

Loyola educator leads with passion

RN recognized with annual Power of Nursing Leadership Event's top honor

By Barry Bottino

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CHICAGO — When describing Diana Hackbarth, RN, PhD, FAAN, colleagues who nominated her for the 2011 Joan L. Shaver Illinois Outstanding Nurse Leader Award outlined an overwhelming passion for nursing.

But that is not all nurses offer, said Hackbarth, professor and program director at Loyola University Chicago's Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing.

"There are four things that a nurse needs to be a leader, and I know all of you in this room have that," she told the audience at the Hilton Chicago while accepting the award Nov. 4 during the 14th annual Power of Nursing Leadership Event hosted by the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Nursing. "[A nurse needs] passion, willing partners, patience and, most of all, persistence."

In more than three decades of work to bring about positive social change, Hackbarth has relied on all of those traits.

"I have been fortunate to be in a supportive environment at Loyola University Chicago and as a board member of the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago to have colleagues, both within and outside of nursing, who share my values for public health, social justice and preventing disease," said Hackbarth, who is immediate past president and a board member for the association. "We've worked tirelessly together for over 30 years to make the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois smoke-free. That's one of the proudest things that I've done."

Hackbarth recalled pushing her children in strollers to anti-tobacco demonstrations, dressing her 6-year-old son as Joe Camel to protest during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, picketing the American Medical Association as a Loyola nursing student in the 1960s and her husband, David, zipping himself into a body bag to protest tobacco-related deaths.

In accepting the award, Hackbarth stressed the power nurses can have by working together.

"The most important thing about being recognized is for others to see that nurses can work in coalitions and make real change," she said. "It is very difficult to make changes in systems working independently. Building coalitions of like-minded people is essential."

"I would hope that younger nurses or those well along in the profession who have a passion for a particular health issue or patient population are inspired to move forward knowing that nursing has a long history of successful advocacy for social change, and that they are not alone," Hackbarth said.

Keynote speaker David Satcher, a physician and former U.S. surgeon general and assistant secretary for health, expressed his appreciation for nurses at the event and his nurse colleagues.

Photo by Barry Bottino

"It may be dangerous to have a physician talking to all of these nurses," Satcher said, evoking laughs from the crowd. "[Working with nurses] has a lot to do with the success that I've had. I'm just very fortunate to have those kind of friends and have them as partners."

Satcher credited UIC's College of Nursing with celebrating nurse leaders. "There's not enough discussion about the importance of leadership, and we don't do enough to show appreciation and encouragement for leadership," said Satcher, who directs the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Atlanta's Morehouse School of Medicine.

A former track and field athlete as a Morehouse student, Satcher likened leadership to a relay race in which the baton should be passed "so momentum will not be lost. It's when we take the baton, as you're doing, to continue that movement that things really happen."

Leaning on his own experiences, Satcher said leaders should be good, creative listeners who respect others, regardless of their positions. Leaders also should challenge themselves not to lose sight of their objectives. "Leadership is not about the leader," he said. "It's about the organization and its mission."

Often, Satcher said, leadership comes from many sources. "Every day, there are people who are leading who are not in what we call leadership positions," he said. "Leadership is not position dependent."