

Interest Areas >>

[Research](#) | [Other](#) | [Education](#)
[Endocrine/Diabetes](#)
[Emergency](#) | [Tele-Health](#)
[Oncology](#) | [Disaster](#)
[Management](#) | [Infectious](#)
[Diseases](#) | [Critical Care](#)
[Hospice / Palliative Care](#)
[Adult Health](#) | [Maternal Health](#)
[Complementary Healthcare](#)
[Home Health Care](#)
[Gerontology](#) | [Long-term Care](#)
[Cardiovascular](#) | [Managed](#)
[Care](#) | [Public/Environmental](#)

Authors >>

Topics >>

Highlighted Features

[Epilogue to 'Bernadette Melnyk: Coal miner's daughter'](#)
[The day the ER nurses were ready, and nobody came.](#)
[Fall into presence](#)
[Civility CAN be learned!](#)
[Define, design, lead, empower](#)
[It's time to end the debate and require a BSN!](#)
[Google Reader, rest in peace](#)
[I'm still standing!](#)

Epilogue to 'Bernadette Melnyk: Coal miner's daughter'

Her leadership recipe? Check out her secret sauce.

By James E. Mattson



Click photo to access "Bernadette Melnyk: Coal miner's daughter (Part One)."

A few years after Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk became dean of Arizona State University (ASU) College of Nursing & Health Innovation, a school alum brought her framed art depicting a flying pig and said: "Bern, when you first came to ASU and talked about all these big dreams for the college and the impact we were going to make, there was a small group of us who were what I call negatoids, who said, 'Yeah, right! She's such a big dreamer. That's going to happen when pigs fly.' I brought you this painting," she continued, "because pigs are flying here."

That account was published in *Reflections on Nursing Leadership* in 2011, in a profile titled "Bernadette Melnyk: Coal miner's daughter." The article noted that Melnyk had recently been appointed dean of nursing at The Ohio State University (OSU) and concluded with the statement "If Dean Melnyk's accomplishments at ASU are any indication, sightings of [flying pigs] will likely occur in and around Columbus, Ohio, in the very near future."

Fast forward

Two years after Melnyk's arrival at OSU, a university known for flying pigskins and teams that excel on the gridiron (the Buckeyes were undefeated in the 2012 season), there is every indication that the school soon will be known, not only for its college of nursing, but also for its commitment to health and wellness and nurse practitioner-led clinics serving nearly 100,000 OSU students, faculty, and staff.

Dean of nursing at The Ohio State University is just one of the hats Melnyk wears. She is also OSU's associate vice president for health promotion, university chief wellness officer, and professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at OSU College of Medicine. And in June of this year, she was named editor of *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing*, a peer-reviewed journal published by Wiley on behalf of the Honor Society of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI).

What is a chief wellness officer?

"It's a pioneering role in academic institutions," Melnyk explains. "One of my highest priorities since coming to Ohio State is to figure out how best to promote health and wellness across the university—how to really create a culture of wellness here as well as what I call an ecosystem or environment that makes it easy and fun for people to engage in wellness."

[MOST POPULAR](#)
[MOST EMAILED](#)
[MOST COMMENTED](#)

1. Reflections on Nursing Leadership
2. Stolen lives: What nurses can do to stop sex trafficking
3. The day the ER nurses were ready, and nobody came.
4. Social media: An innovative way to share nursing ideas
5. The new frontier: Nurses in the executive suite

One of the first steps she took to spearhead creation of that culture university-wide—faculty, staff, and students—was to form the One University Health & Wellness Council, which comprises top leaders at the university who have anything to do with health and wellness. That includes the vice president of care coordination and health promotion, the vice president of human resources, the CEO of Ohio State's health plan, the vice president of student health, and the university's chief technology officer.

Working closely with Melnyk in heading up the group are co-chairs Larry Lewellen, vice president for care coordination and health promotion at OSU's Wexner Medical Center, and Andraea "A.J." Douglass, vice president of culture, talent, and human resources (HR). The council's vision? To create "the healthiest university and community on the globe." That's a tall order, but then tall orders are what Melnyk specializes in.

"If you look at how most universities structure efforts around health and wellness," Melnyk says, "you'll see that HR oversees faculty and staff wellness and that they incentivize wellness monetarily with personalized health assessments and things like that. Further, "student life" typically oversees student wellness, but the two usually do not collaborate. But what is so different about what we are doing at Ohio State," she explains, "is that we have created a comprehensive, integrated approach to wellness for faculty, staff, and students. One of the council's initiatives was to launch what we call a Wellness Innovators program. These are faculty and staff members from all units across the university who are responsible for helping us build a culture and environment for wellness.

"The role of wellness innovators is to facilitate wellness in their units," Melnyk continues, "whether it's colleges, human resources, president's unit, or academic affairs. We want wellness innovators from each of those units working to create a culture and ecosystem of wellness. We work very closely with Your Plan for Health, which is the health-promotion arm of OSU's health plan, and these folks are also focused on wellness.

We need more than information.

"People believe in the need to be healthy, but their implementation is not as strong as their beliefs," Melnyk says. "The good news is, if we can influence people's beliefs about the value of engaging in healthy lifestyle behaviors, they'll implement them more. As you and I both know," she continues, "behavior change is tough. It's what I call character building. People often don't change just with information. You've got to get to people's emotions to get them to change, and you've got to change their thinking. I come from a very cognitive behavior framework," she explains. "How you think directly relates to how you feel and how you behave."

The first call for volunteer wellness innovators attracted 115 OSU faculty and staff members, and the second call an additional 100. That's a start, but the goal established by the One University Health & Wellness Council is to have 10 percent of university personnel functioning in that role.

"That's a lot," Melnyk observes, "because we have about 45,000 faculty and staff here at the university. So we're talking about needing more than 4,000 people if we're really going to make this thing go viral."

Council co-chair Larry Lewellen is unreserved in his praise for Melnyk: "It is my extreme pleasure to be a partner with Bern for health and wellness at Ohio State. Recruiting her to be our chief wellness officer was a stroke of genius for our university! She is a national figure, an expert in evidence-based wellness, an amazing organizer and champion for wellness. Even more importantly, she is thoughtful, collaborative, and acts only with the highest integrity. She is a delight to spend time with, a powerhouse of intensity, and a 24/7 innovator. My hat is off to her, and my life has been enriched!" (A champion for wellness in his own right, Lewellen, aka [CrazyRider5](#), is an avid cyclist. At the time of this writing, he is participating in an 1,800-mile "[Ride to Remember](#)" from Seattle to San Diego. He turns 60 just as the ride concludes!)

Traveling with the president

E. Gordon Gee, JD, EdD, former president of The Ohio State University, is well-known for his fundraising abilities. As chancellor of Vanderbilt University (2000-07), he raised \$1.5 billion and, as president of Ohio State (2007-13), he raised \$1.6 billion. Every summer, Gee would visit 44 of the 88 counties in Ohio, which he called his "friend-raising" trips. In 2012, he asked Melnyk to join him on a tour to 17 of those counties, focusing on the promotion of health and wellness.

"We had a great time," Melnyk says. "It was like a presidential campaign. People come out from these small towns, playing the Buckeye fight song, with blow-up Brutuses (Ohio State's team mascot) and dressed in Buckeye clothes. It was a fabulous trip! We took a busload of students with us, and it was one of my most memorable times with a university." (In July of this year, after coming under fire for remarks he later characterized as "a poor attempt at humor," Gee resigned as president of OSU but, as president emeritus, continues to serve as a distinguished faculty member and raises funds for the university.)

Exporting wellness

Not content to make OSU "**The Healthiest University in the World**," Melnyk can't wait to export her vision for wellness to academic campuses across the country. "Do you know how many people exist in the higher academic communities?" she asks. "More than 33 million across the United States. So isn't that a fabulous opportunity to improve population health through academic settings?"

So Melnyk had a very specific request for President Gee when she buttonholed him more than a year ago. "Gordon," she said, "I want to hold a national summit here at Ohio State on building healthy academic communities, and I need your help. I'll draft a letter from the two of us, and I would like you to identify 200 university presidents to whom we're going to send this letter. In it, we'll talk about how urgent it is to improve population health in our academic settings."

"Academia has sorely lagged behind corporate America in wellness," Melnyk explains. "For more than a decade, Fortune 500 companies have been hiring chief wellness officers, usually physicians, but academia has yet to pick this up in a full-fledged way."

Gee agreed to Melnyk's request, letters went out inviting wellness leaders from other academic institutions around the nation to come to OSU for the first National Consortium for Building Healthy Academic Communities and, on 22-23 April of this year, more than 300 health and wellness leaders from more than 90 universities across the country converged on Ohio State. "That was super," Melnyk says, "because we were going to be really excited if we had 200 people show up."

Nurses honest and ethical, but healthy? Not so much.

"The need is absolutely so great," she observes. "When you look at the figures, despite everything that's going on, with all the emphasis that's being given to obesity, our numbers are so poor. They really are. And then look at nurses' health. Did you see the latest Gallup poll?"

I knew about repeated Gallup polls that rank nurses as **the most honest and ethical professionals**, but I was unaware of Gallup's **well-being index that compares nurses** healthwise to physicians and other workers. Melnyk quickly addresses my knowledge deficiency.

"It said that nurses' health is much poorer than physicians' health," she says. "We have twice the obesity, higher hypertension, and hyper depression levels." I was expecting to learn more, but she changes the subject.

"O, I know what else I wanted to tell you about that's very exciting," Melnyk says. "I don't know if you are familiar with the Johnson & Johnson Human Performance Institute out of Florida." She is wise not to assume I am fully informed on that topic, either.

"Well, they are J & J's wellness company, and they are located in Orlando. Thirty years ago, a psychologist by the name of Jim Loehr started working with National Football League athletes and Olympians on how to improve their performance, how to eat better, how to engage in better activity, how to develop their spiritual side more, meeting their purpose-side-of-life more. Well, he was so successful with that program that he adapted it for corporate executives through a corporate athlete program.

"I went through the program about three years ago and was so excited by the course's content and skills building that I approached a couple of vice presidents at J & J. 'I want to adapt this program for health professionals and other people at universities,' I told them. So we now have a cooperation agreement with them. I have 19 trainers here at Ohio State, and we've been putting groups of faculty, staff, clinicians, and students through a two-day workshop. Now, we are opening it up for everybody—anybody from outside who wants to come and take the program."

She returns to the subject of nurses' health. "We are putting all our new nurse orientees at The Ohio State Medical Center through the program, and we'll be studying their outcomes for two years afterward."

Her comment reminds me of the nurse practitioner-led clinic that OSU College of Nursing had recently opened, similar to what she inaugurated at Arizona State University, and I ask her about it.

"Yes, that's another thing I did very quickly after I got here, because this particular college didn't have a faculty practice. You know, being a nurse practitioner myself, I'm very dedicated to improving quality of care and patient-family outcomes through evidence-based practice and role modeling the best interprofessional care for our students. So we now have a booming, **nurse practitioner-led, interdisciplinary, team-based model of care** at OSU East, which is one of our hospitals. We have this beautiful prison, correctional that

which is one of our hospitals. We have this beautiful primary-care clinic that integrates physical and mental health care, and we are getting ready to open up a second site for which we have just been funded."

Vision: To do the impossible

As our conversation nears its end, I ask Melnyk a final question. "Ohio State is not known for being among the nation's top nursing schools," I venture. (In 2011, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked OSU's graduate nursing program No. 32 in the nation.) "I assume it's not your plan to leave it where it is?"

"You got it. Absolutely not!" she declares.

"Every college of nursing wants to be the best, right? They want to deliver the best education, research, and practice. I want us to be that, too—the best college in the country for delivering the highest quality of educational programs, the best cutting-edge research, and the best practice to impact patient outcomes, but to me that's not enough.

"I want OSU College of Nursing to be known as that college that thinks and does the impossible. In fact, thinking and doing the impossible is now part of our vision statement: 'The Ohio State University College of Nursing is the world's preeminent college known for accomplishing what is considered impossible through its transformational leadership and innovation in nursing and health, evidence-based practice, and unsurpassed wellness.'"

At this point, it's a vision statement, but Melnyk is doing all she can to make it a statement of reality. When she came to Ohio State, she brought 12 faculty and staff members with her, and she has been recruiting, as she describes it, "like wildfire." One of those she has hired is Richard Carmona, MD, MPH, FACS, trauma surgeon and former U.S. surgeon general. (An honorary member of Sigma Theta Tau International, Carmona was a nurse before he was a physician.) Now, as the Dean's Distinguished Professor of Health Promotion and Entrepreneurship at Ohio State, he shares his expertise in public health, health literacy, and health innovation locally with OSU students and faculty and the community. Nationally, he is communicating major OSU College of Nursing strategies to key constituencies.

"He comes in on a regular basis, and people just love him here," Melnyk says. "He's absolutely terrific, and what he offers is just fantastic. It's been a wonderful coup for us to get him here as a distinguished professor."

"We're growing by leaps and bounds here at the college," Melnyk continues. "In the first two years, we've launched three new centers of excellence that are fully functional right now. We have the **Center for Transdisciplinary Evidence-based Practice [CTEP]**, and that center is booming. We have a new Center of Excellence in Critical and Complex Care [CECCC]. I recruited two of whom I believe are the best critical-care nurse researchers in the country for that center: **Mary Beth Happ** [PhD, RN, FAAN] from Pittsburgh and **Linda Chlan** [PhD, RN, FAAN] from Minnesota. We also have a wonderful **Center for Women, Children & Youth [CWCY]**, led by our associate dean for research, **Kim Arcoleo**, PhD, MPH.

"And we're getting ready to launch new programs. We've established a new **Leadership Academy for Peak Performance [LAPP]** that is going splendidly, and we're partnering with American Nurses Association on their **leadership institute**. So we're moving light-speed ahead.

"I've also launched a national consortium for the advancement of **Million Hearts**, which has more than 60 participating colleges throughout the United States. Million Hearts is the national initiative that was launched in 2011 by the [U.S.] Department of Health and Human Services to prevent one million heart attacks and strokes over five years." Melnyk facilitated Ohio State's being the first university-wide partner of Million Hearts.

Meanwhile, a study started by Melnyk when she was still at ASU and completed just recently—data collection was started in 2010 and completed in 2012, with analysis done in 2012-13—was published this week in *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. It is already getting **national attention**. **The research**, an outgrowth of COPE (Creating Opportunities for Personal Empowerment), a program founded by Melnyk more than 20 years ago, finds that adding a mental health component to school-based lifestyle programs for teens could be key to lowering obesity, improving grades, alleviating severe depression, and reducing substance abuse.

"I want to leave a mark," Melnyk says. "I want to improve the lives of people, to positively impact their health and wellness. Doing research for the sake of research isn't my goal. It's doing research that makes a difference in improving outcomes in the real world—educating people—to really improve quality of care and outcomes for the health of our people. That's what it's all about!"

Views on Worldviews

It is time to conclude the interview, but I ask Melnyk if she would take a minute

to talk about one more thing—her recent appointment as editor of *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing*.

"Oh, I'm very excited about that," she responds. "My first editorial is about vision. I want to make the journal more relatable and useful, to help people really put into action what they learn, whatever their setting is—practice, education, the community.

"Jo [Rycroft-Malone] did a great job of leading the journal. We have a really good impact factor for a baby journal, and we publish very good, rigorous articles and systematic reviews, but I think we can do both. I think we can continue to publish the most cutting-edge science on evidence-based practice, but I think we can also add to that piece the usability and sustainability piece.

"Jim, that's what a lot of people are struggling with when it comes to evidence-based practice. They get it into their institutions, and then it kind of peters out. I want to help change that."

Anyone who thinks she won't doesn't know Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk.

Secret sauce for leaders

During our conversation, I ask Melnyk to explain what would motivate a dozen people—faculty and staff members—to move cross-country, from Arizona to Ohio, to work with her. "How do you explain such loyalty?"

"I think, Jim, if you fuel people's dreams and you support them to attain their dreams and their goals, that's what it's all about, really, and it's about personal connection. I think that's secret sauce for a leader. It really is. I see a lot of leaders who are really good at process and implementation, but they often wonder why they have difficulty sustaining their efforts or holding onto people they want to hold on to.



"I tell everybody all the time, you've got to have an exciting team vision that people buy into, and then you support these people. I like to be the wind beneath people's wings. I ask everybody I interview, 'If you could do anything in the next three, five, seven years and not fail, what would you do?' And then, 'How can I help support you to achieve that?' I have people who interview with me and say, 'Bern, I've never had anybody ask me this before!'

"We've lost so much of what we've done. We've lost our dream so often, and we don't fuel those enough in each other. You've got to dream it first before you can do it, so I encourage people to dream big, to take risks. I create environments where people feel comfortable to take risks, to innovate, to think out of the box. That's key, that's really key!"

Terry Olbrysh, former director of marketing and communications at ASU College of Nursing, agreed to interrupt his retirement to work as a part-time consultant to Melnyk at Ohio State. He observes of Melnyk: "She is, without a doubt, the most remarkable woman I have ever worked with. I come primarily from a corporate background in manufacturing and technology, and I have not seen her rival in either industry. Quite frankly, when I retired from Arizona State, I had no intention of continuing to work, but when Bern approached me about working in a consulting relationship for her ... she's the only person I would have said yes to. She's the type of person who can make a difference. [For Ohio State], she's the right person at the right time."



Terry Olbrysh

Mary Killeen, PhD, RN, associate dean for academic affairs at ASU College of Nursing during Melnyk's time at the school and now emeritus professor, also holds Melnyk in high esteem: "It was truly a gift to have had the opportunity to work for and with Bern. I will never forget her vision, enthusiasm, energy, and astonishing ability to effectively bring people together to accomplish what might have been thought of as impossible, yet consistently resulted in great advances for nursing and health. It was a privilege to have worked with Bern."

Barbara White, associate director, Educational Excellence at ASU during Melnyk's tenure as dean—now professor emeritus—and 2013 **Mary Killeen Visiting Scholar for Educational Excellence**, observes: "Bern is a visionary and has the ability to enroll



visionary and has the ability to envision others in her dreams. She also has a way of creating opportunities for herself and others based on her enthusiasm and continuing record of success. She inspires and supports achievements that may, at first, seem beyond reach and is the first one to celebrate the success of others."



Barbara White



Mary Killeen

There you have it. The secret is out. My compliments to the chef! [RNL](#)

James E. Mattson is editor of Reflections on Nursing Leadership.

Published 9/16/2013, Vol. 39, No. 3

To comment on this article please sign in.