

The Nurse Becoming Podcast EP. #122: How Professional Organi...

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SPEAKERS

Natalie D'Itri, Amanda Guarniere

A Amanda Guarniere
Sure. All right, so we are recording. I'm just gonna leave a few seconds of dead air here. Hi, Natalie, Welcome to the show.

N Natalie D'Itri 00:04
Hi, Amanda, thank you so much for the opportunity to be here.

A Amanda Guarniere
Yes, I'm very excited to chat with you! You and I have already chatted actually on your podcast. So I'm excited to kind of turn the tables and get the opportunity to ask you all of my questions.

N Natalie D'Itri 00:24
I'm excited to be here. So, I did already introduce you in my introduction, but I'd love to hear in your own words, tell the good listeners, who you are and what you do. I'm Natalie D'Itri, and I am an experienced oncology nurse. And I am now focused on supporting nurses, especially new nurses, because I've spent where I've been most recently, in practices, what I'll tell you now, I've spent time in the hospital as an educator. And with that role, I also had the great opportunity to be the clinical mentor. And it was an inpatient oncology setting that I spent most of my time on in a large hospital outside Washington, DC, 1000 bed hospital. So I learned that I love helping new nurses. And with that being said, that's where I am now in terms of where I'm sitting, bending my time, contributing to making the world a better place by supporting nurses. But I started in oncology, and I worked about 10 years inpatient and a few different settings across the country. Mostly level three trauma centers, inpatient oncology, seeing patients getting intensive chemo regimens, and providing supportive care. I did that as a traveler as

well as from well, first as a new grad, and then as a traveler for a little while. I spent time even at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center, treating patients on phase one and two clinical trials. And then I moved to an outpatient clinical trials coordinator role in a community setting where I really got to see people consider trials for new diagnoses or for advanced cancers or recurrences, and I got to teach them, and I got to work with the nurses and the community physicians that are clinical trials, programs support it. So then I went to an outpatient infusion role where I got to walk the walk, I had been teaching nurses and patients and families about chemo regimens, getting information on their side effects for the clinical trials data collection. And then I was given chemo and I did that three days a week, it was a great place to be, because I got to see walkie talkie happy, healthy people and their family members coming in for cancer treatment. So that is where I saw Wow, this is the full spectrum of cancer care from sick people in the hospital, to outpatient where people get their treatment before they go to work, get their treatment, while their kids are at daycare, get their treatment done. They're gonna go to a birthday party for the grandkids. I saw everyone. And so I saw all different types of cancer settings and I loved it. Then I decided I really wanted to teach nurses. So I took on an educator role in a practice. And I went from office to office teaching patients and family members, which I loved. I love teaching. And then I got to help the nurses understand more about what they needed to do to teach patients and prepare them for treatment and to support them. I also spent a little time in pharma focused on being an educator. And in that role, I really supported providers, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacist and the nurses giving the treatments that really leads me to where I have been most recently as the educator and the mentor supporting nurses, because that's what I found, I loved. And that leads me to where I am now. Really focused on my Careerwise Nurse Podcast, and also coaching nurses who are launching their careers growing into their roles, whether they're new nurses or experienced nurses in a new role, and also helping nurses to thrive thrive. Also helping nurses to thrive and avoid burnout or look at their choices so that their jobs can fit into their lives. Not them having to bend their lives backwards, upside down to make their jobs work with their lives. Let's see. So did I say that right? I want people's jobs to fit in their lives, not having to change their lives around or upset their lives, to have a job as a nurse. Definitely. And, you know, I think you're in a really unique position to, to help nurses with this. Because you, you know, the career that you've described, I think is really what a lot of us want, or a lot of us envision when we enter the profession, you know, finding that specialty that really feels like home to us, and experiencing it from different angles and growing within that specialty. And, you know, I don't know if you feel the same way, but I feel like I've talked to a lot of newer nurses that are really just kind of struggling to find their home within nursing. So I guess that brings me to this question. I'm curious how, how did you even land in oncology? You said, you started as a new grad. Was it just kind of happenstance? Or did you already know that you were going to love it before you start? Well, I don't really sing. But if you think about the song a long, long time ago, you know, one of those. It was because there weren't a lot of jobs for new graduate nurses. And one of the opportunities that I was offered was an oncology unit, 12 hour nights. And there were a few of us new grads, but I simply landed there because I needed a job. And I learned that it was exciting. It was depressing. It was everything. And it was fun, though, because I was with other new grads. When you're a nurse, and you're starting out, whether you're 22 or 42, you tend to work with a lot of females, you tend to work with people that you can spend time with when you're not at work, right. And I moved to that first job, just a couple hours from what I had called home. And it was fun. So it was a job. There was a lot of benefits to working three 12 hour shifts. And I got a lot of great experience. But then as I moved on into my second job, some of my colleagues talked about things they did that were oncology focus, to get more information about their work. So I learned to love it more. And I stuck with it. And it offered opportunities outside of the hospital abundant opportunities.

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Amanda Guarniere

I love that. I It sounds as though it's something that you really learned to love over time. And you kind of decided, it sounds like you decided to love it, right? Like if it wasn't something that you had a master plan before you even entered this job, which some people do, but some people don't some people, you know, end up where the job is. Right. And you know, when that happens, you many people have the opportunity to make the most of it. And it sounds like that's exactly exactly what you did.

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Natalie D'Itri 05:24

Yes, I did learn to love it. I didn't know, I didn't have a direction or a plan in my first job. After I spent a year or so in my first job, I said, "Oh, I think I'm going to move to Arizona", because I had visited with my friends and I had a good time. So that's what made my plan is, "Let's go somewhere warm and sunny, full of other people that like to go out travel". Because I met people in my next job that we went places and we we had fun. And so it was more than a job. It was a complete life after college to go somewhere. But what we talked about we were gonna go into in the direction of this podcast is what made my job more than just shift work. After a couple years of practice as a new nurse or just beyond those novice years, it's the professional association membership, where one of my colleagues said come to this dinner program. It's about a drug. And it's fun to go out to dinner. It's fun to go to conferences, it's fun to go out to dinner at conferences, especially when it's in some warm, sunny place. So the people I met were the ones that really influenced me to get more involved and get get more out of my work than just the shifts with the Oncology Nursing Society and the chapters and the conferences and the magazines or the journals, all that stuff. After a couple of years, I started to build on what I was doing in the shifts. And that's how I learned to love and see more beyond just walking in the door and taking a patient assignment.

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Amanda Guarniere

So what did that look like in kind of the early days of you joining the professional organization and you mentioned it and you know, we're talking about ONS right which is the Oncology Nursing Society. ad which is well known for being a really excellent professional organization for a specialty for oncology. So, you know, you went to some of these dinners, you decided to join, and then what did it look like? You're doing education? Were you volunteering? Were you going to meetings? Like how did you really start to turn that membership into more than, you know, just a line item on your resume and more into an activity.

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Natalie D'Itri 10:27

It was fun, it was social. And I learned! Well, I learned about drugs like the, I'm going to use brand names here. I know that they don't promote you, but Zofran and Kytril. And how they helped revolutionize cancer care by preventing nausea and helping patients not be so sick during their chemotherapy. So that was pretty front and center when you're taking care of people in the hospital. At that time, I was getting chemo with these new drugs. They were revolutionising cancer care. And so it was kind of cool to learn all that and the why behind. And

honestly, these dinner programs were sponsored by pharmaceutical companies. But it was take home information that made a difference the next day when I went to work, so it was starting to all build into something really exciting. That made a difference for my patients. And I saw that. So that sort of experience, those aha moments in cancer care, were happening on a frequent basis and oncology over the last 20 plus years. So it was putting the science and together with the frontline care, and I was the end user essentially, of the advances that were coming in cancer care to treat patients, because I was that patient care provider, that nurse at the bedside or the chair side during my time working directly with patients. So there were those benefits right up front, going to the local chapter events and hearing what they had to say and seeing the difference in the patients when I went to work. That doesn't happen every, you know, education education session that you get. But in college, it was happening. And I was at those outings, those chapter meetings with people I worked with anyone who was off that day, from those 12 hour shifts, we were there. And it and it was fun. And then when I moved to other places as a travel nurse, or when I took on other regular positions, I connected with the other chapters, so I got to have instant friends or meet people and build a network before everybody was on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn, to connect with people in oncology. I love that.

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Amanda Guarniere

I think that's really, really powerful. And maybe, well, I think it's a resource. Professional organizations in general are underutilized resources. And I think that we kind of hear, you know, yeah, join this membership, join that membership, it looks good on your resume, or, you know, make sure that you're paying the people to lobby for you on Capitol Hill. And, you know, all this messaging. But, you know, it's not just something where you make your membership donation and write it on your resume. There are so many benefits and so many things to take advantage of, that these organizations have to offer. And was there ever a point where you're, you know, your attendance and your membership turned into an opportunity for leadership either, you know, within the professional organization, or did it help you develop your leadership in the workplace?

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Natalie D'Itri 13:44

Yes, I well. For anyone that's been involved in a chapter or some type of committee, you may find that you're always looking for leaders, right? A lot of times people are not lined up to volunteer for the work. But what happened is that there were leadership opportunities. When I moved to the Washington DC area, again, I connected with the chapter we're at near where I worked. And there's meeting meeting flyers posted on the unit walls. So I just reached out to someone now you could just search your chapter or a choice of chapters by going onto the an organization's website. But I became the membership Chair of the chapter when I first moved to Washington, DC. And so then we we met to plan chapter activities, the President, the President Elect, the Secretary, the Treasurer, the membership person. And as the membership person, I had the list of who was a member. So those names, I would get to know those names because I was the membership chair for a couple years. I met those people over the years at chapter meetings or when there was a conference or a Congress here or through places, different places I worked and when I was looking for a job, actually, one of the people who was the contact was the hiring director. I had known her name for years because I was the membership chair. And she was one of the chapter members, even though we had never met.

So yes, I got to know, I could tell you what street some people lived on, because their addresses were with their name. And I received the membership applications and checks the dues in the mail at my house at that time. So I could finally put names with faces over time. And we had fun as officers, we had a retreat, we paid for it on our own, that we would go to this retreat community in West Virginia, and we'd bring spouses or people brought kids. And we would plan in June, or July for September through May our whole calendar of events. So it was fun. And we were you know, it was socializing, we got to know each other, you tend to have co workers there. Because often you get pulled along to a meeting like I did, come on, let's go to this meeting on our day off, or do you want to be our nominations committee chair? Because we have to have a slate to elect new officers. So somebody would say yes. And then you have four or five people from Georgetown or four or five people from Innova working on the chapter leadership. It was fun.

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Amanda Guarriere

I love it. I'm, I'm on their website right now, because I just think, you know, my mom is an oncology nurse. She's been a member of ONS for forever. So even before I entered the nursing world, I was aware of this organization, you know, through through my mom, and I don't know what it is. But this, I'm sure it's like this for other professional organizations as well. But I've just always heard that oncology nurses, particularly those who are members of ons are just really engaged nurses, right. They're engaged in their care of their patients, they're engaged in the workplace, they're engaged in all these other activities. And, you know, it makes me wonder like, is this a chicken and egg scenario, right? Is it that the professional organization gives you, you know, a bigger purpose, a bigger mission beyond, you know, just you're clocking in or clocking out? I don't know if that has been your experience at all, I'd love to hear you kind of talk about how the involvement in this in an organization maybe helped prevent your burnout or contribute to you feeling more satisfaction like was that at all your experience?

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Natalie D'Itri 17:44

So when I had to write applications or brief essays for scholarship money to pay for a certification exam, or to get when I wanted to get money for Congress scholarship to go to the ONS Congress, which is their big annual conference, I would always write about the four benefits of professional nursing organization membership. And I didn't sit down and brainstorm this, I just sat and reflected on what I had. gotten back out of being a member and being involved in ons, you get scholarship, leadership, education and friendship. I'll just go backwards friendship. Remember, I said I worked with a lot of people that became friends or people you connected with outside of work. So scholarship, leadership, education, and friendship, education, I got scholarships. And I have to say that sometimes not all the money allotted for a scholarship, whether it was a congress scholarship, \$1,000 to attend a conference, or sort of vacation award where you would get basically a credit or a coupon code to pay for your certification exam, which is a couple \$100. Right. Leadership, I was a chapter member. And you could be a member at the national level, you could be on a steering committee, Congress Planning Committee, you could be on test writing committee for the certification Corporation, which manages the certification exams, you could do a lot of things. You just have to see what's out there and be involved. And now with everything being online, more than ever, you can find so many opportunities. And so what did I say scholarship, leadership, education and friendship. So you get scholarships. That's money, literally handing you money for being

involved in applying, and they want to support nurses and that's one way that the organizations, professional organizations support their members. Education, you get journals you get. So the research journal, you get a journal that has review articles, and you get a magazine with short information about what's going on. and testimonials and reflections and contributions from people in practice. And it's easy reads. Now more things are online than ever. So you don't get as many mailings, but you get a lot of information that's just great to review and see what's going on and help you keep current, or find people to connect with that doing things that you might want to do like nurse navigators, people, advancing their careers with doctoral level degrees, people doing research studies, all kinds of things. You could find writing mentors, if you want to get a mentor to publish. You want a master scholarship or a doctoral scholarship, it's all there. And these things that happen through an association are really all done by members. And Amanda, you asked about other opportunities. With the organization, people get jobs working for this association. And when a lot of what I'm saying it's something that happens with many organizations, not just oncology, there's the Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association, which when I was a member of that I found it was modeled a lot like ons. It's even also based in Pittsburgh, but they hire their own nurses, these organizations, and way ahead of the COVID, shut down where everyone went working remote. People worked for these organizations and lived wherever they live, they didn't have to move to Pittsburgh or move to wherever the organization is based. I live in Washington, DC, so policies a big deal. One thing I've done is I participated in one voice against cancer, which is from the American Cancer Society, among other organizations, and they had a hill day. And they literally scheduled us to meet with our senators, and Congress, men and women. And they arranged everything. We started the day meeting with a lobbyist from the organizations that we were affiliated with. There's a full day and you learned and you also got to be front and center with your elected officials. And people came from all over the country to do this hill day. And it wasn't just healthcare professionals. It was patients and family members. I remember people different pan can advocates or advocacy for pancreatic cancer, as another example of how we all work together and got to go advocate and talk to our elected officials, Congress members, about factors affecting us as constituents or as healthcare professionals. That was a really great experience. All I did was sign up and respond to an email that came out through my list for ONS members.

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Amanda Guarniere

Well, it sounds like, you know, it has really been an enriching experience for you professionally, and I'm wondering if you have any advice to you know, other nurses who are listening or other nursing students about involvement in professional organizations? Like how do they how do they choose one is it is just joining enough or what's kind of that next step beyond just, you know, being a member.

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Natalie D'Itri 23:09

Joining is the first step. But you may be able to go as a visitor to an event, a meeting, or a conference or a program without even being a member. But it is a way to connect with others. Since I live in the Washington, DC area, people come and go all the time. This is an expensive place to live. So people might decide they don't want to stay here. People come with their partners who are military Foreign Service. They're here for a couple of years, and they leave. And in general, we know that people are mobile, moving all over the place, especially after

COVID When you don't have to necessarily in healthcare and outside of health care, you don't always have to be right on site to do the job. So I meet a lot of people connecting with an organization professional nursing organization is a way to meet people when you're new in a community or new in a job. Now for students, if you're currently enrolled as a student, and you're not let yet. Now for students if you're currently enrolled in a nursing program, and you're not yet licensed as a nurse, so before you take your NCLEX before your semester ends, join a professional nursing organization. It may be free or for ones when you're a student when I most recently looked at the website, it was \$25 to join as a student. Normally an association membership for nurses is around 100 to \$150. Don't quote me on that. But it's much lower in nursing organizations to become a member than say a physician organization, which tends to be much higher. But as a student you can join for next to nothing. And you can explore an area that you're interested in, whether it's mother baby, Emergency Nurses, Is Association, critical care, Psych mental health? Where do you want to go? Well join that organization or an area where you had clinicals, join an association related to that area, because then you can get insight on what's going on, explore that field a little more. And you might have some good talking points when you go to an interview, for that first job, or your second job that helps you to stand out because you have some knowledge, you've done your homework and had the background just from being a member. Now, I don't know how all chapters work. For different associations, oncology, nursing, tended to have really strong chapter activity. And you may not live where there's a chapter close, but you don't have to live in a big city or a major metropolitan area to be involved in a Chapter. Those groups have connected through listservs, and probably on Zoom now more than ever, and they may do service projects or community activities where people get together might be that they're teaching classes, a review course, or chemotherapy class is what our chapter taught. And we did it for a moneymaker. But we did it to help the nurses in our community before there was an online standardized chemotherapy administration course offered by ons, and we had fun planning it. So it's just fun. And it benefits you in many ways, as a professional, and it looks good as you're a student to be a member, because you can get some insight and do some homework.

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Amanda Guarniere

Yeah. Definitely, I think, that is a great piece of advice if you're still a student to join, because, you know, it's a networking opportunity. First of all, you know, you can let the people that you meet, know that you're interested in this field, that you're you'll be looking for a job soon. And it's also a really great way to stand out, not just on your resume. But when you get into those conversations, those interview conversations of Yeah, I really am interested in this field. I've been a member, a student member of such and such organization. I've attended their conference and you know, really taken advantage of the educational resources like that's going to really show an interviewer and hiring manager that, you know, this isn't just any, any interview for you, but but rather something that you're really committed to. So I think that is all excellent advice, and definitely mirrors what I recommend, for sure. So before we wrap up, I'd love to take a few minutes to have you share a little bit more about kind of what you're doing now, you mentioned at the beginning that you've pivoted into supporting nurses. And so I'd love to have you share more about your podcast, more specifics about your services, so that we can learn more about that part of you.

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Natalie D'Itri 27:52

Thanks, Amanda. I have launched a podcast recently called Careerwise Nurse. And I will make

sure that all the information is shared with Amanda so it can be in the show notes. And you can find the podcast, it's on Apple, Spotify, Audible or Amazon. It's called Careerwise Nurse. And it really is about launching, growing and thriving as a nurse. And I've had this concept in mind of Careerwise Nurse for quite a while because I learned that there's good nurses all around. And you might find a job you really love and not have a plan on where you want to go next. But I encourage everyone to have a plan and I help nurses one on one to have that plan or figure out what their options are. So that they what I want them to know what their options are so that they can stay energized, be fulfilled in their work and make it fit in their life. As I said in the beginning. And you may not have been told by anyone figure out what options you want down the road. Because when you have kids or if you have kids or dogs or family to care for does a 12 hour shift day or night work in your life anymore. You may be male, you may be like me and love being a nurse, but it doesn't always fit in our lives like it did before. Or you might find that you want something more challenging or different you want to change so I help nurses figure out their options. And it can be just extra help getting through the first three 6-12 months of their work as a nurse because that's a very challenging time. So helping new nurses are helping nurses figure out options to be fulfilled in their work. This career wise nurse piece is all about that you drive your own ship. No one is going to take you where you want to go. It's all about you, your license, your your work, your career, your certification, your goals and dreams and your life. And so with the podcast we explore the early days of nursing practice. Also we mix in an expert guidance like what Amanda has to share on interviewing resumes, among all the things that she provides to nurses. Also, it's about just extra support for anyone that needs it. One pleasant surprise that has come out of working one on one with nurses as a coach is nurses reentering practice, they've they've been home, their kids are bigger now they want to go back to work. Where do they want to go? So that's been something that I didn't expect when I created my coaching business and even my podcast as to me as to who my audience is. Those nurses reentering practice add a lot of value when you see that we really need nurses. And that's, that's also a population that I focus on in terms of supporting nurses. My email is, belong, belong@careerwisenurse.com. And I have a Facebook group, I'm on LinkedIn, I'm on Instagram. And I really, I just want to help nurses be happy and fulfilled because we need nurses and nursing is an amazing career that can go in any direction you want it to go.

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Amanda Guarniere

Well, thank you for sharing all of that. I am excited for your podcast, I just followed it on Apple and rated it even before listening. So listen after the fact, I'll have links in the show notes, too, too, the career wise nurse podcast, to your email address, and also to your LinkedIn profile so that listeners can connect with you and learn more from you. And a final question that I've started asking guests is whether you have any big dreams or goals that you would like to share, because I think when we speak our goals and dreams out loud, it really dramatically increases the likelihood of them coming true. So this is your, your opportunity to speak some of those dreams into existence if you'd like/

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Natalie D'Itri 32:06

Well, I would love for the nursing shortage to be solved. I'm doing what I can to help nurses. And I find that when I coach nurses one on one, I actually reflect back after the call. And I say that was really fun. I loved helping that nurse solve that problem. So I want to continue to have joy in my job. And I feel like now I'm living my dream life because as I said it was in the hospital

working, and that was most recently in 2021, and it was really hard work for the nurses that were caring for patients directly at the bedside. And it was always stressful. And I want to take away the fear and the stress for nurses and help them just be really happy. So now that I can do that, I feel like suddenly I'm living my dream life. Because I can be flexible for family and life events. And I can still be out there helping nurses and connecting with nurses, which really energizes me. So thank you, Amanda, for allowing me to share that I'm now living my dream life and I want to help other nurses do the same thing. And I was really influenced in the last two years listening to podcasts. And now being able to connect more with those who I was influenced by when there was a lot of time during the pandemic to listen to podcasts as you walked alone. When we were all home. I feel like the world is so big yet so small at the same time. So thank you, Amanda, for what you've done, because it really inspired me to.

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Amanda Guarniere

Well, thank you I love I love all of that. I love to hear that you're living your dream life. And I think, you know that's that's part of the bigger mission of what we're both here to do is to help kind of speak the possibilities into existence for people let them know what's what's possible, what's out there. So I'm so glad that you were able to share all that with us today! And I'm excited for what's to come with the Careerwise Wurse.

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Natalie D'Itri 34:11

Thank you so much.

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Amanda Guarniere

Thanks, Natalie.