

Inspiring Women

Episode 38: Meghan Krueger

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. I am your host, Laurie McGraw. I have spent the past 30 years in leadership and over the years, I've come to learn one thing. Women need women and not just any women, but inspiring women. Tune in every week to hear from women at the pinnacle of their careers and from others who are just starting out. Episodes can be found at inspiringwomen.show or subscribe on your favorite podcast app. Thanks for listening and I hope you will be inspired. This episode of Inspiring Women, we are speaking with Meghan Krueger. Meghan is a registered nurse. She worked at the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program and Meghan has a degree from Notre Dame in biology. She went to nursing school at Emory, and now she's at Boston Health Care for the Homeless. Meghan, I'm really happy to be speaking to you today.

Meghan Krueger:

Well, thank you so much for having me, Laurie. It's great to be here.

Laurie McGraw:

Great. It's always wonderful to talk to women like you, who are sort of at the earlier stage in your career, and you're doing some sounds like important work, working with the homeless as a nurse. So why don't we get started with, maybe, what are you doing right now in your professional career? What is your job? What do you do?

Meghan Krueger:

Sure, yeah. Like you said, I'm working as a registered nurse at Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program. We are a community health center that provides... The goal is to provide equitable and dignified access to healthcare for homeless folks in the Boston area. So I work in one of our shelter-based clinics in the city's women's shelter. I'm the nurse manager of that site. I also work as a nurse in a couple of our smaller women's health sites that we have in different day shelter and overnight shelter settings.

Laurie McGraw:

Do you primarily work with women as the patient that you deal with?

Meghan Krueger:

I do right now. In the first two and a half years working here, I was at one of our shelter clinic at this day shelter where I worked with both men and women, but more recently in this current role, it is more specifically women.

Laurie McGraw:

Got it. Meghan, in terms of some of these traces and how you got here, you started at Notre Dame, you then decided to go to nursing school and then to here with this program, working with the homeless. Maybe, give us a sense of the career choices that you made and what interested you in nursing in the first place?

Meghan Krueger:

Sure, yeah. So when I was at Notre Dame, I knew I wanted to go into health care. Didn't know exactly what kind of role I wanted to be in at that point, but also I have always been very service-oriented, and so I studied biology. After graduating, I think the really key piece to my whole career trajectory so far I would say is the post grad year of service that I did called the bonds of core volunteer ministry. It's an AmeriCorps type program. I was living in Baltimore for a year, living in community with four other volunteers. We all had placements within the community hospital system for that year. That was really where I was first, my eyes were really opened to extensive already and really took public health and community health and the importance of that.

Meghan Krueger:

It was also during that year that I worked directly with a nurse during that and learned a lot more about the role and figured out that was kind of where I felt like with my goals and my personality and everything. That's where I felt like I fit into the medical field. So from there during that year, I applied to nursing school, ended up then at Emory for an accelerated bachelors of nursing program there. So it was down there for a year and a half, and then moved back closer to home to Boston and started working at healthcare for the homeless, which I had actually interned at in between my junior and senior years of undergrad. So knew of the organization and, ended up coming back and wanting to get back involved with them. So been here for about four years now since.

Laurie McGraw:

Right. And you stayed there. So, nursing is a surface oriented field and there's no shortage of the need for nurses. I mean, that's a booming professional choice, but working with this particular population of the homeless, that's a specialized population with specialized needs. What sort of kept your interest there for this length of time? It sounds like a bit more than just being service-oriented.

Meghan Krueger:

Yeah. I will say it probably goes back to that year of service I did in Baltimore. Think again, like I said, when I first exposure there, I also, while I was in Baltimore, joined back on my feet, a group that I run with and volunteer with where that was and has continued to be a chance to really get to know folks experiencing homelessness. In that, opportunity running becomes this equalizer and people with very different backgrounds, end up connecting over that commonality, so through that, and through the time in Baltimore, you've just learned a lot more about homelessness. I think that in doing the work so far, in this last four years, I think recognizing the need and the importance of that work has really kept me there. I'm learning new things every day. I'm challenged every day, everything is complicated by social factors and, various different

like social disparities, it really has kept my interest. That's where I really feel kind of called to do work in that area.

Laurie McGraw:

I'm gathering you're also feeling like you're making an impact. I'd love to hear some perspective on sort of, what did the work look like pre pandemic versus what you're doing now, mid or post, hopefully, we'll see post pandemic sometime in our future. What are some of the differences in terms of what work looks like?

Meghan Krueger:

Sure. Yeah. So pre pandemic in our normal times, we focus on providing primary care. So outpatient, primary care visits, urgent care visits, kind of walk in type of thing. Following patients over the longterm for their primary care, preventative care needs and things have obviously shifted quite a bit over the last year. I guess the irony for me too, is in my newer role, I had part of my schedule being devoted to infection control and kind of how that applies in a lot of just our regular clinic operations with the pandemic. Obviously everything was an infection control issue. So my schedule completely kind of pivoted to mostly doing that. But I would say as an organization, all of our staff really redeploy to these different roles to meet the new needs that came with the pandemic.

Meghan Krueger:

I think the biggest challenge, especially at first for us was, our patients are living in shelters. They don't have a home, when someone is told to they're COVID positive, they're told to isolate, they're exposed, or they are waiting a test result. They're told to quarantine, they can't obviously do that in a shelter or congregate shelter settings. So where do they go? We as a program really had to act quickly, we put up temporary tent structures and a parking lot as one of the shelters and staff that was nurses, doctors, providers, and case managers.

Meghan Krueger:

We staffed also the field hospital that was opened up in the Boston convention center and what our respite program converted one of their floors into a COVID care unit to really meet that need. Because something we found early on too, was that in the congregate shelter settings, about 35% to 40% of people when we did mass testing were coming back, COVID positive, most of them being asymptomatic. We knew this was really spreading fast in those settings and we needed to find different places to isolate folks and care for those with COVID. So yeah, everything really shifted quite a bit.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah. Meghan, it sounds intense probably with a lot of thinking on your feet and, you mentioned being involved in public health and that we all know we've learned even more so through the pandemic that the public health infrastructure hasn't had the near the level of investment perhaps to support, the needs that came through from a pandemic. We've also learned a lot, as a nation about the disproportionate impact of this pandemic on different populations, whether it's black and brown communities or other disadvantaged community. So what have you seen, in terms of what it meant to the people that you serve and, how are you seeing it change perhaps as we start

to swing out of the pandemic, I know you're doing quite a bit of work in the area of vaccines. I'd imagine that it has its own set of unique challenges or potential opportunities.

Meghan Krueger:

Yeah. I would say that, I think working within the field of public health, I've had the opportunity to learn a lot about the various disparities that exist and work with a very diverse population of patients. I think the pandemic has really amplified and magnified that and broadcasted it on a broader scale that I think more of the general population is understanding all those disparities that exist, which I think it is a positive thing for there to be an increased awareness of, to work toward decreasing those disparities.

Meghan Krueger:

I would say too yet with the vaccination efforts, we were really intentional as a program to keep in mind, what we know about the disparities and that higher risks for people living in certain communities, people of color that are, using the phases of eligibility that the state and the federal government put out, in addition, we tried to prioritize, when we were vaccinating our staff, vaccinating patients, to go through and really make sure we were getting to those highest risk individuals first and offering it in the most equitable way that we could.

Meghan Krueger:

So I really appreciate being able to be a part of the organization that took that so seriously and prioritized that in our vaccine rollout.

Laurie McGraw:

How did that impact you, Meghan? I mean, there also is a lot of awareness about just, stress in the healthcare profession. So you're in a pandemic, you're working with a population that needs a lot of care and it sounds like you did a lot of work, fast on the feet to help and support and be at the ready. How are you doing in terms of the stress of this as this spends some of the most rewarding times of your career? Is this the most stressful something in between what's going on there?

Meghan Krueger:

Yeah, I would say probably both, that's definitely a mix of most rewarding, I think be able to step back and see, this is such a historic time that it's an honor really to be able to have been a part of it, particularly, the vaccination efforts, but also the response when things were really uncertain and stressful and scary. I mean, it definitely one thing starts to slow down. I think sometimes that's when I realized like, "Wow, this is really had quite an impact."

Meghan Krueger:

I really like to, try my best to keep a good balance between everything I'm doing at work and, make sure I'm taking care of myself. I love to run and exercise. So always keeping that a part of my routine really helps keep me grounded and then bring in really using the sports of people close to me to talk about the challenging things that have gone on at work. At the same time too, I feel like I work at an incredibly supportive organization where I feel really supported by my

coworkers. I also feel just very valued and seen, appreciated and cared for by the program as a whole, the senior leadership. I think that really helps.

Laurie McGraw:

So those are wonderful things to have, to have the support of coworkers that are around you to have outlets, to manage stress, exercise, being a key one for you. Did you ever have points where those things just, got out of whack? I mean that a lot of women who are working very aggressively and hard at their profession sometimes have trouble balancing those things and you are again, working on the front line in a pandemic where there's just a lot of need for the work to get done.

Meghan Krueger:

Yeah. I would say for sure. More often over this last year than ever before there, it feels like there's always things to do and there's great needs and there's a sense of urgency and it's hectic and I've definitely had a hard time setting boundaries of not just continuing to do work and setting hours of when I'm going to work and then be home and be able to shut the work mind off a little bit because yeah, it's been a challenge because knowing the need is there, it's hard to turn away from it, but at the same time, understanding that in order to be able to be, my best self when I am there at work, you do need that time for recharging and self care.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah. Good to have some awareness of that and good to recognize when those boundaries are getting a bit blurred. Meghan, how do you think about your profession and your career? You've been doing this for a couple years. You sound very passionate about the work that you're doing. Do you think about your career as a trajectory? You said you moved into being a nurse manager, so you've got a new sort of orientation in your job. Do you think about the next couple years or further than that? What are your thoughts there?

Meghan Krueger:

Yeah, I would say and this has really, it's changed a lot from when I was in school in undergrad and in nursing school of what I kind of envisioned for the longer-term plans. I would say right now I'm very much in like a, this is the work that I'm doing. I'm trying to be kind of present in that work. But at the same time also be very open to intake opportunities that come to me, I would say, I feel very fortunate to work in an organization where even internally there's a lot of opportunity for that. A lot of chances to grow and move to different roles, both laterally and up just within that organization. I have the mindset, I guess right now of, working in the role that I am, but also keeping my eyes open for opportunities that come, and right now that is internally.

Laurie McGraw:

Yep. In terms of what motivates you, and as you think about sort of what might be the longer term couple years from now, whatever that might be, what are the things that are important? When I talk to different women, some of them, it's all about the next title and promotion for some women, they're very motivated by, compensation as the next most important thing are managing people. What do you think about, what are the types of things that guide what you might be exploring or thinking about in future years?

Meghan Krueger:

Yeah, so I would say there's certainly always, the money and opportunity to move up and increase title is again, very enticing and motivating, but I think that I always try to stay and then I hope that I continue to keep motivated primarily by mission and the opportunities that I take I hope that I always stay grounded in, am I feeling like I am very mission driven and also feeling very fulfilled in what I'm doing and at the end of the day, am I happy with the position I'm in and the work that I'm doing. Also, really, I hope that I continue to prioritize, keeping good balance with my work and life and not getting caught up maybe in always moving forward to the next title or the next, pay increase, but making sure that I, through my career and able to have a really good work-life balance and stay happy. Also, like I said, stay fulfilled and the mission of the work that I'm doing.

Laurie McGraw:

Yeah. When I hear you talk, Meghan, what I'm hearing is that you sound very connected to the work that you're doing and the mission orientation of that is clearly something that is important to you and something that you sound very proud of as you should be very proud of that really important work. How do you think about your network? How do you think about looking to other people, whether they're in the profession that you have, the job that you have or outside where you work every day for building that network and other connections in your professional development?

Meghan Krueger:

Yeah. So I definitely, I appreciate the importance and the value of networking. I would say, I know, ending up where I am working now has definitely come from networking. I ended up with the internship at this organization because our president, went to the same university as me and that connection happened there. Then I met our CEO at a charity walk soon before I started working there. So I really appreciate the importance of that. I would say currently, in the same way that I feel like the way that I think about my career progression is pretty internal right now. I also think about my networking in that way, at this point, I think trying to keep an open mind and say yes to opportunities that come up for me, especially ones that allow me to work with different individuals within the organization in different parts of the program. Whether that's something more clinically or something in that more like management realm, just saying yes to those opportunities to become exposed to different opportunities and also to work with different people.

Laurie McGraw:

Also, being in the place where there is opportunities. So you've made some connections through some of your activities that you do, charity walks, whatever. Last question I wanted to ask you, Meghan, is, just like coaching, you've done quite a few things in the few years that you've been out there professionally working. What's the best advice you've ever received. Have you had coaches that have helped you as you think about what you're doing next?

Meghan Krueger:

Yeah. When thinking about this question, I think one of the best things for me has been just like the permission that I think that I was given. This first happened back in undergrad, that you don't

need to take like the expected or the traditional path. I think when I graduating from college, there was a lot of pressure to get a job right away. But taking that year to do service work for a year, really has shaped my career trajectory. What I feel like is a very positive way for me, and also, ending up right after nursing school, working in community health and in public health and as my first nursing job versus getting that first nursing job learning experience in a hospital setting was kind of different than a lot of my peers. So getting that permission and that advice is something that's stuck with me and I think has allowed me to stay true to my passions and where I feel driven to go, and lead my career.

Laurie McGraw:

That's great, Meghan. So this has been just a terrific conversation as we close out here, any last closing thoughts that you might want to share with listeners?

Meghan Krueger:

So I think kind of similar to what I was saying, in your career and in your work, make sure you're staying true to yourself, continuing to be fulfilled in what you do. Making changes if you're not feeling fulfilled and happy and then always taking care of yourself too, and really striking that good balance between work and life.

Laurie McGraw:

Sounds like you've got a lot of great perspective. Meghan, this has been an excellent, inspiring women conversation. I have been speaking with Meghan Krueger and Meghan, thank you so much.

Meghan Krueger:

Thank you so much for having me. This has been really great.

Laurie McGraw:

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