

**Company:** Duke University Health System, Durham, NC

**Nomination Submitted by:** ELO Branding

**Company Description:** Duke University Health System is a nationally ranked academic healthcare network based in Durham, NC, comprising three hospitals and over 140 clinics. It delivers high-quality patient care, advances medical research, and drives innovation through interdisciplinary collaboration. It serves millions and shapes global healthcare standards.

**Nomination Category:** Individual Awards Categories

**Nomination Sub Category:** Most Resilient Female Leader

**Nomination Title:** Theresa McDonnell, SVP & Chief Nurse Executive



1. Briefly describe the nominated individual: history and past performance (up to 200 words):

**Total 187 words used.**

Dr. Theresa McDonnell's career is a testament to resilience and transformative leadership. Initially trained as a pastry chef and Montessori teacher, Theresa's path shifted dramatically following personal health crises. After her mother suffered a devastating stroke, Theresa, without formal medical training, became her primary caregiver, learning complex medical care overnight. When her son faced a life-threatening illness, her relentless advocacy for his care crystallized her calling, propelling her into nursing education while raising a young family.

Theresa rapidly ascended in healthcare leadership, driving operational excellence at Massachusetts General Hospital and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center. At Fred Hutch, she notably secured a landmark \$710 million philanthropic gift and led the construction of a \$300 million Ambulatory Innovation Center. She also spearheaded one of the nation's earliest COVID-19 vaccine rollouts at a cancer center, administering over 100,000 vaccinations.

Now, as Chief Nurse Executive at Duke University Health System, Theresa oversees an 8,000-strong workforce, championing frontline innovation, AI-driven workforce strategies, and global healthcare collaborations. Her unwavering ability to navigate adversity and her visionary leadership continue to profoundly influence healthcare, underscoring her lifelong commitment to resilience and purposeful transformation.

2. Outline the nominee's achievements since July 1 2023 that you wish to bring to the judges' attention (up to 250 words):

**Total 223 words used.**

NEW ANNOUNCEMENT: Dr. Theresa McDonnell has been awarded one of Modern Healthcare's Top 50 Most Influential Clinical Executives - This will be publicly announced on the 9th of June.

Since July 2023, Dr. Theresa McDonnell has significantly advanced Duke University Health System by spearheading initiatives with measurable results. Under her leadership, the Duke Nursing Innovation Summit empowered nurses to rapidly prototype solutions for critical care challenges. Notably, a VR-based training platform developed at the summit provided over 5,000 training hours, significantly reducing workplace violence incidents. Additionally, the Smart IV Pump Standardization initiative achieved a 19% decrease in medication errors.

Theresa also implemented AI-powered staffing solutions that dynamically align nurse scheduling with patient demand, achieving a 23% reduction in overtime, an 18% improvement in retention, and a 40% decrease in administrative documentation time. These metrics underscore her strategic ability to blend compassionate leadership with cutting-edge innovation.

Further, Theresa led the strategic relocation of Watts College of Nursing onto Duke's campus, effectively integrating academic training with frontline clinical practice, significantly strengthening Duke's nursing workforce pipeline and improving interdisciplinary collaboration.

Her global perspective expanded Duke's partnerships internationally, incorporating best practices from healthcare systems in Singapore and Europe. Collectively, Theresa's achievements reflect a deep commitment to resilient leadership, transforming healthcare delivery at Duke, and setting new industry benchmarks for frontline innovation, workforce sustainability, and clinical excellence.

3. Reference any attachments of supporting materials throughout this nomination and how they provide evidence of the claims you have made in this nomination (up to 250 words):

**Total 228 words used.**

The attached supporting materials provide compelling evidence of Dr. Theresa McDonnell's resilience and profound impact. Her resume and professional bio validate her remarkable trajectory from a pastry chef and Montessori teacher to transformative healthcare executive.

The DUHS Nursing Innovation Summit and Watts College relocation media release confirm her recent strategic innovations, emphasizing measurable outcomes in nurse empowerment, patient safety, and education integration.

Coverage in Healthcare IT News, ICT&health, and HealthTech Magazine illustrates her pioneering leadership in healthcare technology, notably AI-driven staffing and VR-based safety training, validating her frontline-driven innovation strategy.

The MGH Institute of Health Professions article and North Carolina Health News feature Theresa's influential advocacy for nursing leadership and global healthcare strategy, further substantiating her resilient approach to system transformation.

Duke Health's internal communications, including Duke Health news and Duke's Friends of Nursing program, highlight Theresa's systemic influence, especially regarding frontline staff innovation and workforce sustainability initiatives.

Podcast interviews, particularly from Becker's Clinical Leadership Podcast, offer compelling evidence of her innovative healthcare strategies, deeply rooted in resilience and compassion-driven leadership. Her LinkedIn profile further demonstrates active thought leadership within the broader healthcare community.

Finally, the embedded YouTube videos vividly portray Theresa advocating passionately for frontline staff and innovative healthcare strategies, further underscoring her resilience-driven leadership style.

These materials robustly substantiate the claims made throughout this nomination, illustrating Theresa's sustained resilience, visionary impact, and transformative leadership in healthcare.

4. Which will you submit for your nomination in this category, a video of up to five (5) minutes, explaining the achievements since July 1, 2023 of the nominated woman, OR written answers to the questions? (Choose one):

Written answers to the questions

5. If you are submitting a video of up to five (5) minutes in length, provide the URL of the video here, OR attach it to your entry via the "Add Attachments, Videos, or Links to This Entry" link above, through which you may also upload a copy of your video. If you are submitting written answers to the questions for this category, provide them in the spaces below:

N/A

6. Explain why the achievements you have highlighted are unique or significant. If possible compare the achievements to the performance of other players in your industry and/or to the nominee's past performance (up to 250 words):

**Total 211 words used.**

Dr. Theresa McDonnell's recent accomplishments at Duke University Health System are unique and significant. They surpass traditional industry benchmarks and distinguish her leadership even among high-performing peers. Unlike typical passive industry conferences, the Duke Nursing Innovation Summit marks a substantial departure from standard professional development practices, converting nurse-driven ideas directly into implementable solutions in record time.

Her deployment of AI-driven staffing solutions has dramatically surpassed common outcomes in healthcare workforce management. While typical retention initiatives yield modest results, Theresa's efforts have remarkably reduced nurse overtime by 23% and boosted retention by 18%, representing exceptional success compared to national trends and her past performance.

Theresa's leadership of the Watts College of Nursing relocation is another distinct achievement, strategically embedding academic training within Duke's clinical environment. This integration uniquely positions Duke as an innovator in nursing education, setting a new standard rarely seen in other major healthcare institutions.

Internationally, Theresa's proactive global partnerships notably exceed traditional industry collaborations. She actively incorporates successful international nursing practices from Singapore and Europe, demonstrating an advanced strategic vision uncommon among top healthcare leaders.

Overall, Theresa's recent achievements represent an evolution from her previously notable accomplishments, marked by a broader strategic impact, deeper frontline engagement, and significantly greater measurable outcomes, clearly setting her apart within the healthcare industry.

## Attachments/Videos/Links:

[Theresa McDonnell, SVP & Chief Nurse Executive](#)

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