



PROFILES OF COMPASSION CLASS OF 2020 INDUCTEE

DEBORAH FLEMING, RN



“I HAVE ALWAYS FELT a sense of personal responsibility when it comes to protecting patients as well as staff. As a nurse, it’s important to identify safety issues and implement process changes to keep our environment of care safe, for everyone.”

Debbie Fleming, RN, has fond childhood memories of watching her aunt, a nun as well as a nurse, in action. Seeing what her work entailed, and that her every move centered around helping others, sparked a passion in Debbie. She, too, wanted to become a nurse and help others.

Debbie’s earliest experiences in the health care environment were at Saint Agnes Hospital, the closest hospital to her home in Catonsville. She volunteered there during her high school years and eventually secured a job as a nursing assistant in the coronary care unit to gain some early experience. It was during that time that Debbie pursued her nursing degree at the University of Maryland School of Nursing.

“Early on, I knew nursing was the right choice for me. I loved learning new things and the opportunity I had to interact with other nurses and doctors in my day-to-day work.”

Upon graduation, Debbie was eager to diversify her skill set. She joined the United States Navy and was stationed at the Naval Hospital in Long Beach, Calif., where she worked on the medical-surgical unit as well as in labor and delivery. In 1985, she returned to Baltimore and accepted a job at Johns Hopkins Hospital, where she worked as an operating room nurse, and was eventually promoted to nurse manager. It was in 1997, after taking a career hiatus to raise her two sons, that Debbie officially became part of the nursing team at UM St. Joseph. She worked night shift in labor and delivery, but also dedicated time to the hospital’s patient safety initiatives.

Debbie’s personal passion for patient safety translated to a career growth opportunity when, in 2009, UM St. Joseph created a new part-time patient safety liaison position and selected her to fill the role. She continued to work part-time in labor and delivery until 2011, when she became the full-time patient safety officer. She considers her promotion a good example of the many options nurses have when it comes to defining and personalizing their career paths. It has helped shape the words of wisdom Debbie often offers as she is orienting newly hired nurses at UM St. Joseph. “I always stress that there are many choices in nursing. I encourage new nurses to get involved on their units or in things happening around the hospital.”

Staying involved and going above and beyond the scope of her job description is second nature for Debbie. For 10 years she planned and produced “Risky Business,” an internal newsletter focused on patient safety conversations and solutions. Additionally, she leads the RISE (Resilience in Stressful Events) Team, which offers trained peer responders as a supportive resource for staff struggling with the mental and emotional impact of their jobs.

Though Debbie was surprised to be a Profiles of Compassion honoree because she is no longer on the “front line,” she is proud of her hospital’s work, and glad to call UM St. Joseph *home*. “Everyone who works for UM St. Joseph is making a contribution that supports the bigger picture. I have stayed here for 23 years because the people I work with really care about each other and function like a family.”