responsible for the operating activities of the Enterprise including management of staff and implementation of programs for the American Nurses Association (ANA), American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), and American Nurses Foundation.

Dr Cole lives in West Virginia with her husband, who also served the community through his role in law enforcement. She has a son and daughter and 1 granddaughter, and enjoys spending time with her family.



AT: Congratulations on your new role! I am honored to be able to learn more about you. Can you tell me about your career path and what brought you to where you are today?

LC: I received a full scholarship to nursing school and graduated from an associate's program on a Saturday and began work in my first job as a nurse the following Monday! I became a charge RN very quickly, and within 5 years, I moved into a nursing supervisor and nursing manager position. Within 10 years of being a nurse, I was encouraged to keep progressing and became a director of multiple nursing units.

For the past 20 years, I have been in the role of chief nursing officer. I always seem to have been in the right place at the right time, and I have always believed I needed to listen and grow and embrace additional responsibilities offered to me, whether in education or responsibility within operational settings.

During my years as CNO, I became involved with the American Nurse Credentialing Center (ANCC) through our Magnet Recognition® and Pathway to Excellence® Programs within that system. I had been serving on the Virginia Nurses Association (VNA) board, and I was encouraged to pursue the position of executive director of the ANCC, and transitioned to that role in 2016. I was in that role for about a year when I learned the CEO role would be available, and was encouraged to apply for that as well. I am honored to serve as CEO of the ANA Enterprise role, beginning May of 2018.

AT: It sounds like quite a journey you have been on, and you mention being encouraged along the way for several of your positions. What colleagues and experiences have influenced you most in your career?

LC: I have had so many influential people in my career who have believed in me and mentored me. Each position I have taken has been the result of someone reaching out and saying they saw me in the next role, mostly when I wouldn't have seen that initially within myself, and within each role, I have made so many connections and support systems that help as I transition. One such influence has been Dr Pamela Cipriano, past president of the American Nurses Association, who I have worked with in various capacities throughout the years, and she had a lot to do with me applying for my current position. Dr Cipriano was influential in my pursuit of my current role and through one of the most influential events in my leadership career.

I was profoundly influenced by my experience as the CNO of LewisGale Hospital Montgomery (formerly Montgomery Regional Hospital), at the time of the tragic shooting at Virginia Tech University in 2007. We cared for several victims, and as the CNO, I also focused heavily on caring for those providing care in such a traumatic and life-changing event. Through this event, I gained an understanding of the importance of being prepared for any situation as a nursing leader. I learned that a strong leader must be prepared for the unthinkable, and when the unthinkable occurs, the leader's presence during that time is so impactful and important to everyone involved. I knew that the best thing that I could do in this situation was to be there, be quietly present, and make sure that I met any needs that were identified by our patients or our team of caregivers. I learned that whether it be a need for a chaplain, counseling support, food, protection from the media, or just a place to rest for a few moments, that I, as a leader, needed to be there to ensure that any and all needs were met. The role is crucial and one that I am honored to have been able to fill at that time.

AT: Thank you for your leadership to your team and all you were serving during that time. I know your leadership had a huge impact and continues to as we learn from you. Tell me what you find to be the most relevant learning from that experience now that you are leading at the national level?

LC: Even more important than the leadership during the immediate aftermath of the event, which was crucial, was the leadership provided in recovery and what I learned about resilience of all involved. You cannot underestimate the long-term effect of such a traumatic event on your staff and the continued attention staff must have to recover. I give a talk entitled, "Caring for the Caregivers," where I include the testimonies of registered nurses (RNs) regarding the long-term support they needed. This speaks to the

need to understand individuals and that each of them will need different levels of support during recovery. Mostly, they need to know that their leaders are there to support them and are with them through the entire event and recovery process. I had many nurses who commended me for my messaging during that time and the simple statement “We’re going to stay with you.”

In terms of leadership at a national level, I hope to influence the leadership community to do something when these events occur to let those involved know they are not alone and there is support coming from their colleagues around the country. When these types of tragedies occur, every nurse should pause and think about the caregivers involved and send any good wishes and support on an ongoing basis. We do, naturally, think of the victims and their families, and we need to do that, and also know that even seemingly small tokens of support are greatly appreciated. Even something as simple as having a banner printed for employees to sign, put in the mail, and send to the impacted organizations so that they know there is support out there for them during the tragic event and as they recover together. These things mean so much to all involved and are easy things we as nursing leaders can coordinate during times of tragedy for our colleagues.

AT: It sounds like you learned a lot about the importance of connections and support in our greater community of nursing. How do you see that being enhanced and developed further in your role with the ANA Enterprise?

LC: Absolutely, the connections are so important. The ANA Enterprise seeks to have a larger reach and stronger connections with America’s 4 million registered nurses. Involvement in professional organizations is crucially important for both career growth and for feeling a sense of community within our important profession. In 2 years, the American Nurses Association will be 125 years old, and membership and participation continues to be as important today as it was in the beginning of the organization. We seek nurses who want to engage in the work of ANA through membership and active participation, making important connections beyond individual work settings.

One primary area of focus at the ANA Enterprise is to connect with a greater number of nurses about their specific needs, especially nurses in direct patient care. The ANA Enterprise speaks of itself as the organization that represents the interest of all nurses, and that means we must be relevant to nurses in all care settings as we bring new programs and services to market, advance our advocacy work, and maintain the foundational standards for nursing.

AT: It will be so important to have those connections nationally as our entire health care systems and processes are transformed. What do you see as the role of the ANA during this



Name:

Loressa Cole

Hometown:

Peterstown, West Virginia

Current job:

CEO of the ANA Enterprise, which is the organizing platform of the American Nurses Association (ANA), the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), and the American Nurses Foundation

Education:

I earned an associate degree in nursing from Bluefield State College in Bluefield, West Virginia; a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia; a master’s of business administration from Averett University in Danville, Virginia; and a doctorate in nursing practice from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

First job in nursing:

Staff RN in general med-surg

Being in a leadership position gives me the opportunity to:

Continually learn from and mentor others

Most people don’t know that I:

Am a choir director

My best advice to aspiring leaders:

Commit to life-long learning and when doors open, step on in!

One thing I want to learn:

To take my own advice—find more “me time” and achieve work–life balance

One word to describe me:

Enthusiastic



time of transition, and how can we help you and the ANA Enterprise be successful?

LC: We must recognize that nursing is moving beyond the walls of health care centers and acute settings, so we must respond to the health care needs of Americans wherever they are. This will require us to consider nursing roles in settings we have not considered before this time of transformation. To improve the health of our country, and remain relevant to the needs of nurses in all settings, the ANA Enterprise and other nursing organizations must meet nurses where they are.

For that to occur, we need every nurse leader to engage with the work of the American Nurses Association at the national and local level as we seek to ensure relevant representation for every nurse, ultimately ensuring higher quality health care in America.

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