

“Who said we can’t do that?” Remembering Prof. Kristine Gebbie (1948 – 2022)

By David Stewart, Associate Director (Consultant), Nursing and Health Policy

Geneva, Switzerland, 20 May 2022 - It is with great sadness that I share the passing of Professor Kristine Gebbie. Kristine has been working as a consultant with the International Council of Nurses for the past few years. She supported our work particularly in Disaster Management and Competency Based Education. Many may remember her presentation on Disaster Nursing at the ICN Congress in Singapore in 2019.

I am proud to say that I have had the honour of working closely with Kristine who was undoubtedly an internationally renowned nurse and public health official. She will ultimately be remembered as a prominent nursing leader who transformed the profession.

Kristine was both a friend and mentor. Her motto, “Who said we can’t do that?”, which she frequently said and lived by, will continue to resonate in my ear. What impressed me was her breadth of knowledge and wisdom and the ability to articulate this succinctly to make change happen. She would regularly say “Words matter. Be clear and be concise for we need people to understand.”



This is reflected in the ICN [Core Competencies in Disaster Nursing](#) which she led. This seminal document is used by education providers, researchers and health systems across the world preparing nurses for disaster management. Kristine also provided consultation on the World Health Organization’s [Global competency framework for universal health coverage](#) that was recently released.

Kristine was born in Iowa, USA. She held numerous degrees in nursing and science including a Master of Nursing and a Doctorate in Public Health. Whilst she has held many academic positions, Kristine was best known for serving as the first White House AIDS Policy Coordinator, known as the “AIDS Czar.” She would boldly call for healthcare reform, improving access to care, addressing the social determinants of health, and mobilising the nursing and healthcare workforce to care for vulnerable population groups. Prior to this role, she served as a Public Health Director for two US states, Oregon and Washington State.

Kristine was then inspired to prepare nurses and other health professionals for disasters. This came about as a result of leading responses to a number of emergencies and disasters including volcanic eruptions and an anthrax-bioterrorism event. She worked with federal, state and local professionals across multiple professions to develop guidelines on practical emergency preparedness plans for public health agencies, clinics and medical officers. She

would also develop short courses on emergency preparedness for all levels of health professionals. Shortly before the 9/11 tragedy, she had just finished conducting a disaster training course for nurses.

She also served as a Professor of Nursing at Columbia School of Nursing, the Joan Hansen Grabe Dean of the Hunter-Bellevue School of Nursing at [Hunter College](#), at City University of New York, and Professor of Nursing at Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.

Her contributions have been widely recognised by numerous entities including the National Academy of Medicine, the American Academy of Nursing, the New York Academy of Medicine, and Flinders University Australia. The University of California, Los Angeles recognised Professor Gebbie with one of its Nurse 21 Awards for inspiring individuals helping to transform the nursing profession and raising awareness of the valuable role nurses play in 21st Century healthcare.

Kristine was immensely practical, and action orientated. She was willing to meet people to share and inspire new ideas. She will be remembered as an inspiring leader, not just because she was the smartest in the room (which she really was), but because she would take the time to listen, engage and meet with you. She selflessly promoted and recognised the contribution of others.

Today we remember and mourn the loss of a beloved teacher, researcher, mentor, leader, colleague, and friend.

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