

April 2021 Leader Highlight

In April, NWONL circles back to follow up with **Jen Packer, CNO at OHSU Health Hillsboro Medical Center** (formerly Tuality Healthcare). Our last interview with Jen was mid 2020 in the center of the pandemic. Jen shares where she is at now, a candid view into her leadership style, the direction of leadership heading toward post pandemic and offers a strong call to action for all of us... plus a bit of what she is learning for fun.

(~ 5 min read)

Cindi W.

Hello Jen, why don't you just quickly introduce yourself and where you're working, and then we'll delve into some deeper questions around what's been happening in your leadership world.

Jen P.

I'm Jen Packer, the chief nursing officer at OHSU Health Hillsboro Medical Center, formerly referenced as Tuality Healthcare, but now we are part of the OHSU health system.

Cindi W.

Thank you. This is undoubtedly been a very challenging year for you and nursing leaders across the nation and the world. Let's tackle that... what do you see as some of the biggest challenges going forward as now, we start to emerge, dare I say, on the other side of this pandemic?

Jen P.

The biggest thing - I say this from my own perspective along with what I'm hearing from leaders - is I think we all recognize that we're starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We know we're all hopeful (about vaccines) and that we're going to see an end to the pandemic. We're going to have to go back to our primary roles, versus crisis managers: helping our nursing practice, helping with the operations of our hospital. The issue is how do you move forward when everybody is feeling so much fatigue in their job? You need energy to be innovative and creative but people are just tired. How do we go back to a level of energy and motivation to get move us forward?

Cindi W.

Definitely a big challenge. Is there anything that comes to mind that you feel like we need to be focusing more on? I know you just mentioned finding that energy, but what's your sense of what we need to be talking about? Is it resiliency? Is it coping skills? Is it just recovery and finding the enthusiasm in the work again? What's your sense on that?

Jen P.

I think it's hard because those things mean so many different things to people. Like when you talk about coping and resilience, there's a lot of people who feel they're very resilient and still feel stuck and can't quite get out of this quicksand that we're experiencing. For me, it's really about going back to the basics: why we are in healthcare originally. I'm striving to help nurses find joy at work again. I feel it is critical we do that. People can be resilient and cope, but having a purpose and joy is beyond that.

Cindi W.

So true. What personally are you doing to reenergize and find the joy in the work that you do (as a CNO)?

- Jen P.** *Well, for me, the biggest thing is connecting to why I'm a nurse. When I feel overwhelmed and bombarded with crisis and start to get that feeling of "Oh, heavens, I don't know which direction to turn next..." I go out and connect with the staff. Being out there, rounding with nurses, other leaders all the support teams and the patients, its grounding. Specifically, I feel I need to be able to connect even more with patients... and nursing staff. I'm honestly sad because yesterday, we had our DAISY Award presentation to a nurse, and I missed it. Yes, there were a stack of reasons, but I am heavy with the feeling that "I just missed that, and it was very important to me and all of us." That kind of interaction gives me energy and helps me rekindle resilience and joy. I even find joy just reading stories of the people nominated for DAISY awards. That's the kind of stuff that brings back the feeling of " this is why we're here."*
- Cindi W.** Absolutely. Finding those little reasons to celebrate, right? And what would you offer to put a new or aspiring leader right now as they're thinking about their journey in nursing? What would you do to help maybe inspire and guide them?
- Jen P.** *I think one of the biggest issues that our leaders struggle with is boundaries, related to work-life balance and expectations of ourselves and our staff. We either haven't set them (boundaries) well enough, or we overlook them entirely. What are we doing with the ability to be texted at any hour of the day, called at any hour of the day? Have we really considered the whole impact? I feel it sets our leaders up for risk of burnout, not being able to feel like they have time away from work. My challenge to Leaders is if you're going to be a leader role, you have to very early on know how to set boundaries and develop your team, so your team isn't reliant on you all the time. Train, empower, delegate, develop them... be comfortable with the decisions that they make. Make sure that they have what they need to make those decisions. Support them up so they succeed, and you will have time as well. Time that you can really be away from work and energize yourself.*
- Cindi W.** That's great advice. Not easy to do. Leader development is a challenge that never really ends. Switching to your personal life, for fun, what are you doing outside of work that fills your bucket a little bit that gives you some energy back?
- Jen P.** *First off, I make sure I get up early and exercise every morning. So even with COVID, when it started, my husband built me this nice gym in our garage, and I'm still out there every morning. As tired as I am, I still manage to put my clothes on and go out there. And, for fun I then I started playing pickleball about a year ago.*
- Cindi W.** So fun, I love the sound of that!
- Jen P.** *It's so much fun. It's just fun again to learn something new and watch yourself improve, "my goodness, I'm so much better than I was a year ago". I've been practicing this, and I finally can do it... it's just that kind of stuff that I've been doing for fun.*
- Cindi W.** Okay. I admit I don't know a thing about pickleball. Is that something that you play with somebody else or—is it a tricky sport?
- Jen P.** *It's kind of like a cross between tennis and ping pong. It's on a much smaller court than tennis. You can play outside; you can play inside. And it's the fastest growing sport in the United States right now. Someday, you're going to have to get yourself into it.*

Cindi W. Good to know. I get my exercise, a little bit of interaction with somebody, and coordination. I get outside. What's not to like? I'll warn my husband after this interview...

Jen P. ***You should. It's fun!***

Cindi W. I really appreciate your candid responses and for sharing some solid nursing leadership advice and insight to me personally. Is there anything else you want to add as we wrap up?

Jen P. ***I think we have to remember that this is not just our struggle. It's just not my burden to carry alone. It's all of ours. How do we lean on each other and share what each other's doing so that we're not reinventing things; wasting time when people have found success on something that works? Now is the time more than ever to be networking and reaching out to people so we can share what is working well.***

Cindi W. I believe that was a Leadership Call to Action...

Jen P. ***Yes, yes it is.***

Cindi W. Outstanding. Thank you Jen!

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