



Podcast Transcript

Distinguished Careers in Nursing: C. Alicia Georges and Jean Watson

Part 1 - C. Alicia Georges

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Guest

C. Alicia Georges, EdD, RN, FAAN

- Experienced Professor
- Strong business development professional
- Skilled in Program Evaluation, Caregiving, Curriculum Development, Public Speaking, and Health Equity.
- AARP Board of Directors
- Author and presenter
- Numerous awards and honors including, not limited to:
 - o American Academy of Nursing Lifetime Legacy Achievement Award
 - o Women Who Lead, Black History Month, Vitas Health
 - o Woman Leader 2012, Manhattan and Bronx Times
 - o Black Nurse Pioneer, Kings County Hospital
 - o Elected and Inducted, New York Academy of Medicine
 - o Trailblazer Award, New York Chapters of the National Black Nurses Association
 - o New York State Legislature Nurse of Distinction for Region I

Host

Leana McGuire, BS, RN

- Extensive expertise with leadership development and executive coaching
- Best selling author
- TEDx Speaker

- Expertise in content development, visual performance, speaking and podcast hosting.

Transcript

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(INTRO)

C. ALICIA GEORGES (GUEST): You just got to step out. You got to be bold, but you got to do your homework. You got to find out where it is, where the power lies. You know, I got involved in political campaigns, you know, not too much. But, you know, they knew I was there. I gave, I helped. I became a district leader in my in my party. You know, I did all the things that needed to be at the same time, I was looking at that intersection with nursing and health care.

LEANA MCGUIRE (HOST): Hello, everyone. My name is Leana McGuire, and I will be your host for this Elite Learning Podcast series. Distinguish Careers in Nursing. I'm really pleased to introduce you to Dr. Catherine Alicia Georges. She is professor and chairperson of the Department of Nursing at Lehman College. Welcome, Dr. Georges.

GEORGES: Thank you for having me, Leana.

MCGUIRE: Ah, we're thrilled. I'm really thrilled. There's so much I want to ask you, but the first thing I would love to know from you is what brought you to nursing in the first place.

GEORGES: Well, I was born and raised in the United States Virgin Islands, and my godmother was a nurse midwife. And I just thought she was super-duper. I mean, she delivered every baby that that in my generation. And so, I thought I would like to be like her. And so I said, oh, I'm going to be a nurse midwife.

Not understanding what that time, what it takes to be to become a nurse. So my my dad, who never went to college, he was the postmaster in the Virgin Islands, however, said, my daughters are going to college. So you have to go to a place where you will get a degree, you know, to be a real nurse like my my godmother was.

So I journey. And I said, okay, I've finished Catholic school in the Virgin Islands and went to Seton Hall.

MCGUIRE: Wow. So was it your OB rotation that made you decide not to be a midwife?

GEORGES: Well. Like during the summers when I was at Seton Hall, I went home to work. That was part of my because they paid for my tuition. So I went home to work. And, you know, my friends who were my age group who may have stayed on, were having babies. I would be with them, but I didn't quite think I wanted to be a midwife.

So, you know, but but the other thing about that was nurses in the Virgin Islands is that they were also community health nurses.

MCGUIRE: Oh.

GEORGES: Midwives of women. See, all deliveries were done when I was growing up at home. And then even after you gave birth, they did they or another public health nurse, community health nurse went to see the parents. So that that I don't think I, I like that, you know, I like their uniforms better than white.

MCGUIRE: I love that. It's great.

GEORGES: If you make a decision, right?

MCGUIRE: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And when you started your career in nursing, did you ever envision it taking the direction that it did?

GEORGES: No, I didn't. I you know, I'm being very transparent. I went to school in the sixties. It was not a great time in the United States now. And so I didn't see that, you know, I never thought about opportunities. I knew I wasn't going back to the Virgin Islands because it was so small, one little small houseful. And there was so many other people like me who had gone to get bachelor's and master's degrees.

So I, I decided I would stay, but I never envisioned that I would be where I am. But someplace in the back of my head was this this nagging peace that my dad and my mom always said. You could be what you you want to be. You just got to keep trying. You just got to keep trying. It took a long time. Don't let anybody fool you. But you know, I got where I am now. I'm ready to retire.

MCGUIRE: And it went by like that, right? Probably all of us. Yeah, well, you know, kudos to your parents, right? Good for them. That was a great influence. What I'd like to talk to you about is, I know that you've done a lot of work around equity and inclusion in nursing and in health in general. Right? So can you tell me what inspired

GEORGES: Again, it's my experience at Seton Hall in. Okay. And again, it was would you believe it was an OB? It was an OB experience. And I don't care. I say it out because we need to keep saying it and remember what happened. What happened, I went to school and I that we did our experiences in Newark, New Jersey back in the sixties Newark was not the greatest place then either. There were parts that were excellent. Anyway, we went to what was then called Newark City Hospital. They call it Markland Medical Center. It's now the big-time hospital University Hospital of Rutgers University. It was a building that was horrible. They saw the people who were poor were seen in the basement of that building. And the way they treated folks was just it was unacceptable to me.

My classmates who I still read, we are all still in contact today. White women and one black woman who later became a physician. We were we were all upset with this, all upset. So I swore I'm not going to let any know. They just can't do this. They just can't do that. So fast forward, when I finished, you know, school I went to I came to New York to visiting nurse service of New York. And there I also saw the inequities. I worked in the Bronx. And you saw the that the baby that was sick in those days, opioid addicted babies. You saw the poor housing that people were living in. The inability to get the resources they needed. And you know what? It just made me more angry. But angry with a purpose.

MCGUIRE: Right? Like, right.

GEORGES: You can't be angry unless you have a purpose to do something about it, to, you know, to dissipate your anger. But I just knew that this was not going in my watch as long as I could, that I wasn't going to let this happen. So I became involved in well, at that time, the Black Nurses Association, who on one hand was fighting for equity and in work force and to include more blacks in nursing.

So some of my greatest mentors who have now passed, you know; and I became part of the black nurses in 71, in 1971, because it was just getting started. And and that was a forum and a place to to get enough energy to go back to your home to fight. And so I but it's it still is to this day it still gets to me because, see, I've been the victim of that. I've been treated now as a black woman living in the Bronx who happened to be old. And institutional disparities exist. I have never been treated so badly as I was back in and last year, the way they is screamed at me with addressing me by name, calling me Mommy, dearie, you know, those kinds of demeaning things. Demeaning things. And I said, Yeah, when is this going to be over?

MCGUIRE

Yeah, interesting. I was going to ask you that because that was in the sixties when you got fired up about this, and rightfully so. And I was going to ask you, how far have we come since then? And then you mention this story, like, do you would you there have been some there has been some headway. Yes or no?

GEORGES: Yes. Yes. Ups and downs.

MCGUIRE: Okay.

GEORGES: As we bring new people and we bring other generations into to the to the health care workforce, one of the things we we forget is that the system, it is so ingrained in the system, that even people who look like me tend to use the same terminology and behave in that way because that's what the system allows and expects.

So, yes, there have been ups and downs. We have increased the number of folks across the board in the health care workforce. We see, I see all my my, my, my former students, you know, now who are holding top notch positions in the country and and doing great things. And so they had the opportunity. Many of us and my, the generation before me, paved the way. Those women who were my mentors.

So it did become better. But in the last few years it's escalated in this. It's just not good again.

MCGUIRE: No, exactly. Now, I'm assuming, I'm sure, rightfully so, that you got a lot of resistance throughout throughout this battle, so to speak, through the years. Did you?

GEORGES: Yeah, I call them challenges, you know.

MCGUIRE: That's it. That's it for me.

GEORGES: To kick them aside, stomp on them, you know, or blow them out the way something. But yes, I did have a number of those. You know, it was you know, I have to tell you that sometimes I don't feel like I force myself. But I spoke up, and and I would, you know, and I tell people, you know, you've got to speak up and talk loud. When I felt in visiting nurse service that I was as qualified as some of the other people who were getting promoted, I made a noise. And I got promoted a couple weeks later.

MCGUIRE: Oh, that's good, that's good. That's fantastic. Any particular challenge you'd like to share or.

GEORGES: You know, there have been so many. And you know what I always say to tell folks there were challenges. And then I, you know, I said, what did I learn from that one? Sometimes what I've really learned is sometimes it just can't. You just got to shut up. You know, sometimes you do see the gambler. You learn when to know, when to fold.

You know, you just have to, you know, so that I learned about, you know, some of the things I, you know, I guess because I spoke up, I really, you know, and I sometimes I alienated people,. You know, because they felt and even students in faculty and my colleagues would say, oh, you're using race as an issue. I said, It's not that I'm using race. It is a fact. You know who I am the minute you see me.

MCGUIRE: Yeah.

GEORGES: It comes on all the issues that that surround people like. Like, that look like me, right? You want to believe it or not, but it is what it is. And so I've learned to be a little more mellow, you know, and not to be as as. As as threatening. Some people saw me as threatening. And I really didn't threaten anybody. Um, I'm nonviolent. I'm scared to be violent. I was a child at age 60. So that whole you know, we marched in silence and

we did the nonviolent stuff. And and so I didn't I'm not you know, I'm didn't try to attack. So but I learned how to use the words and use what the system has to get the changes.

MCGUIRE: And be assertive.

GEORGES: Then you got to be inside to change the system any time to get a change.

MCGUIRE: Right.

GEORGES: Not like the Wall Street disrupters and to bring in all that, you know, all the disruptive stakeholders they use. But they got a reason. They got the money to get inside. That's just one way they can disrupt. So, yeah. So that's what I see that, you know, to be a good disruptor, which I now have a group I call myself myself is just me. Who [inaudible] international. But you got to be inside to disrupt they're not going to pay any attention if you're outside banging on the door. Not that you know.

MCGUIRE: That's true. That's absolutely true. There's other questions I want. We could talk about this all day. I love this discussion. Before I move on to a couple of other things that I wanted to ask you, is there any way for the newer generations in this profession or any profession as far as that goes, to get involved despite their race or gender? If they're if they're trying to fight this inequity, how do we get involved?

GEORGES: Sure. I'll tell you the way I did it and my role to get involved. I just found out what what's going on in the community. And I got that through, I got to give NYU and I see all the time to NYU goes to credit. When I was doing my master's, I took a course in public in a public school of public administration, and it was about community engagement in what happens in communities. So I found out back in 1971. Yeah, back in 1971, at the same time I was becoming part of black nurses. I wanted to know what was going on in the community because in that class I, you know, you heard about the city charter, you heard about all the things who influenced what. I said, let me find out. Got involved in going to a community board meeting was this thing I didn't want to let me in.

MCGUIRE: What?

GEORGES: No, they didn't want to let me in. It was the biggest it was it was an all-boys political club in the Bronx. But the couple years later, the city charter changed. And I applied to be on the board, and I stayed on for 20 years.

MCGUIRE: Wow.

GEORGES: It was like. So, it's that kind of, you know, you know, you just got to step out. You got to be bold, but you got to do your homework. You got to find out where it is, where the power lies. You know, I got involved in political campaigns, you know, not too much. But, you know, they knew I was there. I gave, I helped. I became a district leader in my in my party. You know, I did all the things that needed to be at the same time, I was looking at that intersection with nursing and health care.

MCGUIRE: Right.

GEORGES: Because I remind people, your street got built because it was a political decision. The hospital you work in is there because of a political decision. You got to not see politics as bad. But how it can help us and propel us into what we need to be doing as health care providers. So I say, you know, that's how I got involved.

That's how nurses should get involved. Don't keep complaining. Write the letters. I write letters. I use email and make sure I send it to the right person. Send an email to the right person, so they don't dump it. But you got to get involved. You got to get involved. You cannot make change sitting at home watching TV.

MCGUIRE: No, you can't. Amen.

GEORGES: You know, I am very stressed having two and three jobs because you want to buy a house. You know, that doesn't get you the changes that you need inherent in the system if you truly want to change it.

MCGUIRE: Right. Good. Excellent advice. I love that. Okay. I want to know just a little bit more about your career. So of all the varied positions that you've held and all the things you've done throughout your career, has there been a favorite role and why?

GEORGES: It's been in academia.

MCGUIRE: Has it?

GEORGES: Yeah, because for us, I've been there for 47 years. So and so. And why? Because I see people like Sandra Lindsay, who is receiving the the the Presidential Medal, Medal of Freedom. Who was my former student.

MCGUIRE: Oh, wow.

GEORGES: Yeah. I'd see the deans and directors in New York City and across the country, you know, one who a graduate who sat in the Montana. Don't ask me why she left New York and went to Montana. But then came you know, I saw her years later. Her name was different. And when at one point she was one of the highest ranked women in the state.

MCGUIRE: Wow

GEORGES: Of Montana. You know, and it's those things or you see the children of your graduates coming in and you hear they're now they are the director of education, the vice president for operations, the chief nursing officer. You know, and you just beam because, you know, you had it even if it was just a tiny spot, you had a tiny spot in getting them through.

So after 47 years, I mean, it's thousands of people, some who don't like me, some who still to this day would like me to have vanished, don't like. That's irrelevant. You know, it comes with the territory, but that's been the best, you know, for me is really working in academia. My my second best was my role as a community health nurse, where one year I took care, this is early on in my career, took care of a a baby who had spinal bifida and then looked a couple years later I saw she was the March of Dimes child for the Bronx. You know.

GEORGES: That's my patient.

MCGUIRE: That's great.

GEORGES: Those kind of things. And and where you see, you know, where you see nurses who are so heroic during the pandemic. I mean, you want to.

MCGUIRE: Oh, wow. Yeah.

GEORGES: My some of my graduates still, you know who do die during them you know, during the pandemic and family members of, you know, our graduates. But but my greatest has been to see what what the potential and to see it blossom. Graduates of our program.

MCGUIRE: Yeah, it sounds like your joy is in giving forward and I love that. And having known you for just 15 minutes, I would think that it's more than just a tiny influence that you had on those people. I'm just going to guess.

GEORGES: Students call me a tyrant, you know, I say to them, you want to be the best you can be. And that's all we can ask you to be. And sometimes our best is not accepted by externally, you know, for whatever rule and and archaic rules they haven't, you know, does not mean are less than.

So even when even when students fail in my department, you know, and I really it it hurts me as much as it hurts them. But, you know, you say, well, let's see, there's something else you can do because not everybody can be a nurse like not everybody can be a journalist like you. Not everybody can be a lawyer. You know, I mean, people it comes with, you know, sometimes people say, oh, that's a good career, but it's not that they really want to.

MCGUIRE: Yeah.

GEORGES: You just don't have you know, I said the accouterment the equipment that come some of our students in this country never got it in these lousy school systems. And, and then they, then, then the public doesn't want to pay to help them to make up for it. So and not failing but not because they're not good people.

MCGUIRE: No.

GEORGES: It at this point. You can't play catch up. Yeah. You're going to try but you know, it's going to take a little longer.

MCGUIRE: Now, you spoke just briefly about the pandemic. Just a few more questions before we wrap up. Any words of advice for nurses in the field with boots on the ground right now who are just about at their wits end?

GEORGES: Well, they have to speak up? I'm going to tell you right now, and I to say it on every forum I get, I say these healthcare systems made out like bandits with the care money in this country and the rescue act. The nurses and the frontline people never saw any of that. They are disheartened because they did it. Because they wanted to do it, because they were committed to human caring and didn't want to see people suffer.

I'm saying to all nurses, we have got to speak out and say we are not tolerating this, and going to contract services is not the way to solve the problem. It's just a Band-Aid over festering wound that we have. We have got to make these boards of trustees, you know, accountable to us as workers, as their employees, and to the people in the community.

I mean, we got these CEOs making \$17 million and they didn't even give the nurses \$3,000 or \$4,000 from those care money. We got these systems that are just just they combining. They're just and they're not looking at the people who are their frontline. And we have got to speak up loud and clear, because the bottom line is people trust us. We're the most trusted profession and we got to use that.

They see us not only as one of my my colleagues that the woman, you know, always says it's not trust is trustworthiness. Not the woman who asks about trustworthiness. People have to see us as trustworthy, and they do. And that's what we have to tap into to help them. But we can't do it by ourselves. No, we've got to look at collective impact.

We've got to look, as I said and I learned from AARP long ago, we've got to look for new agents of opportunity. Who can help us, journalists like yourself, you know, others who will speak the truth and tell folks, and not be intimidated by these, you know, all these machinations that go on in these systems.

MCGUIRE: Excellent answer. Now, one last question, because I've talked about the burnout and yes, speak up. Amen. What about those who are just getting into the profession? They may be intimidated by what they're

seeing and hearing. How do we keep them motivated? And what are some words that you would share with new nurses?

GEORGES: New nurses, one, you've got to finally, you know, form a bond with the people who are coming in with you. You all have to speak, be on the same page and speak in the same voice. But you also need to go and embrace those who have been working so long for so long because they haven't left. See, there's a bunch of folks who have not left.

Those are the people you need to tap into, you know, because it could leave but is still there because they are still committed. If you don't have passion, if you don't feel that you want, then step back out. It's not a profession for you, you know. But if you still believe in caring for people, you'll make it. You're just have to begin to again speak up with respect, know what's going on around you.

Don't always come up with all the problems, come up with ideas, solutions to make it easier. Not all about us. See, that's one of the things that people say. Oh, the nurses only worrying about their salaries. That is not what I say to new nurses. It's not about just you. It's about who you care for. So that's the key. I say to them, and we just admitted 124. I just added eight more students because there are so many people who are qualified, but I want to be there and that's what we need to do. We got a new generation of people want to be there and we've got to keep nurturing, not facilitating it. Doing it when they go into institutions, institutions have got to pay attention and keep and and work with folks.

And and, you know, you don't have to give them a lunch. Well, that might help some, but, you know, it's good. You know what I mean? You you've got to nurture them. You got to find mentors. And it doesn't have to be one mentor, but a mentoring system that keeps them moving. Somebody they could call. We found some techniques during the pandemic that we should continue to use, you know, where where people go calling to a hotline and talk to somebody.

MCGUIRE: Oh, wow.

GEORGES: Think about that. For nursing, when somebody gets down, you know, they can call up and say, oh, I'd like to. Leana answered the phone and say, I went through it day. Let me tell you how we sound, you know, those kinds of things then. Should get.

MCGUIRE: Excellent. Thank you so much for that. This has been a joyful 20, 25 minutes with you. I have to say, I could talk to you literally all afternoon. I could.

MCGUIRE: Do you think you really can fully retire. You talked about.

GEORGES: Well, I will leave a job. I will. You know, I am I'm in I'm going on terminal leave. My terminal leave starts August and I have I officially retired in in January of 2023. If I want to come back, the president says, no, no, no, you know, at least a year. I said, no, no, I will. You know, it's 47 years.

MCGUIRE: Yeah, that that's a long time. But regardless of what you do after January, I'm convinced you're going to be a positive influence wherever you go.

GEORGES: You know, I intend to. I told a group that they are not honoring me the other night. I said, my job's not done. I just leaving a position and a job. But my job is to make sure people age with dignity and purpose and that we and we assure people have know equity in this country. Equity, justice and equity, that's my job. That's sleeping at night.

MCGUIRE: That's it. The job is not done. Yes, I hear you. Gotcha. Well, thank you for everything that you've contributed, your attitude towards things. You're very positive and you're very giving and and and you get things done. And I just have really thoroughly enjoyed this. So thank you so much.

GEORGES: Thank you.

MCGUIRE: We hope that you have enjoyed this episode of Distinguished Careers in Nursing, where we've talked to Dr. Catherine Alicia Georges. And we encourage you to continue learning and shaping your careers by checking out the many courses that we have at Elite Learning dot com. Thank you again to everyone for listening. Thank you again. Dr. Georges, this is Leana McGuire for Elite Learning by Colibri Healthcare.

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