A Pearl of a Leader

For many of us who have been longtime members of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), we are about to embark on a journey that we thought might never come. At the end of the month, Pearl Moore, RN, MN, FAAN, the only person ever to have held the position, will retire from her job as chief executive officer (CEO). Many of you will sadly never have had the opportunity to meet and work directly with Pearl, but for those of us who have, it will be difficult to conceive of our organization without her presence and steady leadership. WWPD—or “What would Pearl do?”—became, I dare say, an automatic assessment for many of us as we worked on behalf of ONS.

Ironically, most of ONS’s 35,000 members will barely blink an eye at the transition. Of course, the National Office staff will feel the loss rather strongly, as will the leadership structure of ONS and its affiliated corporations. But most oncology nurses will go right on enjoying all of the benefits of ONS membership without realizing that most of what we have today can be attributed to Pearl’s amazing tenure as our leader. The fact that the transition to a new CEO will likely be seamless is a reflection of the amazingly functional, organized, and progressive organization that ONS has developed into throughout the years—all under the watchful eye and with the direct input of Pearl.

I am pretty sure that no one but a nurse could have been as successful in the job of taking a fledgling but promising organization of oncology nurses and helping make it the force we are today. We are one of the largest specialty nursing organizations, highly respected, financially stable, and goal directed, with a seat at many important tables. We have taken a leadership role in nursing that is envied, one that produces results for our members and for our patients. Documenting those achievements is impossible without crediting the hard work, dedication, and personal savvy of Pearl. I urge you to read the interview with Pearl in the Leadership and Professional Development column in this issue (see p. 23). Not surprisingly, this wonderful description of Pearl’s leadership journey throughout the years was written by one of our longtime ONS Publishing Division staff members. Pearl set an example with the staff that encouraged them to reach beyond their job descriptions. Read between the lines, and you will see how well Pearl exemplifies all that is good about nursing and how the fact that she is a nurse enabled her to bring important skills to the job and the talents and instincts to develop those skills to be successful. Pearl, like so many experienced nurses, seemed to have it all—energy, compassion, organizational skills, vision, problem-solving acumen, intelligence, the ability to mentor, the humility to be mentored, the foresight to anticipate future needs, and an appreciation that all of us can be more than we expected. Those talents and attitudes infused the staff and ONS member volunteers throughout the years with the freedom and willingness to achieve all that we have achieved.

One of my most enduring memories of working with Pearl goes back to the days when the organization was taking a careful look at who it was and how we, as members, could best do our work. I was fortunate to be asked to be a part of these efforts. I was one of those member volunteers who was asked to stretch a bit to contribute to the organization, and the experience was well worth the effort. One of the activities we focused on was carefully articulating a vision and mission that we would commit to as we went forward. Fittingly, the vision we committed to, “To lead the transformation of cancer care,” was proposed by Pearl. The vision was hers, but all of us at the table that day united behind the goal and knew that it would keep ONS motivated to do the best work it could do. It is the nature of visions that they should be goals for which we need to keep reaching. This vision still keeps us striving to achieve.

And so another stage in our development occurs. Paula T. Rieger, RN, MSN, AOCN®, FAAN, has begun her tenure as the second ONS CEO. Paula was involved most recently in ONS as part of the Oncology Nursing Forum Editorial Board. Working with her was a pleasure, and I hope that many of you will have the opportunity to volunteer with the organization and get to know Paula personally. She has some pretty big shoes to fill, but my wish for her is that her tenure is as enriching, lively, and professionally satisfying as it was for her predecessor. It will take a while for us to adjust to working for an organization without Pearl Moore at the helm, but perhaps the biggest part of her legacy will be that ONS can and will continue to be great even without her. She put us on a sure footing and gave us “fledglings” strong wings with which to fly. Off we go...