

Sit Down with Rebecca Love, RN, MSN, ANP, Director of Nurse Innovation & Entrepreneurship at Northeastern School of Nursing and Founder of HireNurses.com



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Nursing in the United States has a staffing problem. According to a 2012 report from the University of Nebraska, if the current shortage of nurses continues unabated, upwards of one million positions will remain unfilled in 2030. A shortage of nurses will lead to a decline in the quality of care for patients and an increase in costs for providers.

A 2016 survey from RN Network, showed that nearly half of current nurses are considering leaving the profession for a variety of reasons including exhaustion, burdensome paperwork, and not spending enough time with patients. Rebecca Love, Director of Nurse Innovation & Entrepreneurship at Northeastern University, founder of HireNurses.com and a nurse herself, is trying to address that with the Nurse Innovation and Entrepreneurship Initiative.

Her program aims to disrupt nursing education and inject it with the spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation. "The fundamental principles of nursing education, make sure you never harm or kill somebody and follow best practices at all points, but you rarely ever innovate on best practices because you've never been the person to develop those best practices. Our goal is to change that dynamic," said Love.

Q. What is Nurse Innovation and Entrepreneurship?

It is a brand new initiative in Massachusetts and the country. Nurses make up the largest collection of health care professionals, but they are rarely involved in decision making. In June 2016, Dean Nancy Hanrahan asked me to come on as the director of this initiative to change the way nursing education is delivered and to teach nurses more about innovation and entrepreneurship so they can start businesses and innovate within existing health care structures.

Q. What does that entail?

We want to see nurses as the leaders in healthcare innovation. It's teaching nurses the skillsets they need to be successful as healthcare leaders. Currently, when you go to nursing school, you leave with an excellent clinical toolbox. Give a nurse a stethoscope and a roll of tape and we're constantly innovating by the bedside. What we were never taught was the basic skills of business. It's important that nurses gather these skills so they can be change agents in their places of work. For this initiative to be successful, it all starts with leadership, Dean Nancy Hanrahan had the foresight to believe that nurses should be at the forefront of healthcare innovation and is changing nursing education to position nurses as healthcare innovators and entrepreneurs.

Q. Why do you think this a relatively newer concept? Why were nurses left behind given all the changes in the health care world in recent years?

We in nursing are told to practice within a very small box. The goal of nursing is to do two things well: You never want to harm a patient and you never want to kill

a patient. Operating within that box means you follow procedure, you follow directive, you don't challenge authority because challenging authority or procedure means you could kill or harm someone.

Entrepreneurship is all about challenging the status quo. The fundamental principles of nursing education, make sure you never harm or kill somebody and follow best practices at all points, but you rarely ever innovate on best practices because you've never been the person to develop those best practices. Our goal is to change that dynamic.

Q. So, why Massachusetts? You could create this initiative anywhere.

Massachusetts is both a leader in healthcare and in innovation. Nurses have been able to cross between healthcare and industry in larger numbers than we've seen in most other states. Nurses are taking a seat at the table in state politics, Secretary of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Alice Bonner, PhD, RN, being a primary example, where they can actually influence policy. In a lot of states you don't see that happening.

Boston is a highly international city, it's a destination for some of the best minds from around the world, you are constantly gaining access to people you would not normally have access to. There is a strong venture capital backed support system in Massachusetts; there is a strong infrastructure for companies not only with what we've done at Northeastern, but at Pulse@MassChallenge, and the numerous accelerators across the state, they give a leg up to startups to gain momentum. The community of startups is a very friendly community, although it is competitive there is a sense that if we can help one startup, it rises the tide for all other companies within the state of Massachusetts. If we can help one startup, we can help raise up all others.

Q. What are some of the technologies that you've come across here at Northeastern and in the Commonwealth that have made the lives of nurses better?

Vocera started off with rough distribution of a communications system for nurses. We have electronic monitoring now and EKG systems that allow for remote monitoring of vital signs so we don't have to be by patient's bedside all the time. I think electronic records have done something to advance the work of nurses but at the same time created other hurdles that we didn't see coming. Technological improvements in the scheduling and movement of patients have probably been the best thing for nurses.

Q. What are some of the challenges you've faced getting this off the ground?

We had to see if there was a market out there and market demand. We spent the first year focusing on events, we did 13 events in 11 months, bringing together nurses of all different backgrounds. We did a hackathon, a shark tank, a conference. What we're focusing on this year, our second year, is creating real educational opportunities, like a boot camp, a business 101, partnering with the business school to launch a program with certificates where nursing and business go together to support

nurses in these worlds. The nursing hackathon we hosted was very successful, it drew over 150 people from around the country for three days in March.

The nursing community sounds like it has embraced this.

We've been lucky that nurses have been looking for this outlet, those that have been engaged with it. Do I think the entire population of nurses understands what we are doing? Probably not. Not every nurse wants to be an entrepreneur, but every nurse is an innovator, and we hope that this effort will empower nurses to think differently about what is possible and redefine the future of nursing potential.

Q. Are there some companies or startups in Massachusetts in the health ecosystem that are particularly ahead of the game on this?

Dr. Marybeth Pompei at Exergen Corporation, a Massachusetts based company, as a nurse, she came on as one of our earliest supporters and has been instrumental in this. She's based in Massachusetts, she runs a company based in Massachusetts, and they were our first sponsor of this initiative.

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