

Liberty Leadership Application Letter

I found my calling as a nurse later in life, graduating from my nursing program at 48 years old. That being said, I spent my entire adult life in the health care field working in almost every non-clinical position from a surgical scheduler to executive administrative assistant. While rewarding in their own way, none of those jobs were more than jobs. It wasn't until I was almost killed in a freak accident, after being run over by a herd of horses, that I truly decided what I wanted to do. Two weeks in Shock Trauma in Baltimore, surviving a code not once but twice changed not only my life, but my passion. I distinctly remember the nurses who worked trying to save my life, their faces are seared in my brain. My ultimate recovery however, was an uphill battle. I found out I was pregnant with our youngest child a month after my last surgery.

Adversity is nothing new for most people and my lovely, healthy daughter was born despite my broken ribs and rebuilt body. Getting back on track took commitment and effort. As anyone in this profession can attest to, nursing school was rigorous. I worked full time through part of it and was hired at University of Maryland, a MAGNET designated hospital on their Neurosurgical Intermediate Care floor. As a new nurse, I was surrounded by young nurses and critically ill patients. It was both humbling and exhausting in equal measure. Still, I loved it. There is much to be said about life experience and I truly felt I contributed to our unit as a more mature nurse. Often times a younger, perhaps more clinically experienced nurse would turn to me for guidance. I always welcomed the opportunity to offer a suggestion or a solution to a problem. Periodically we collaborated and found our collective intuition and skills could resolve the situation.

Tragedy struck again when I lost my husband just short of our 32nd wedding anniversary last year. I remember not a month before his unexpected death that he told me how proud he was of me. He was not a man of many words or undue compliments. I told him we were a team and that it was a team effort. I could not have made it without his support. This concept of team is important to me and always has been. As nurses, we understand that team work is vital to our job. As a wife and mother it is as well. The next year on my unit was difficult to say the least, my soul mate was gone, and my “home” team was shattered. I was working twelve hour night shifts and my youngest was sometimes moved from place to place in an effort to make sure she was cared for. I had no choice. I was her sole provider now and despite the stress of this, I owed and continue to owe nursing for allowing me to be able to care for her. I worked in a profession that encouraged growth, autonomy and skills that allow for a new direction if necessary and I realized that I would need to focus on another aspect of health care. When the opportunity came for me to join the Occupational Health Team at Johns Hopkins University, I knew it was what I wanted. Not only did I want to be an occupational health nurse, I wanted to be the best occupational health nurse I could be.

That of course requires effort, time, and money. I have worked diligently since coming to Johns Hopkins University in April of this year, taking CMEs on line. I have completed my Workman’s Compensation Case Manager Certification. I am eager to sit for my Certification as an Occupational Health Nurse. I joined the American Association of Occupational Nurses in May of this year because the mission of this organization melded seamlessly with my ideas on what I wanted to be. Not only what Occupational Health could do for me – but what I could do for it. For my new “patients”, for my chosen career and for my colleagues. I am a woman who

is determined to be the very best I can. My team has been transformed and I want to be ready for this next challenge. Education is the only answer.

I realize that education can be accomplished in a variety of ways. I have wonderful mentors here at Hopkins. They are supportive and knowledgeable. As previously mentioned, I have accessed on line courses to help me broaden my skill set. I read with interest and voracity occupational health materials. I work diligently in my new profession, transferring skills I have and learning new ones daily. I am never bored. Still, to be able to participate in AAOHN's National Conference would be an extraordinary opportunity for me. When researching the speakers and topics available, I was amazed at the diversity presented. There is a world of Occupational Health that I would be able to be privy to in a short amount of time.

I have learned that there is no real equivalent outside of Occupational Health. We need to work closely with governmental agencies, lawyers and staff - from the President of the university to a groundskeeper. We need to keep triage skills sharp, follow cost containment strategies and maintain a balance between advocacy for our employees and our employer. We need to organize health fairs and flu shot clinics. Often times we are the only point of contact for a population that often feels we are their primary care providers. Scope of practice is sometimes a difficult concept to explain to an injured employee. Since joining my Hopkins family I have been privileged to help a diverse group of men and women with everything from return to duty maternity leave to psych issues that required emergency transport.

But knowledge is not worth anything if not shared. If I am awarded this scholarship, I plan on returning to Johns Hopkins University armed with new ideas and understanding that I will be

able to share with my “new” team. I am nothing if not an educator, with my children, with my family, friends and with every employee I see. There is always an opportunity to impart others the new information you have gained. What better way to improve leadership skills than making yourself available to learn, to understand innovative techniques and ideas and then bring that knowledge home? In this extremely complicated era of nursing and healthcare, I can only hope to become an important cog in an extraordinarily complex wheel. The headlines we read in the papers only touch on the changes and challenges that healthcare providers must deal with routinely. I need to be ready for these challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to allow me to communicate some of my own hurdles and the challenges I have overcome. I share my tale not for sympathy, but more to help you understand the woman I am and the persistence I have. I am a fighter and a mediator, a caregiver and a lifelong learner, a mother and a nurse. These words are nothing but labels unless you can put a face to the name so to speak. When I decide what I want - I pursue it. This is exactly why I feel I need to be a part of AAOHN’s National Convention in March. There is wisdom to be learned from lecturers, presenters and the companionship of others who are on the same journey as me. I know that I want to be prepared to continue on my chosen path as an Occupational Health nurse armed with the newest information we have in healthcare in general and Occupational Health in specific. Granting me this scholarship will go a long way toward both my personal goals and my professional ones as well. Thank you for your consideration.

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