

Heather Cowan, RN, MSN, Brings 37 Years of Bedside Nursing Experience to Patient Advocacy and Healthcare Education

Founder of The Art of Being ILL expands her work beyond the bedside through patient education, advocacy, and speaking for patients, families, caregivers, and healthcare professionals.

Long Beach, California Aug 26, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - After 37 years of direct bedside nursing, Heather Cowan, RN, MSN, is bringing decades of clinical experience into a new chapter focused on patient advocacy, healthcare education, and speaking.

Cowan began her nursing career in 1987 after earning an associate degree in nursing. She later completed her bachelor's degree and, after approximately two decades at the bedside, earned a Master of Science in Nursing with a focus in nursing education.

Throughout her career, Cowan worked in hospitals across California, ranging from small community facilities to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. Her clinical experience includes pediatrics, geriatrics, oncology, cardiac care, orthopedics, surgical care, and general medical-surgical nursing. She also spent seven years working as an oncology float nurse.

Despite opportunities to pursue other directions, Cowan's career remained centered on direct patient care.

"Patient advocacy was never something separate from nursing for me," Cowan said. "It was part of taking care of people—listening, explaining, asking questions, and making sure patients and families understood what was happening."

Over nearly four decades, Cowan repeatedly saw how difficult the healthcare system could be for patients and families to understand. People often entered the hospital frightened and overwhelmed, received treatment, and then returned home unsure of what came next. Families did not always know which questions to ask, where to find reliable information, or how to advocate when something did not seem right.

Those experiences ultimately became the foundation for The Art of Being ILL.

After leaving bedside nursing, Cowan began turning what she had learned into practical, patient-friendly education. What started as a blog has grown into an extensive collection of nearly 400 articles, approximately 100 educational guides and PDFs, and three books addressing healthcare, illness, aging, patient safety, caregiving, advocacy, recovery, and navigating the healthcare system.

Her graduate education in nursing education now plays an increasingly important role in that work.

"I chose nursing education because I have always loved teaching," Cowan said. "Knowledge changes the way people experience healthcare. When patients and families understand what is happening, they can ask better questions, participate in decisions, and advocate more effectively for themselves and the people they love."

Cowan is now expanding that work beyond written resources and is available for educational presentations, speaking engagements, workshops, and collaborative programs for patients, families,

caregivers, nurses, healthcare professionals, paramedics, support staff, and community organizations.

Potential educational topics span the healthcare journey and include patient advocacy and patient rights, communication with healthcare professionals, hospitalization and discharge, patient safety, medication safety, caregiving, aging and independence, chronic illness and pain, emergency care, rehabilitation and recovery, and helping patients and families understand medical information.

Programs can be adapted to the needs of individual organizations and audiences.

Cowan's approach is grounded in an unusual combination of long-term bedside experience, formal education in nursing education, and years spent observing healthcare through the eyes of the patients and families receiving it.

The goal, she says, is not to tell people how to practice medicine. It is to help close the gap between healthcare professionals who understand the system and the patients and families who suddenly find themselves trying to navigate it.

"My career has always been about the person in the bed and the family standing beside them," Cowan said. "That hasn't changed. I'm simply finding new ways to help."

More information about Heather Cowan, RN, MSN, her professional background, patient advocacy work, and speaking and educational programs is available through The Art of Being ILL.

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