Nurse to Know: Allyson Nowell

What is your present role? What do you do in that role?

My current position is Senior Professional Practice Leader at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto. The role supports the Director of Professional Practice whose portfolio covers our oncology program and includes our surgical services at Toronto General and the International Program. The position supports the development, implementation and maintenance of profession-specific and inter-professional practice standards at the program level and across the organization.

What drew you into nursing? What influenced you to become a nurse?

My mother was a nurse and it was a big part of my life when I was growing up. We discussed her work regularly and were very connected with her teams and colleagues. I did not go directly into nursing, but started university in Marine Biology. It was actually conversations with my father that helped me realize how passionate I was about nursing. This realization and the encouragement of both my parents to change directions resulted in my going into nursing.

What drew you into oncology nursing? What influenced you to become an oncology nurse?

One of my placements in nursing school was on the oncology unit at Montreal General Hospital. This setting immediately felt different for me. I loved the team and the nurses’ knowledge and passion inspired me. This was also my first placement where I was able to really care for patients over an extended period of time and see the impact of nursing care on the patient and their family. I was also fortunate to be able to work as a nursing student on the unit over the summer and this solidified my passion for oncology nursing.

How would you characterize or describe the driving forces for you regarding your practice as a nurse?

For me, in all my roles as a nurse, the driving force is always the patient. Conversations within all practice areas are influenced by resources and varying priorities, but when it gets brought back to the patient, everyone is engaged.

What do you find most exciting about being a nurse?

Nursing offers so many opportunities and has so much variety. Especially now, there seem to be so many different roles and practice areas that nurses can choose or move into.

What have you seen as the biggest changes for nurses over the years of your career?

I think the complexity of treatments and care across the continuum and the rate at which it changes is the biggest change for nursing.

What do you see are the biggest challenges for oncology nurses or oncology nursing today?

The increasing volume of patients and the complexity of both the patients themselves and the treatments we offer create a huge challenge for oncology nurses. Being able to provide consistent quality care to the growing number of patients and staying informed and skilled with regards to the complexity, I believe is a challenge across the world for oncology nurses.

What is your greatest hope for the future of oncology nursing?

Oncology nurses have always played a critical role in the cancer patient journey. They have such a positive impact on the patients’ experience. With the increasing complexity of the health care system and the variety of settings in which we provide care, I hope that oncology nurses can continue to create new and innovative ways to provide excellent oncology nursing care and continue to be an essential part of the patients’ experience.

What is the best advice you would give to an individual who is considering becoming a nurse or an oncology nurse?

I found identifying a variety of mentors in different roles is a key to growing, as a nurse, and assisting in being able to understand the patients’ experience better.