# Former CNO Cathy Rick Returns to VA During COVID Crisis

Here’s my "story": Having been a proud VA nurse for over 22 years and holding the position of Chief Nursing Officer at the national level for the department for fourteen years (2000-2014), I knew that our Veterans and surrounding communities were in good hands with the dedicated VA talent ready to address COVID-19 challenges. During my tenure as CNO, I worked on the front lines during national hurricane relief efforts. So, I knew firsthand how challenging, yet rewarding working through pandemic requirements would be.

I retired from my CNO position in January 2014. Throughout my nursing career, I sought to be engaged in transforming the healthcare industry by advancing the professional nursing community via active involvement with organizations such as the American Nurses Association, American Organization of Nurse Leaders, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, American Hospital Association etc. After retirement, I took a position as Senior Advisor to the Jonas Center for Nursing, joined a Board of Directors for a tech company and signed up with Arizona State University as Senior Faculty Advisor for their fellowship program for healthcare leadership in innovation. I’ve also had the pleasure of mentoring senior nursing students at my alma maters (Alverno College and Marquette University).

Cathy Rick, RN NEA-BC FAAN

I have been enjoying retirement but missing my VA work. My husband (Ken) and I moved to Arizona where we love living in a planned community northwest of Phoenix. I signed up with the pottery club, took lessons and have kept busy making fun gift items. Ken and I had been golfing three days/week and yes, my game has improved but then there are those days that my golf game humbles me back into knowing that I’m 70 years old and never going to be considered a great golfer (smile).

Then COVID-19 hit and changed things for everyone. Our golf courses stayed open with several modifications to reduce contact with common things e.g. no rakes in the sand. We were lucky to have nice weather and availability of golf. The pottery studio closed which left me with more time on my hands. All of this made me focus on my treasured VA colleagues. Frankly, there are few days that have gone by since my retirement that I don’t find myself thinking about and counting my blessings for having been part of such an awesome organization with the honorable mission of caring for our nation’s heroes.

Toward the end of March, I contacted colleagues in VA Central Office- Office of Nursing Services (ONS) to let them know that I was thinking about them during this challenging pandemic event. I sent my good wishes along with prayers for all to stay safe. In that same brief email message, I said that if there is anything I can do to help, let me know. I received response from Dr. Beth Taylor, Chief Nursing Officer-Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs asking if I'd be interested in/willing to come back to work during this pandemic crisis as a rehired annuitant. I said yes. I was asked what I'd like to be assigned to; I said I'll do whatever you want.

It took a little over a week to get through the onboarding process (pretty darn good to get someone onboard so quickly). I started my virtual, 120-day assignment to assist with national nurse staffing strategies on April 9th. I was assigned to an Office of Nursing Services workgroup. It was a daily whirlwind, working 8-11 hours a day, seven days per week (including Easter Sunday); quite an adjustment from retirement. Once that assignment was completed, I was asked to work on an ONS communication plan. I will continue this short-term virtual assignment through the end of this fiscal year.

It has been a rewarding return to work experience. During my 22+ years working for the VA, I had the privilege of working with the most talented, dedicated clinicians in my 40+ nursing career. I am honored to be supporting the impressive VA healthcare programs and our nation’s healthcare system. I am proud to be back. It is an honor and a privilege to be able to contribute. I am reminded again and again of how ***nurses are the backbone of global healthcare*** (public and private).

"It is a VERY special feeling to be a VA nurse again.”