

NWONL 2026 Annual Conference: Leading Forward - Aligning Culture, Reimagining Workforce, Adapting Leadership

Pre-Conference: Wednesday, September 23, 2026 at 3:00pm – 5:30pm PT

Main Conference: Thursday, September 24, 2026 at 7:30am PT - Friday, September 25, 2026 at 12:15pm PT

Pre-Conference: Wednesday, September 23, 2026

2:00pm – 4:00pm

Early check-in Registration

3:00pm – 4:30pm

Pre-conference: 2026 Mentor Cohort Mentoring Lab - Focused Connections, Meaningful Insights

Olivia Brooks, MSN, RN, NPD-BC, NEA-BC, is the Director of Nursing Leadership Development at MentorLead

This interactive session and mentoring lab, facilitated by MentorLead, gives participants a dynamic, structured way to build meaningful professional connections. Through guided conversations and rapid-rotation partner exchanges, participants strengthen communication skills, expand professional networks, and walk away with practical strategies they can immediately apply within their own leadership and practice settings.

4:30pm - 5:30pm

Pre-conference: NWONL Regional Councils Meetup and Social Hour

For those coming in the night before the main conference, this is a great opportunity to connect face to face with peer leaders! Special thanks to Medtronic, 2026 Premier Annual Partner for their sponsorship of the Meetup and Social.

Main Conference: Thursday, September 24, 2026

7:00am

Check-in Registration Open

7:30am - 8:30am

Breakfast & Exhibit Hall Opens

8:30am - 10:00am

Key Note - It Starts with You! Leading in a Human-Centered Way

Kay Kennedy NEA-BC, CPHQ, FAAN, an internationally recognized nurse leader, educator, and author, brings deep experience from roles spanning bedside care to the Chief Nursing Officer and national faculty appointments.

1.5 CE Credits

As healthcare grows more complex and unpredictable, leaders are being called to lead with greater clarity, intention, and humanity. This keynote introduces a human-centered approach to leadership that strengthens alignment, connection, and team culture. Leaders will

explore how small shifts in mindset and behavior can create meaningful impact on engagement, trust, and performance—starting with how they show up each day.

10:00am - 10:30am

Beyond the Transaction: Clinical Partnerships as a Strategic Leadership Advantage

Jennifer More, MN, RN, NPD-BC Associate Director, Baxter

This 30-minute session explores how clinical partnership and interoperability can help organizations move beyond silos toward more connected, adaptive healthcare ecosystems. Using the Baxter and NWONL relationship as an example, the discussion will highlight how strategic collaboration, shared learning, and common goals can create value beyond a traditional vendor relationship.

10:30am - 11:00am

Morning Break & Exhibit Hall Touring

11:00am - 12:00pm

Leading Forward with Caring Intelligence: How Nurse Leaders Can Use AI to Reduce Burden, Strengthen Culture, and Reimagine Workforce

Perry Gee PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN. Enterprise Director of Nursing Research and Evidence-Based Practice, Nurse Scientist and Associate Professor of Research Intermountain Health and National Co-Director, Sigma Nurse Scientist Collaborative.

1.0 CE Credit

Nurse leaders are navigating an increasingly complex environment defined by workforce strain, operational pressure, and rapid technological change. At the same time, artificial intelligence is moving quickly into clinical workflows, documentation, and decision support. The leadership challenge is no longer whether AI will enter nursing practice, but whether nurse leaders will shape how it does.

This talk reframes AI as a leadership strategy, not a technology initiative. Drawing on cognitive load science and the concept of Caring Intelligence, the session explores how AI can reduce burden, strengthen workforce sustainability, and restore time for human connection. Participants will be introduced to a practical framework for evaluating innovation through value yield, enabling nurse leaders to align AI adoption with culture, workforce well-being, and high-quality care.

12:00pm - 1:30pm

Lunch & Exhibit Hall Touring

1:30pm - 2:30pm

Engaging and Retaining Gen Z Nurses

Larissa Africa, MBA, BSN, RN, FAONL, FAAN, Vice President, Healthcare Solutions, Ascend Learning

1.0 CE Credit

2026 is the year Gen Z RNs reach a tipping point in health systems: by virtue of reaching 30% of the general population, Gen Z will go from adapting to workplace norms to redefining them. According to Malcolm Gladwell, author of the best-selling book *The Tipping Point* (2024), when a minority group within a population reaches between 25% and 33%, the dynamic of the population changes to reflect their needs and values. 2026 is also the year when many health systems are likely to see the first major cohort of Gen Z RNs filling nurse manager roles.

2:30pm - 3:00pm

Afternoon Break and Exhibitor Sponsored Raffles!

3:00pm - 4:00pm

The Era of Workforce Digitization: How to Lean in and Embrace the AI Revolution

Dr. Dani Bowie, DNP, RN, NE-BC SVP, Workforce AI, Qualivis/Aya Healthcare

1.0 CE Credit

The AI revolution is upon us, reaching facets of our everyday lives. Healthcare is ripe for an overhaul, but the journey of transformation will require curious, courageous and informed healthcare leaders. Together we will review the history of AI in healthcare, why it's becoming essential today and showcase examples of how AI-driven workflows in workforce management can improve efficiency and enhance patient care. Additionally, attendees will learn best practices on how to prepare, start and support the journey of workforce digitization in their health systems.

4:00pm - 5:00pm

Conference Social Hour & Networking

Main Conference: Friday, September 25, 2026

8:00am - 9:00am

Breakfast and NWONL Annual Awards Presentations

NWONL formally announces and celebrates the 2026 Nursing Leaders selected for: The NWONL Daisy Nurse Leader Award, NWONL's Rising Leader Award, and the NWONL Excellence in Nursing Award.

9:00am - 9:30am

NWONL Meeting of the Membership

NWONL updates on its programs progress, membership base, and key legislative issues impacting our region and what's next for NWONL members and affiliates.

9:30am - 10:00am

Morning Break & Room Check-Out

10:00am - 10:30am

The "Other Half" of Leadership: Storytelling, Courage and Meaning

Jennifer More, MN, RN, NPD-BC Associate Director, Baxter

This interactive, reflective session focuses on storytelling as a leadership competency, narrative medicine, reflective leadership practice and human-centered approaches to innovation and culture. Participants will engage in a guided image-based reflection exercise to access insight through observation, intuition, and meaning-making. The session concludes with a personal leadership narrative illustrating how experiences as both nurse and patient can shape resilience, perspective, and leadership courage.

10:30am - 12:00pm

Key Note - The Chaos Whisperer's Guide To Healthcare Leadership

Megan Carter DNP, RN, NEA-BC President & Founder MC Health Care Consulting, LLC

1.5 CE Credits

You are not meant to prove your worth through exhaustion. Dr. Megan Carter DNP, RN, NEA-BC is the President & Founder of MC Health Care Consulting LLC where she started the Chaos Whisperer movement in healthcare for leaders who are ready to stop leading from a place of exhaustion.

12:00PM - 12:15pm

NWONL Presidents Message & Adjournment

Pat Patton, DNP, MSN, RN, NEA-BC NWONL Board President and Chief Nursing Officer Providence Swedish First Hill Medical Center and System Chief Nursing Officer Swedish Health System

Our own NWONL Board President wraps up our conference, shares a call to action, and sends us off to rejoin our families, communities and the teams we all serve as Northwest Nursing Leaders.
