

**2024 AACN Thought Leaders Assembly**  
***Nursing VIIIP: Visibility, Image, Influence, Impact, Power***

The AACN Thought Leaders Assembly provides a forum for generative thinking on emerging trends and issues impacting health, health care, and higher education. The dialogue generated during this annual event is designed to stimulate fresh thinking and better position AACN to serve as a catalyst for excellence and innovation in academic nursing.

The 2024 Thought Leaders Assembly theme, *Nursing VIIIP: Visibility, Image, Influence, Impact, and Power*, was selected to stimulate discussion among practice and academic leaders on current perceptions about nursing and how to elevate understanding about nursing's true impact on healthcare and health equity. While the discussion initially focused on the image of nursing, participants quickly recognized that it is raising the visibility of the impact of nursing that provides the greatest opportunity. Demonstrating impact will drive visibility, image, and influence – not the other way around.

Convened in Chicago on July 17, 2024, the meeting opened with remarks from AACN Board Chair Jean Giddens and President and CEO Deborah Trautman. AACN's leaders framed the topic and welcomed this year's attendees, which included the AACN Board of Directors, 9 invited nursing practice and academic leaders, 3 invited deans, 3 student representatives from the Graduate Nursing Student Academy, and senior AACN staff. The Assembly was facilitated by Josh Mintz of CHP Mintz.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Giddens highlighted the intentionality of bringing practice and academic leaders together to address two complex questions: How can we elevate the image of nursing, and how can we raise awareness about the impact nurses have on health and health care? In her opening remarks, Dr. Trautman highlighted the importance of the image and impact of nursing on growing and sustaining a healthy workforce.

The Assembly featured 3 panels consisting of academic and practice leaders, each addressing a separate issue relating to the current perception of nurses and the nursing profession; internal and external factors that inhibit a clear understanding of nursing and its impact; and strategies to achieve that understanding and demonstrate the impact of the profession. (See the roster of panelists below). Time was allotted for questions after each panel presentation.

### **Key Takeaways and Questions Addressed**

We know that nurses are the key to providing high-quality, cost-effective, and patient-centered care, but we must do more to demonstrate the impact of nursing on improving health. Given that the profession is at the intersection of care delivery and the social determinants of health, how might we raise awareness about nursing's role in reshaping healthcare delivery and impacting the greater good?

The nursing profession can improve on elevating, sanctifying, and/or articulating the value of the profession. Panelists described how nurses often struggle with their professional identity and can only articulate a surface-level understanding of the profession beyond the bedside. They called on the academic community to do more to enhance professional identity and leadership, which are key components within nursing identity, into the academic curriculum, not only upon entry but throughout graduate-level education.

To heighten understanding about the impact of nursing and nursing roles, it is critical to overcome stereotypes, increase visibility, inspire passion and a commitment to caring, and elevate the appreciation

for nursing research/scientific work within and beyond the nursing community. With more than 4 million nurses in the workforce, there are opportunities to demonstrate the power and financial impact of the profession, and to increase understanding that nurses are key stakeholders in all discussions and decisions about the future of health and healthcare. Until nurses understand, accept, and appreciate their professional identity, it will be difficult for them to promote the profession and the impact nurses have on the nation's healthcare.

Panelists noted that external factors, including media representation of nurses, influences public perception of the profession. Stories shared on social media often do not represent the full reach of the nursing profession or the impact it has on healthcare. Social media has powerful influence, and consideration should be given to using available platforms and social media influencers more effectively to advocate for nursing.

While describing internal and external factors that impact the perception of nursing is important, the consensus among attendees is that there must be intentionality in capturing scientific data to support and demonstrate the impact of nursing on health and healthcare. Research and data on the impact of nursing can be used to shape communication initiatives and awareness strategies to increase visibility, support for nursing and interest in the profession.

For example, this work could include demonstrating the efficacy of nurse-led models of care and highlighting stories about nursing interventions and patient outcomes. Having this data to substantiate the profound impact of nursing would help to restore the image of nurses and the nursing profession, all while retaining and promoting nursing's commitment to caring, competency, and innovation.

To change current perceptions of nurses and the nursing profession, key participant engagement is required. This would include the involvement of the next generation of nurses, patients, and local, state, and national nursing associations. Nurse initiatives in other countries might also serve as examples. There are many potential pathways to address the internal and external perception of nursing, however, the intent of this Assembly was to identify and highlight current challenges, not advance solutions.

At the 2024 AACN Thought Leaders Assembly, nurse leaders unlocked a different way of looking at nursing's visibility, image, influence, impact, and power (VIIP). The group determined that while there are challenges to be resolved, the nursing profession is well-positioned to shape its professional identity, leverage strengths, change perceptions, and engage with stakeholders to magnify its impact on health, healthcare, and health equity.

### **Thought Leader Panelists**

**Bimbola Akintade, PhD, MBA, ACNP-BC, NEA-BC, FAANP, FAAN**, Dean, College of Nursing, East Carolina University

**Beena Peters, DNP, RN, FACHE, FABC**, System Chief Nurse Executive, Cook County Health

**Julie Zerwic, PhD, RN, FAHA, FAAN**, Kelting Dean, College of Nursing, University of Iowa

**Debbie Hatmaker, PhD, RN, FAAN**, Chief Nursing Officer, ANA Enterprise

**Brenda Nevidjon, MSN, RN, FAAN**, Chief Executive Officer, Oncology Nursing Society

**Shannon Smith, DNP, APRN, ACNS-BS, CNE**, Chair, Department of Nursing, Claflin University

**Cynthia Brincat, MD, PhD**, The Henry P Russe MD, Dean of Rush Medical College – Interim Chairperson, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology

**Alex Morin, MA**, Managing Director, Manatt Health Strategies

**Mary Wakefield, PhD, RN, FAAN**, Co-Chair, The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity. National Academy of Medicine

### **Thought Leader Participants:**

**Lorna Finnegan, PhD, RN, FNP, FAAN** Dean, Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing Loyola University Chicago

**Eileen Collins, PhD, FN, FAAN, ATSF** Dean, College of Nursing University of Illinois Chicago

**Connie Zak, DNP**  
Dean, School of Nursing  
Aurora University

**Claudia Choe**  
University of Illinois at Chicago

**Steve Rudolph**  
Director of Communications and Marketing  
University of Minnesota School of Nursing

**Talia Coveleski**  
Rush University  
GNSA Liaison

**Tyler Gaedecke**  
Co-Chair GNSA Leadership Council  
Columbia University