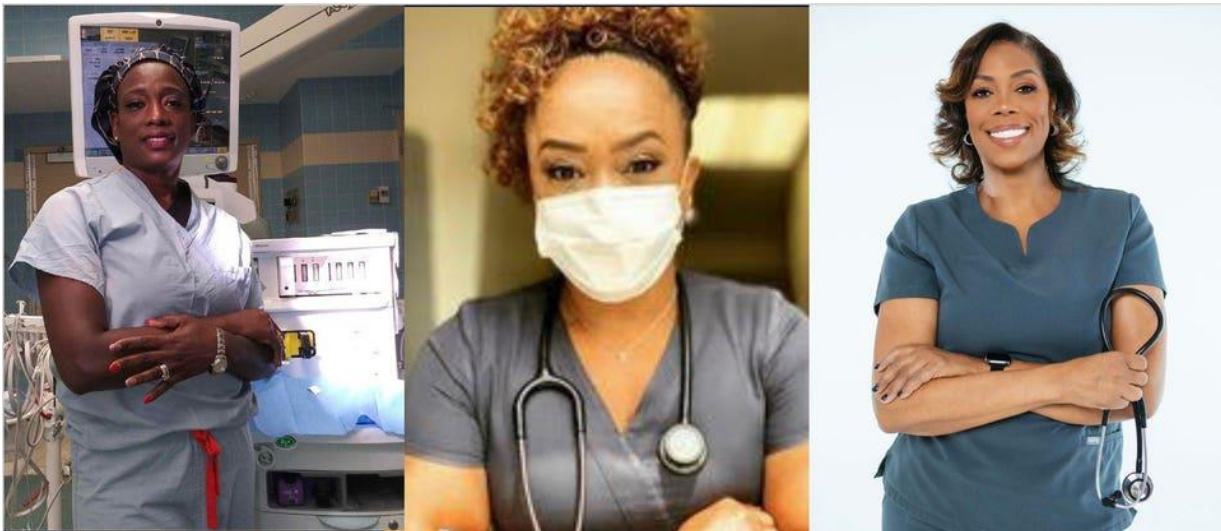


# Forbes

## Black Registered Nurses Host Summit Amid U.S. Nursing Shortage Crisis

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**The Black Nurse Collaborative members work daily to keep their patients and communities thriving and healthy.**

RICHARD FOWLER

In an auditorium nestled on the southeast corner of Howard University Hospital's sprawling campus, a group of dedicated registered nurses are meeting to discuss the modern-day healthcare system's numerous problems.

For members of this uniquely all-Black healthcare professional group, their healing hand and their blackness intersect regularly as they navigate an industry struggling with staffing shortages and a legacy of racial bias and discrimination.

That's why their meeting, part of the [Black Nurse Collaborative](#)(BNC)'s inaugural State of Black Health According to the Black Nurse Summit,

provided Black registered nurses of all levels an opportunity to speak candidly about health and workplace equity.

"Our mission as Black registered nurses is way bigger than the positions we hold at our respective hospitals or healthcare sites," said Danielle McCamey, an acute nurse practitioner and assistant dean at The Johns Hopkins School of Nursing.



The Black Nurse Collaborative Summit on the State of Black Health at Howard University Hospital's ... JEFF SUGGS

summit came just as the United States nursing shortage reached an all-time high. [According to a survey recently released by AMN Healthcare](#), nearly a third of nurses nationwide say they will likely change careers due to the pandemic. For a decade, 80 to 85 percent of nurses said they were satisfied with their career choice. In 2023, that number dropped to 71%. This long-standing nursing shortage has exacerbated the lack of access to care for communities of color—a key focus of the summit.

BNC was founded in July 2022, during a critical time in the pandemic, to bring Black nursing professionals together, promote professional growth and address health inequities. Registered nurses Meedie Bardonille and Dr. Eugenia T. Powell took on this endeavor upon seeing Black Americans'

pandemic death rate reach levels disproportionately higher than their white counterparts, due in part to deeply entrenched healthcare disparities.

“This summit was a spiritual experience, and so is our collaborative,” said Bardonille, BNC’s founding president. “With race being a leading factor for far too many of our members for forward progression and promotion, groupings like ours are essential to ensure that Black registered nurses get their voices heard and better serve our patients.”

Nurse managers, chief nursing officers, academic deans, professors of nursing, doctors in nursing and registered nurses that provide acute care attended the summit. Nearly 70% of them had more than 11 years of professional experience.

“The Black Nurse Collaborative is helping to turn the tide for Black nurses in the healthcare field,” said Powell, BNC’s founding vice president. “If we want to see Black health disparities decrease, Black nurses need a seat at the decision-making table.”



Meedie Bardonille (right) , BNC's founding president and RN, alongside Dr. Eugenia Powell (center), ... JEFF SUGGS



Black registered nurses have become a lifeline to their patients, especially those that live on America's color line, said Edward Salsberg, a researcher for the [Mullan Institute for Health Workforce Equity](#).

“Having a diverse healthcare workforce is a key component to solving health disparities and ensuring quality healthcare for Black patients, especially with regard to patient communications, preventative care, and patient satisfaction,” Salsberg said

Black nurses who attended the summit spoke about their pivotal role as advocates, communicators and watchful providers for the patients and families in their care. Bardonille said these healthcare providers have established trust and become a necessary breath of fresh air for their patients through their unique ability to humanize them.

During the summit, [Paula Roberts, a certified registered nurse anesthetist \(CRNA\)](#), encouraged her colleagues to carry on that tradition.



Paula Roberts is an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse working in level one trauma as a certified. PAULA ROBERTS

"We must be in the room to humanize our patients," [Roberts](#) exclaimed. "We must be in the room so that our patients are more than their circumstances; they are more than just a gunshot wound or an appendectomy. As a Black person in the room, we are all responsible for advocating for our patients."

And with approximately only 308,000 Black registered nurses in the United States, their role cannot be understated.

[An April 2023 study from the National Council of State Board of Nursing \(NCSBN\)](#) found that approximately 100,000 registered nurses left the workforce during the pandemic, oftentimes because of stress, burnout and retirement.

Another 610,388 reported an “intent to leave” the workforce” by 2027 for similar reasons. And 62% of the registered nurses surveyed reported an increase in their workload during the pandemic, leading to more significant

fatigue, emotional frustration and burnout. “The data is clear: the future of nursing and the U.S. healthcare ecosystem is at an urgent crossroads,” said Maryann Alexander, NCSBN’s chief officer of nursing regulation, in a [press release](#).

[According to Pew Research](#), the circumstances are even more dire for Black registered nurses and members of the African-American community living in zip codes where they experience worse health outcomes than other adults.

In citing this study, summit keynote speaker Dr. Katie Boston-Leary, a registered nurse and American Nurses Association (ANA) nursing program director, zeroed in on the nursing shortage and its overt impact on Black residents.

“Where the care is needed the greatest is where it’s least available,” Boston-Leary said. “Black health and Black nurse well-being [are] intricately intertwined. That is why we must educate ourselves, know it, show it, grow it, own it and be about its solution.”

[.In June 2022, the American Nurses Association \(ANA\) released a statement of reckoning, acknowledging its role in negatively impacting Black nurses and perpetuating systemic racism.](#)

“As leaders of the ANA, we apologize for the named and the unaccounted-for harms,” the statement said. “Our past actions have caused irreparable physiological, psychological and socioeconomic harm, not only to nurses of color but to all patients, families and communities that depend on ANA as the national leader of the nursing profession.”

BNC is working to highlight the plight of Black registered nurses, the majority of whom work in the hospital setting. And with 58% of summit attendees finding race a barrier to career progression, the summit and its outcomes were laser-focused on uplifting solutions that promote upward mobility of Black nurses and, in turn, their patients.

While the national nursing shortage has not gained much traction among either local, state or national lawmakers, the U.S. population feels its impacts. Whether it’s [longer wait times in emergency departments](#), lag times in surgery scheduling or [increased hospital closures throughout the country](#), Black, brown, poor and vulnerable communities are disproportionately impacted.

The life-saving care provided by Black nurses has never been studied or quantified, but that does not diminish their impact in the healthcare setting.

Through anecdotal storytelling, you don't have to go far to hear the story of Black or brown patients who had their humanity and dignity conferred upon them through the care of Black healthcare professionals. For some patients, it was the way the Black nurse held their hand and reassured them everything would be okay. It was the care the Black nurse took in braiding patients' hair. And for others, it was the time the Black nurse took in explaining a complicated procedure to the patient and their family.



**Richard Fowler:** I am a media commentator, radio host, and millennial messaging expert who currently serves as a progressive contributor at FOX News Channel. I have been providing political and cultural analysis across the cable network's highly rated slate of programming since September 2014. As a first-generation American, from Jamaican parents, I began my political career in my home state of Florida, volunteering with numerous local and statewide races. Most recently, I was named a Senior Media Fellow for the New Leader's Council and Chairman of the Center for Black Equity Leadership Council. In both of these roles, I focus on training, equipping, and empowering the next generation of millennial and LGBTQ leaders to use their voice to advocate for change. I have a Bachelor of Science in Economics and a Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs from The George Washington University. I live in Washington D.C.