Baystate Health

Building a Culture of Nursing Research Through Collaboration

Cidalia Vital began her career at Baystate Health in 2003. She left Baystate in 2016 to pursue her Ph.D. in Nursing, choosing a path that would allow her to focus on research and help advance her nursing profession. She returned to Baystate Health in April 2022 as the Director of Nursing Research & Holistic Nursing. Since returning, Vital has played an instrumental role in giving nursing research a seat at the table.

Vital's decision to pursue a Ph.D. was intentional. When considering how to further her education, she weighed the paths of a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) and a Ph.D. in Nursing. She understood that the Ph.D. offered a more research-focused path and was drawn to the opportunity to contribute to the science behind nursing practice. She also recognized how uncommon the degree is within the profession, with fewer than one percent of nurses holding a Ph.D. Today, Vital strongly advocates for and educates nurses who are considering advancing their education, encouraging them to explore the Ph.D. pathway.

For Vital, building a culture of nursing research is about more than conducting studies; it is about ensuring that nurses have a meaningful voice in research conversations and in shaping the future of healthcare.

Under her leadership, Baystate's nursing research program has significantly expanded its footprint. The team has presented at local, regional, and national conferences, published six articles, and secured several small but impactful grants. These accomplishments are particularly meaningful because many members of the research team are not full-time employees, which include per diem nurses.

Much of this growth has been fueled by strong clinical-academic partnerships. Vital has established collaborations with UMass Amherst Elaine Marieb College of Nursing and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, bringing established research expertise directly into the clinical environment. These partnerships provide bedside nurses with tangible pathways to participate in research, evidence-based practice, and quality improvement.

When asked about the most rewarding initiative of her career, Vital does not hesitate: the Art of Questioning and Innovation (AoQI).

"The number of nurses that were engaged was incredible," Vital recalls.

Led by Vital and involving members of the nursing staff, AoQI gave bedside nurses a structured way to turn everyday clinical curiosity into meaningful action. Nurses were introduced to a process for submitting questions, reviewing existing evidence, and developing their ideas into

evidence-based practice, quality improvement, and research initiatives. Most importantly, the process created an opportunity for nurses to take their questions from the bedside and turn them into changes that could make a difference in the clinical environment.

Following the success of AoQI, Vital is already looking toward the next chapter. Over the next three to five years, her goal is to move the program beyond foundational work, toward larger external funding opportunities, including National Institutes of Health (NIH) support and potentially a K award. The broader vision is to create a more sustainable funding structure while continuing to strengthen interdisciplinary and clinical-academic partnerships.

As our conversation came to a close, Vital's message was simple: nursing research needs to have a seat at the table, and nurses should consider the opportunities that come with pursuing a Ph.D.

Her message to nurses who may be interested in research is equally encouraging: If you have a question, an idea, or a project, reach out. Research is more accessible than many nurses realize.

For more information about nursing research at Baystate, please visit the website via the link or QR code below:

https://www.baystatehealth.org/research-at-baystate-health/nursing