

Leader to Watch

Elizabeth Madigan, PhD, RN, FAAN

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

Elizabeth Madigan began her nursing career with her bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) from Wright State University and has been on a journey of progressive roles, organizations, and forward-thinking endeavors since that time. She received her MS from The Ohio State University, and began her career in formal leadership positions, including a position as Director of Home Care in Columbus, Ohio, and as assistant chief nursing officer in a hospital at the age of 30.



Elizabeth Madigan has served in many operational staff and leadership roles, and also had a career in academia at Case Western Reserve University. It was there that she gained experiences with grant funding, research, and global health nursing. Dr Madigan also has served on 2 boards of directors and further expanded her interests in looking at a greater picture of work and building relationships with people across the world.

Dr Madigan and her husband raised their family together in Ohio, and she has now relocated to Indianapolis, Indiana, where she is serving as the

chief executive officer (CEO) for the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (Sigma).

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

EM: Certainly! I seem to have always been involved in forward-thinking, progressive aspects of nursing, starting with the BSN program I completed through Wright State University. I was in that program in the 1980s, and they



had made the controversial (at the time) decision to have the nursing students spend much of our time in the community instead of the hospital during our program.

After graduation, I spent 1.5 years as a staff nurse in a pediatric department. I then moved on to a VNA in West Central Ohio. I worked in many rural areas and small towns, and got to be a part of the development of their hospice program, which became just the third certified hospice in Ohio. This progressive agency changed the course of my nursing career as I realized, at just 23 years old, the essence of what nursing really should be and could be. I realized it was not about all of the technological interventions, though those were fascinating in and of themselves, but nursing is all about relationships and the opportunity to really impact someone's life. It was this realization that kept me in home health and hospice nursing for quite some time.

I then took another step outside of a traditional path and became a nurse in a school for delinquent boys. I spent 1.5 years there. I was the only nurse, and I experienced so much through treating these young boys. A lot of these boys suffered from behavioral mental health issues, and we tried many approaches beyond just medications to treat them, which was controversial at that time as well.

I then set some educational goals for myself, to include getting my master's degree by the age of 30 and a PhD by 40. I started my MS at The Ohio State University and took a position as director of home care in Columbus. I got promoted into nursing administration, and by the time I was 30, I was working as an assistant chief nursing officer. I was responsible

for many departments, including home care and the intensive care units (ICUs). It was during this time that I realized transitional care was lacking, and I would wonder why we were sending people home without being aware of their home conditions. I believe my experience in home care helped me focus in on this aspect at that time, and we worked very early on with ensuring appropriate transitions of care for our patients.

My husband then suggested I do my PhD through Case Western Reserve University, and I got my PhD in 1996. I enjoyed a great career at Case Western where I was an endowed professor and tenured full professor. Then, one day, I got a personal e-mail asking about my interest in the CEO opportunity at Sigma, and I felt like I was in a pretty good position personally to apply. I truly felt my career experience to that point had prepared me well to step out on to a new path, and so I sent in my CV and went on from there! That was in February, and 7 months later, here I was living in Indianapolis, Indiana, starting a new career with Sigma!!

AT: Thank you for sharing about your career. You have definitely had diverse experiences and have demonstrated courage in stepping out to try new things. Who have been the most influential people that gave you that support and courage throughout your career?

EM: My very first mentor was Donna Grimm, director of the home care agency where I worked. She saw something in the 23-year-old me that I don't know that

I saw. She gave me extra responsibilities and challenges to keep me engaged. She found things for me to do that would benefit the organization and help me learn and grow. I have had many other great mentors through faculty colleagues, research mentors, deans, and others. In particular, Shirley Moore, the associate dean for research at Case Western, helped me with my research career, and May Wykle, former Sigma president and dean. She gave me opportunities when I was relatively young in the ranks, and now it is so amazing that we have come full circle with me in the CEO role for Sigma. She was influential in helping me discern fit for this position as well, and I am grateful.

AT: You mentioned fit for the position and feeling you could bring something to the role from your past experiences. What do you feel you most bring to the role at Sigma?

EM: I really feel I have something to offer on the global health side of things. I had been in charge of the WHO Collaborating Center for Home Care Nursing at Case Western related to global health. I had done some technical consulting kinds of work for home care nursing related to global health. I have worked with lots of great nurses doing terrific work in other countries and seen them go through many challenges.

I had also serendipitously been involved in 2 boards as one way to fulfill my professional service commitment. This experience gave me a good sense of how boards could work and how to work with a professional staff. Insight into these relationships is helpful when now leading an organization with more than 135,000 members from over 90 countries. That's astonishing when you think about an organization which started with 6 student nurses in 1922. I am really proud of the work of Sigma, and I look forward to focus on scholarship and leadership primarily. I will ensure we continue to do what we can to support nurses along their entire career.

AT: How do you think your global health experiences you mentioned will help you prepare our nurses for the major transitions occurring in health care?

EM: First is to help people realize that all nursing is global health nursing today. Someone from Cambodia could come in to the ED in Peoria, Illinois, and we could be faced with an illness that we have never seen. Recognized and undocumented immigration brings a lot into the United States. My aim is to make sure the nurses in the United States begin to think about their care as global health nursing.

Secondly, I believe we need to continue to connect nurses in all care areas and from across the globe with each other. We have a great advantage in that we have membership from several different countries, and so we



Name:

Elizabeth Madigan

Hometown:

Wapakoneta, Ohio (home of Neil Armstrong)

Current job:

CEO of Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honor Society

Education:

BSN (Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio), MS in Nursing (The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio), PhD in Nursing (Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio)

First job in nursing:

Pediatric staff nurse at a community hospital in Lima, Ohio

Being in a leadership position gives me the opportunity to:

Promote nurses and nursing's contribution to global health

Most people don't know that:

I love traditional Irish music.

My best advice to aspiring leaders:

Take the risk to get involved. Most organizations need more people involved.

One thing I want to learn:

More about nursing in the world

One word to describe me:

Passionate



could help each other understand and experience what it's like to be a nurse in Pakistan, for example, through influence and collaborative work with our nurses from Pakistan. Our members also run the gamut from leadership positions to staff nurses and everybody in between. A lot of our clinical members are our most loyal members, and we can really do great work together with our membership to ensure we are connecting globally.

AT: Your vision to connect nurses globally at a deeper level is inspiring. How can the nursing leadership community support you?

EM: Sigma is sort of a “unicorn” as we are a US-based global organization. We aren't a specialty organization, and so often people don't think of us as collaborators. So, I would say that if leaders could begin to think of us in this same way and reach out, we might be a great resource for them. We do publish 12 to 14 books a year and can really help leaders get their work published and recognized.

AT: It does seem that Sigma can be a great resource for nursing leaders, and I wonder, given the global health perspective, what roles you see emerging in the next 10 years, and what advice you would offer those aspiring to those roles?

EM: I really see roles in data mining, natural language processing, and artificial intelligence emerging for nurses around the world. We will definitely need someone

with a clinical sense to look at all of the information that is out there and put nurses eyes on what machines are looking at right now. We will need nurses who understand algorithms, write some code, look at information, and then make sense of it and build what is needed. Nurses are the ones who will critically think through the information, we would understand how the algorithm would be implemented, and we can fill the gap for those who are more naive as to how health care is delivered. Nurses will be critical to helping others see what opportunities exist for the many tools that are being used, and nurses will, as always, help us do a better job with health delivery.

AT: There are certainly a lot of current and emerging opportunities for nurses, and it will be exciting to see how we fill those roles in the future. As we move forward, how would you describe the legacy you hope to develop in your current role?

EM: Sigma, itself, already has an amazing legacy. We are 96 years old. We gave our first nursing research grant in the United States in 1936. I really hope to continue to do great work that has been established by my predecessors and keep moving all research forward. We need to learn from legacy organizations that did not change with the times who have now been left behind. I want to keep Sigma current and utilize my past experiences to continue to push forward in progressive and forward-thinking ways. For my personal legacy, I want



people to know me and see me as someone who is approachable and wants to know the Sigma members and others within the nursing leadership and nursing community as a whole. Sometimes, when you get in leadership positions, people begin to say things like, “I’m honored to meet you...” or somehow see you differently and don’t feel comfortable just talking with these leaders. I don’t want others to be afraid to approach me and want them to know I am a person and a nurse and ready to collaborate to ensure nursing continues to thrive into the future.

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