



## KIMBERLY MATTHEWS

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### 2014 Graduate

#### A PASSION TO HELP THE ELDERLY DRIVES HEALTHCARE CAREER

Some kids dream from an early age of becoming

a doctor or a nurse, while for others one pivotal experience sets them on an unexpected career path. Now a healthcare division manager at a respected major institution, Kimberly Matthews chanced upon her calling while in high school. One summer day, she visited the rehabilitation center where her mother worked. Kimberly had no interest in medicine and wanted to be an attorney. She admits hospital environments scared her. Those fears melted away once she met the patients.

"I think the fact that I volunteered while very young in nursing homes gave me a different perspective," Kimberly said. "In many cultures around the world elders are revered members of society, but in America that is not so. In American culture we place such a high value on beauty and youth. We try to do any and everything we can to stay young for as long as we can. No one wants to think of growing old, becoming vulnerable or about death and dying. I think I would've fallen into that same mindset had I not been so fortunate to see firsthand what elderly life was really like."

Not long after, she began a work study program at a nursing home, which quickly led to a serious job offer. She accepted it, even though that meant finishing her 12th grade year at night school instead of finishing high school during the day. In awe of her elderly patients' storied lives and out of concern for their well-being, she then began identifying ways to improve their care.

#### EMBRACING HER CALLING

Kimberly enrolled in nursing courses at a local community college, but soon realized nursing wasn't for her. She did not have the constitution for the hands-on work on the front line. Discouraged, she considered returning to legal studies. But that wasn't where her heart was.

"My husband said to me, 'Why are you still trying to do legal when it's so clear that you belong in healthcare?'" Kimberly said. "'You really care about people having access to healthcare. You really care about the elderly population and how they are treated in healthcare organizations. Why aren't you doing that, because that's what you are clearly called to do?'"





## BECOMING MORE WELL-ROUNDED

Years spent observing practitioners showed Kimberly how policy and management impacted patients and staff alike. She had already earned a bachelor's degree in Healthcare Administration and was eyeing a master's in the same field as the next step, but she worried it might be redundant. After 17 years working in healthcare, she decided to pursue George Washington University's online Healthcare M.B.A. to empower her to make an impact without ever making an incision.

"Because I had worked in healthcare for so many years I knew that what I needed was a program that would enhance my knowledge of budget, finances and strategic planning. I would need to be able to project where an organization will be in X amount of years" Kimberly said. "I felt like I needed an M.B.A. to give me that business acumen."

## WORKING WHILE LEARNING MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Kimberly's current job in geriatric medicine at the University of Florida Health Senior Care clinic requires her to meet constantly with a broad range of professionals within her organization, from doctors to the CEO. Although her work keeps her busy as a linchpin to organizational success, she knew that education could help her to better perform her duties and show the highest respect to her primary stakeholders, the patients. An online Healthcare M.B.A. program meant she had more flexibility to balance her schedule and further her education simultaneously.

"It's like anything else in life: If it's important to you, you will organize and find a way to fit and balance it to make it work," Kimberly said.

## UNEXPECTED EXTRA LESSONS BECOME ADDED PERKS

Initially, Kimberly used the M.B.A. program to gain more in-depth insights into management through focused courses in macroeconomics, financial management and data analysis. Later she discovered that electives at GW provided a diverse additional layer to her education, allowing her to satisfy other interests. Meanwhile, in the field she continued to learn daily from the elderly.

"It was definitely a humbling experience to have met these people," Kimberly said, "and especially to come into their lives when they were vulnerable — but still able to teach you so much."



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