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## Vicki Folsie on Nursing, the Pandemic and Criminal Liability Cases

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WGLT Sound Health Interview with Vicki Folse, June 6, 2022

Announcer: A nursing educator at Illinois Wesleyan University says interest in nursing has rebounded since the start of the pandemic after years of lacking interest. But she's concerned the potential of criminal liability could have a chilling effect on the profession. Vicki Folse is Illinois Wesleyan's director of the school of nursing and health sciences. She'll soon become the new president at Ripon College in Wisconsin. In this edition of "Sound Health," Folse tells Eric Stock she hopes that increase interest in nursing doesn't suffer from what she calls "an alarming case in Tennessee." A nurse there was convicted of negligent homicide for mistakenly giving the wrong medication to a patient who later died.

[Start of Interview]

Vicki Folse: So what's striking about this case is that we teach our nursing students about adjust culture. Meaning, we want them to report medication errors and the nurse in fact did report her errors and yet the outcome as we've watch it all unfold has been quite troubling. With that said, there's no question that this nurse ignored safe guards that were put in place to promote patient safety and the outcome could have been different on so many levels, had technology for example, been working adequately and the overrides that we saw happening with great frequency at Vandy had been reduced. So tragic on so many levels, because this...uh... nurse has not only lost her license... but as we watch her case unfold we recognize that so many elements of her life...um... with the criminal charges, with the civil charges, will change the face of nursing forever.

Eric Stock: And it looked like in this particular case there were a number of safe guards that would have potentially stopped this from happening. Do you feel there are enough controls in place generally to prevent this sort of thing from happening?

Folse: It's not unusual to look at the root cause of a medication error like this and determine that there was a systems failure. So not only did this nurse...uh... fail to protect the patient... uh but there were many things that were happening at a very prestigious medical system that were not adequate for this death to have been prevented. So, your question was, are there enough safe guards in place? Never, but when you start combining human error with um technology failures the outcome can be deadly, as it was in this case.

Stock: And are you concerned about a potential precedent of criminalizing medical mistakes?

Folse: I am concerned, as are my students um and you know again we have so many seminal pieces of literature that uh have been published by what was the institute of medicine, now the national academy of medicine, that gave a voice to human medical errors and how regardless of discipline, whether its nursing or medicine or pharmacy. How we are all culpable and one of the things that...um, we've seen in this pandemic uh with significant staff shortages, stress, that it is the practice environment is a concern to those of us who have been in nursing education for decades. So the conversation that- that um I'm

having with our students is how essential quality and safety risk management is for their career. But I will tell you that our students say “I thought my employer would protect me.”

Stock: Are you concerned that this case will discourage more young people from pursuing careers in nursing where we know there’s been a substantial shortage for quite some time.

Folse: I’m hopeful it doesn’t have that impact this is a case of course has been going on for years but it really has taken a front seat in terms of social media and other conversations so I think most young uh prospective health care providers can see that this...um this case has... is- is so complex and so multifaceted- I don’t think Eric that it will detour students because we’re seeing unprecedented numbers of future health care providers who want to enter the field. The pandemic in fact uh seemed to be a catalyst for so many young students who want to have an impact on global health and health care in the US.

Stock: That is interesting uh any data you can share on that because we continue to hear that covid drove a lot of medical professionals out of the profession.

Folse: We certainly aren’t seeing that in Illinois Wesleyan, we’re not seeing that in our region and in fact we did see an increase in enrollment and interest Baccalaureate schools of nursing and those data were just recently reported by the American association of Colleges of Nursing, and if memory serves me correctly it was about a 9 percent increase this past year.

Stock: And how do you prepare nurses for the world they are about to enter now after covid, and all the long hours, the health risks, and the hostilities that they have had to deal with from several dimensions including their patients in some cases and then add this layer on top of that.

Folse: Your- your question it- it resonates with me. It’s not only how do we prepare this next generation of nurses, but how do we prepare this next generation of humans. We are seeing a mental health crisis in our young students that has been present but exacerbated at unrecognizable levels across our nation. So covid fatigue and the increase in depression and anxiety is something that we’re seeing in higher education. In fact, just this week um we uh asked for um... federal money and state money to help with this mental health crisis in public and private universities across Illinois.

[End of Interview]

Announcer: That was Vicki Folse, Illinois Wesleyan’s director of the school of nursing and health sciences speaking with Eric Stock. You can read more of our sound health series at [WGLT.org/soundhealth](http://WGLT.org/soundhealth)