Karen L. Miller, PhD, RN
2015 Honorary Nursing Alumna
2015 Honorary Health Professions Alumna

This past June, Karen L. Miller, PhD, RN, stepped away from her executive leadership roles after serving 19 years as dean of the University of Kansas School of Nursing, 17 years as dean of the University of Kansas School of Health Professions, and 10 years as senior vice chancellor for academic and student affairs at the University of Kansas Medical Center. For her immeasurable contributions to KU, Dr. Miller is being given the 2015 Honorary Nursing Alumna and Honorary Health Professions Alumna awards.

Dr. Miller was born in York, Pennsylvania and grew up in Spring Grove, Pennsylvania, the oldest of five children. Her father was an executive at Glatfelter Paper Company and her mother was a homemaker. In high school and college, Dr. Miller volunteered in hospitals as a nursing assistant where she discovered her passion for health care and the idea that expert, compassionate caregivers are a significant factor in how patients recovered from illness.

Dr. Miller earned her undergraduate degree in nursing from Case Western Reserve University and her master’s and doctoral degrees in nursing administration and health care systems management from the University of Colorado.

She practiced as a critical care nurse for about eighteen months before taking her first position in nursing management at age 24 as assistant head nurse at University Hospitals in Cleveland, Ohio. She has served in leadership roles since that time, including director of nursing at community hospitals in Colorado, and vice president for nursing and patient care at Denver Children’s Hospital in Colorado prior to coming to the KU School of Nursing in 1996.

When she was appointed as dean of the KU School of Nursing, and later as dean of the School of Health Professions, Dr. Miller recognized the importance of educating more teachers by using faculty enhancement strategies, cutting-edge information technology and interprofessional teaching approaches. During her tenure at KU Medical Center, she has been a champion of improving diversity, cultural competence and inclusion among the leadership, faculty and staff. Dr. Miller is also a great student advocate dedicated to ensuring that KU is preparing skilled and considerate health care professionals.

Many of the graduate programs in the KU Schools of Nursing and Health Professions rose to national prominence during Dr. Miller’s tenure. In the current rankings from U.S. News & World Report, seven programs in the two schools were ranked in the top 25 among public universities. In 2013, the School of Nursing was recognized as a Center of Excellence in Nursing Education by the National League for Nursing.

Dr. Miller also led the development of KU HealthPartners, Inc., the integrated faculty practice for advanced practice nurses and health professionals who provide care in nutrition, audiology,
rehabilitation and wellness, and in-home living services. Since 2006, KU HealthPartners faculty and students have cared for patients at Silver City Health Center as part of the Wyandotte County safety net.

Dr. Miller was inducted as a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing in 1995 and in 2010 was inducted as a Fellow of the Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions. She has received many honors for leadership during her career, including the Clare Dennison Award for National Leadership in Nursing, the Marjorie S. Sirridge Award for Excellence in Medicine and Science, the Distinguished Service and Achievement Award from the National Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions, the Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Colorado, and recently, the Nurse of the Year Legacy Award from the March of Dimes organization in the region. She is also a member of the University of Kansas Women’s Hall of Fame.

With her partner of 24 years, Pam, Dr. Miller is the proud mother of Megan, Nicolas and Meili and the grandmother of Reily, age 13.

Although Dr. Miller has stepped down from her executive leadership roles at KU Medical Center, she will continue to be a presence at the university as professor, mentor and scholar in leadership.

It is with tremendous pride that the KU Nurses Alumni Association and the KU Health Professions Alumni Association bestow Karen L. Miller, PhD, RN, with the 2015 Honorary Nursing Alumna and the Honorary Health Professions Alumna awards.