

Essay

The individual nominated for the Mary Decker Mentorship Award profoundly embodies the spirit of excellence and dedication to neuroscience nursing mentorship modeled by Mary Decker herself. With a distinguished career spanning over three decades, marked by pioneering educational initiatives, extensive scholarly contributions, and impactful leadership at both institutional and global levels, this nominee has consistently elevated the practice of neuroscience nursing and nurtured countless professionals. Holding a PhD in Health Science from the Medical Faculty of the University of Lund, an MSN from Arizona State University, and certified in advanced practice, her expertise is recognized internationally, making her an exemplary candidate for an award celebrating outstanding mentorship.

Excellence and Clinical Expertise in the Care of Pediatric or Adult Neuroscience Patients

This nominee's clinical acumen is foundational to all her contributions. Her extensive career, originating as a nurse in the neurosurgical ICU over 30 years ago, provided her with deep, hands-on experience in complex neuroscience patient care. Her foundational clinical training in the Graduate Neuroscience Nursing Program at Barrow Neurological Institute in 1987 further solidified her specialized insights. This rich clinical background directly informs her leadership and teaching roles.

Her commitment to advancing evidence-based practice directly enhances patient outcomes. Her research publications consistently address critical aspects of neuroscientific care. For example, her work in *Neurosurgery*, including “Implementation of a Standardized Multimodal Postoperative Analgesia Protocol...” and “Patient-Controlled Analgesia Following Lumbar Spinal Fusion Surgery...” (both 2020), has driven safer and more effective pain management strategies, reducing opioid consumption and shortening hospital stays. A substantial portion of her research, published in *Neuroscience Nursing*, has focused on revolutionizing oral care protocols for critically ill neuroscience patients. Studies such as “Evaluation and Acceptance of an Electric Toothbrush Designed for Dependent Patients” (2021) and “Effects of a standard versus comprehensive oral care protocol among intubated neuroscience ICU patients...” (2012) have provided critical evidence for preventing complications like ventilator-associated pneumonia, directly impacting patient safety and comfort. This meticulous, evidence-based approach to patient care exemplifies her unwavering pursuit of excellence.

Dedication to Patients

The nominee's dedication to patients is intrinsically woven into her life's work, manifested not only through direct clinical care but also through ensuring every neuroscience nurse is equipped with superior skills. Her development and continued oversight of rigorous educational programs directly translate into improved patient outcomes. By fostering a highly competent and specialized nursing workforce, she ensures countless patients receive the highest standard of care possible. Her long tenure at a leading neurological institution, along with her ongoing commitment to researching patient-centric issues (such as staff resilience affecting care and optimized pain protocols), highlights a career unequivocally devoted to the well-being and recovery of neuroscience patients.

Communication

As the Director of Advanced Practice Nursing and Evidence-based Practice, and the Course Director for the Nursing Symposium, the nominee demonstrates exceptional ability to communicate complex neuroscience concepts clearly and effectively. She skillfully articulates advanced clinical principles and

research findings to diverse audiences, from novice nurses to seasoned practitioners and international fellows. Her numerous publications and editorial board memberships for influential journals like the *Journal of Neurological and Neurosurgical Nursing* and *World Journal of Critical Care Medicine* underscore her capacity to disseminate critical information, shape professional discourse, and foster interdisciplinary understanding among healthcare professionals.

Teaching and Educating in Neuroscience Education

Teaching and Educating in Neuroscience Education lies at the heart of this nominee's mentorship philosophy. In 2004, she pioneered a formal educational program to prepare nurses for the Certified Neuroscience Registered Nurse (CNRN) examination, a program that continues to thrive today. Under her leadership, her institution boasts the highest number of CNRN-certified nurses in the U.S., a direct result of her innovative curriculum design and unwavering support. Furthermore, as the Director of International Neuroscience Nurse Fellowships, she extends her educational impact globally, guiding and developing future leaders in neuroscience nursing worldwide. Her role on editorial boards and her own prolific publication record further serve as educational tools, disseminating cutting-edge knowledge and promoting evidence-based practice across the specialty. Her being awarded the Nursing Excellence Award for Teaching by *Nursing Spectrum & Nurse Week* in 2005 distinctly highlights her outstanding contributions as an educator.

Inspiring Others

This nominee possesses an unparalleled ability to inspire and empower nurses. Her leadership has not only facilitated professional growth through structured education, such as the CNRN program, but has also ignited a passion for excellence in individuals. Her formal recognition as a Neuroscience Nurse Hero Award recipient by the Arizona Nurses Association in 2011, combined with multiple Nurse of the Year awards (2004, 2006) at her institution, speaks volumes about her capacity to motivate and uplift her colleagues. She encourages nurses to pursue advanced certifications, engage in scholarly activities, and assume leadership roles, consistently demonstrating that dedication and clinical curiosity can lead to profound career satisfaction and impactful contributions. Her mentorship fosters a culture where continuous learning and professional development are not just encouraged, but passionately embraced.

Leadership

The nominee's leadership is both profound and pervasive. As Director of Advanced Practice Nursing, Director of Evidence-based Practice, and Director of International Neuroscience Nurse Fellowships, she shapes strategic initiatives that elevate clinical standards and expand educational opportunities. Her role as a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing (FAAN) places her among the most influential nursing leaders globally, recognized for her transformative impact on policy and practice. Her active engagement with organizations such as the World Federation of Neuroscience Nurses, American Association of Neuroscience Nurses, and the American Association of Neurological Surgeons further exemplifies her broad leadership within the healthcare community. This influence extends to her roles as an Editorial Board Member for critical publications, where she guides the dissemination of new knowledge. Accolades such as the Transformational Leadership, Excellence in Nursing Leaders Award (Dignity Health, 2023) and the National Healthcare Design Award (2023) underscore her innovative and impactful leadership, which consistently drives positive change in healthcare delivery and nursing practice.

Passion and Nurturing

Underpinning all of her extraordinary achievements is an undeniable passion for neuroscience nursing and a genuinely nurturing approach to mentorship. Her sustained commitment over 30 years to a single institution, evolving from staff nurse to a Director of advanced practice, is a testament to her deep-seated love for the specialty and for developing the next generation of caregivers. She cultivates a supportive environment where nurses feel empowered to learn, innovate, and excel. Her dedication to improving staff well-being, as evidenced by her research on "Resilience Room Use and Its Effect on Distress Among Nurses and Allied Staff" (2023), further illustrates her nurturing leadership style. She consistently invests in the success and well-being of her colleagues, ensuring they not only achieve professional competence but also thrive as individuals. Her consistent pursuit of knowledge, exemplified by her membership in Sigma Theta Tau, the National Honor Society for Nurses, reflects a lifelong dedication to nursing excellence that she generously shares and instills in others. Above all of this, she lives by an open door policy and has been the confidant and support for many nurses, residents, and advanced practice providers as they go through personal challenges.

Conclusion

The nominee stands as an exceptional candidate for the Mary Decker Mentorship Award. Her career is a powerful continuum of clinical excellence, pioneering education, visionary leadership, and unwavering dedication to nurturing the growth of others. Through her extensive research, influential leadership roles, and a career spanning over three decades, she has not only shaped the landscape of neuroscience nursing but has also served as an enduring source of inspiration and guidance. Her profound impact on individual nurses, institutional practice, and global standards firmly establishes her as a preeminent mentor and leader, truly embodying the legacy of Mary Decker.