Early Career Achievement in Nursing Alumna
Kesa Herlihy, PhD'17, N'08, RN, CNE
Clinical Assistant Professor, KU School of Nursing
University of Kansas Medical Center

In a relatively short period of time since becoming a nurse herself, Kesa Herlihy has made substantial contributions to the way future nurses are trained. Her career path has taken her to seven different schools of nursing, and it keeps bringing her back to KU.

In a way, Dr. Herlihy, who was born in Lawrence, began her career at KU: When she was 19, she was in a car accident and taken by helicopter to the University of Kansas Hospital. "The care I received from the nurses when I arrived at the hospital and until I was discharged inspired me to become a nurse," she remembered.

After earning an associate's degree in nursing from Metropolitan Community College-Penn Valley in Kansas City, Missouri, she entered the KU School of Nursing RN-to-BSN program and graduated in 2008. She then went on to earn a master's degree in nursing education from the University of Utah, while also working as a nurse at a children's hospital in Salt Lake City and then at the University of Utah Hospital.

She then taught in the nursing program at a community college in Utah followed by five schools in Colorado, including Denver School of Nursing and the University of Colorado. In these positions, Dr. Herlihy gained considerable experience managing the simulation labs. Simulation experiences for nursing students was the subject of her research when she earned a doctorate from the KU School of Nursing in 2017.

In 2018, Dr. Herlihy became a clinical assistant professor at the KU School of Nursing, where she has redesigned courses, led a major revision of the School's simulation program for BSN students and redesigned how BSN students learn basic assessment. "These changes in the KU BSN assessment course are drawing praise from the School's clinical partners, as they see students well-prepared with these basic – yet essential – assessment skills," wrote Cynthia Teel in her letter supporting Dr. Herlihy's nomination for this award.

Dr. Herlihy and her husband, Kevin, have two small children, Kellen and Katie. About receiving this award, she said, "I am a Jayhawk; I was born a Jayhawk and I am so proud to be a member of the KU family. This award means so much to me because it is coming from KU Medical Center, where I have had the opportunity to graduate twice."

For her contributions to nursing education, the KU Nurses Alumni Association takes great pride in awarding the Early Career Achievement in Nursing Alumna Award to Kesa Herlihy, PhD'17, N'08, RN, CNE.