



Celebrating Nurses and Leadership: A Conversation with Kim Brown Sims

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A passionate, health care executive, [Kim Brown Sims](#), FACHE serves as the VP of Patient Care Services and Chief Nurse Executive at Queen of the Valley Medical Center, a St. Joseph Health hospital in northern California. With an MBA, BSN and RN, her career journey includes 35 years of experience in adult, women and children's health care as well as work at a digital start-up and consulting on the adoption of electronic health records. We caught up with Kim during her recent visit to Chicago for ACHE meetings and exchanged ideas about nursing, leadership and life in Napa Valley.



IP: *What (or who) propelled you to become involved in ACHE?*

KBS: As I became more involved in nursing leadership roles and moved up the ranks, I recognized the importance and value of business acumen. I wanted to be fluent in the business language of health care. I decided to pursue my MBA and I simultaneously joined the California Association of Healthcare Leaders ([CAHL](#)), an independent chapter of the American College of Healthcare Executives ([ACHE](#)). Now, I'm President-Elect of CAHL and engaged with colleagues across the state to advance excellence in health care leadership and improve the lives of the communities we serve.

IP: *How has Queen of the Valley Medical Center evolved in recent years?*

KBS: We are on a transformation journey. The leadership team is committed to excellence and so is our staff. Lean Daily Management is the most important tool in our process improvement effort. It has operationalized hearing the voice of frontline staff. Together, our nurses, physicians and care teams are focused on delivery of "[The Queen Experience](#)."

For example, each day begins with a daily huddle for the charge nurses. We review quality metrics as we discuss patient care issues. Management follows with a safety huddle three times a week before making rounds to 44 departments, who each track their progress on a visual management or GEMBA board. We address safety, compliance, in-house and community events and near misses. Our approach is to be soft on people and hard on process. It's important that we give a shout-out to nurses and other staff who report a near miss, so that we can quickly address the matter. A thank you card is signed by the entire leadership team and delivered to the person who reported the situation. It is a simple gesture with big impact.

IP: *As Chief Nurse Executive, how are you elevating the role of nurses at Queen of the Valley Medical Center?*

KBS: When I arrived in June 2017, I was surprised to discover 40% of the nursing team was traveling staff. Constant turnover had a negative impact on our culture, i.e. there was a lack of ownership for the delivery of quality care. I needed to inspire our

nursing staff and create opportunities for their advancement. We began with an open conversation focused on people-centered care. Today, just 10% are travel nurses. It is a level that works well in the gig economy and provides us flexibility to surge nurse headcount based upon growth of our patient population. We've saved millions of dollars – money that has been reinvested in training and growing the team.

IP: *Can you share examples of the impact?*

KBS: It's hard to predict a natural disaster, so institutional readiness is critical. Earthquakes are a constant threat in California and wildfires raged throughout our region the last few years, so our team has to be alert and able to spring in to action. We work closely as a community year-round and especially during a crisis situation. During the recent fire emergency, we activated the command center and did a quick assessment of the resources that we could offer. Our helipad was used to receive evacuees who were then bussed to shelters. Having more full-time nursing staff made us better equipped to work with the first responders to protect our neighbors and families. Overall, the work we've done individually and collectively to strengthen hospital operations provided a solid platform to join in the wildfire response.

IP: *California is well known for its innovation culture. How has it been part of your career journey?*

KBS: I've managed my career with professional growth on a lattice as well as the classic ladder. After developing a specialty in neonatal intensive care, I had a keen interest in exploring the intersection of biotech, data and clinical quality. I joined Site of Care Systems as Vice President, Client Services to drive introduction of products that had a positive impact on perinatal labor delivery. The position was fulfilling as our products improved results for a vulnerable population. The experience of working in a start-up also sharpened my business acumen and prepared me to climb the ladder as a nurse executive and as an operational leader. I'm committed to continuing to the climb to Chief Executive Officer and taking on enterprise wide responsibility.

IP: *Any notes or reflections on health equity and wellness in Napa Valley?*

KBS: Our environment is agricultural with a concentration on fruit and nut crops; over [\\$750 million](#) of grapes were produced in 2017. The region's sprawling vineyards attract tourists who enjoy the hospitality, cuisine and sunshine of our region yet the people who help make that image a reality—Napa's thousands of farmworkers and working poor—face daunting challenges each day as the cost of living is high. Through a tourism tax, we have the funds to support essential community services including police and fire. The community is also fortunate to have individuals of tremendous wealth who are generous and committed to health equity. We have a [strong cadre of nonprofit organizations](#) tackling issues such as affordable housing, workforce development and financial stability. Thanks to business, government, education and philanthropic leaders working together with a collaborative spirit, we have an ability to provide quality care for all and work to eliminate health disparities.

In terms of wellness, our location is a valuable resource. We enjoy low or no cost access to hiking, biking, and water activities such as swimming and paddle boarding (my favorite sport!) I'm proud to serve as a board member of [Mentis](#), Napa's center for mental health services. The organization is dedicated to the emotional health and wellbeing of all Napa County residents and provides bi-lingual, affordable mental health services to people of every age, stage and income level.

IP: *Lightning round: Your leadership mantra, role model, best career advice for other nurses?*

KBS: Patient care is a team sport, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, be a voice for what is important.

IP: *Thank you Kim for your leadership and passion for service!*

InveniasPartners is proud to have served St. Joseph Health in the recruitment of Kim Brown Sims to Queen of the Valley Medical Center.