

Portraits of Nursing Leadership

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Nurses improve life for migrant families

MARY LOU DE LEON SIANTZ is a professor at the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis. She is nationally recognized for her interdisciplinary efforts to prepare health professionals for leadership and policy, and internationally respected for her research in migrant health.

As a professor at the School of Nursing, de Leon Siantz teaches, conducts research and mentors students in leadership policy and population health. Her research most recently focused on the impact of migration on the health and development of Hispanic migrant/immigrant children and families. Her current research, funded through the Office of Minority Health Department of Health and Human Service, focuses on the development of educational strengths of Hispanic immigrant adolescents and the promotion of their reproductive awareness.

Q. *What prompted you to pursue a leadership role in nursing?*

A. Observing and experiencing the health care that nurses and physicians provided my family, siblings, and me throughout my childhood, made a huge impression on me. As a child with asthma, I experienced early on the warmth and cultural sensitivity that our family physician and registered nurses used to treat sickness, promote health and prevent illness. I knew that's what I wanted to do, too.

Early in my career, I was chief of nursing for children with developmental disabilities at the Children's Hospital in Los Angeles Child Development Center. I loved the interprofessional nature of this position —

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the connection with education, research and practice, in a university setting, and the preparation of the next generation of leaders. This inspired me to continue my education and complete a doctorate.

As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, I recognized that nursing leadership did not reflect the demographics of the U.S. But, I was inspired by a few diverse nurse leaders and others who served as my mentors. I had many mentors, from the founder of the National Black Nurses Association, Betty Smith Williams; as well as the first nurse to direct the Maternal Child Health Bureau, Henrietta Villaescusa; to Afaf Meleis, global health leader; Kathryn Barnard, nurse scientist; Congressman Ruben Hinojosa and Frances Hesselbein, former president of the Peter F. Drucker Foundation and CEO of the Girl Scouts of America.

I discovered through my research that little was known about immigrant families. Some research had been conducted regarding men's roles in immigrant families, but very little to nothing about women and children and the family as a unit. This was a challenging task

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PORTRAITS OF NURSING LEADERSHIP highlights leaders, faculty and partners of the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis who exemplify the school's vision and mission through leadership and commitment to advancing health.

The **PORTRAITS OF NURSING LEADERSHIP** series is available at nursing.ucdavis.edu

to take on, but those challenges inspired me to renew my commitment to make a difference and take on new leadership opportunities — such as serving on the board of directors for the National Latino Children’s Institute. Most recently, I was appointed to lead UC Davis Chancellor Linda Katehi’s academic science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) initiative as founding director for the Center for Advancing Multicultural Perspectives on Science. The center is part of a new effort to increase the participation of women, especially Latinas, in STEM careers. This is what matters to me.

Q. What do you like about the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing?

A. My professional goals align with the school’s mission and vision of transformative leadership to advance health, improve quality of care and health outcomes, and inform health policy. The school is recognized for its ability to attract a diverse student and faculty pool. Faculty and leaders demonstrate a capacity to lead change and transform health systems, especially those serving rural and underserved populations. The school is positioned to educate the next generation of nurses and interprofessional health professionals for collaboration on migration and health from a lifespan perspective. I can mentor diverse students on the importance of their scholarship to leading the transformation of the health and development of rural migrant and immigrant families, locally, nationally and globally.

Q. What motivates you to focus in your particular area?

A. My research and policy experiences, especially as the National Mental Health Coordinator for the Migrant Head Start program provided an opportunity to observe rural migrant and immigrant families. These experiences identified the need for research as well as interprofessional and binational partnerships to transform the health, education systems and health policies needed to support their future potential.

Q. How can the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing transform education and health care?

A. Transformation will occur through visionary leadership that embraces transparent communication, respect and civility among faculty, students, staff and alumni in collaboration with evolving health systems, interdisciplinary teams, diverse communities, and public and private partnerships. Dissemination of new interprofessional models through community partnerships that lead to innovative research, education, and practice will not only transform community health, but also answer questions of mutual concern to communities and universities. A commitment to mentoring the next generation of nurse and interprofessional leaders in health science will sustain the transformation.

Q. What would you recommend for faculty or graduate students interested in the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing?

A. Candidates should follow these steps:

- value their own leadership potential, expertise and obligation to the mentorship needed to lead change in the health systems of the future;
- consider the school’s commitment to the innovation, interdisciplinary collaborations and discovery expected in research, education and practice;
- appreciate the charge to test a new model of education for the 21st Century;
- recognize the significance of the school’s model in the implementation of the Institute of Medicine report on the “Future of Nursing;”
- value engagement with rural communities in Northern California;
- commit to diversity and a lifespan perspective;
- appreciate that the school is at the forefront of the application of technology for health and and is also uniquely positioned in the state capital in one of the most diverse cities of the U.S. — Sacramento.



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