Chadwick Ricks  
Council of Black Nurses, Los Angeles

It’s around 6:30 a.m., and Chadwick Ricks, MSN, RN, is preparing for another long day.

“I round up my staff to get an idea of what the night looked like, check my calendar, which is filled with meeting after meeting after meeting. Most of my days are 10 to 12 hour days even though I’m an eight-hour employee,” said Ricks, an interim manager who oversees the day-to-day operations of an emergency department in Los Angeles.

It’s his latest position in a 30-year career, 10 of which have been in senior leadership, including his current position. Ricks served in the Army for 10 years but was discharged after he was wounded. As fate would have it, his service injury led to a new career path, where he found his passion for helping people through nursing.

“I was working for a for-profit company in San Bernardino. My position was eliminated, so I started to do interim leadership. They called in January, and I started in March.

“The governor asked us to open a hospital that was virtually in mothballs. It had been closed for almost a year. Shortly after, around the middle of July, I got COVID. I remember telling my wife, ‘I want you to move out of the house. I don’t feel good.’ I didn’t want to infect my wife, four kids, and 70-year-old mother. I needed everybody to get away from me to the other side of the house. I went to a physician. The rapid COVID test had just been developed. I found out I was COVID positive.”

For the next 10 days, Ricks isolated, taking Tylenol, zinc, and vitamin C while his wife left food by the door while he struggled through the disease—which since its inception has infected nearly 191 million and claimed the lives of 4.1 million worldwide to date.
“It would take me about two hours to get to the shower. I sat up for eight hours a day so I didn’t get pneumonia and lost a good 25 pounds, which you don’t want to lose that way. My urine was dark, which normally signifies a kidney dysfunction or failure. I forced myself to drink a liter of water that day, and my kidneys corrected because my urine was clear. Me and Jesus spent a lot of time together those ten days,” he said.

His sickness allowed him the opportunity to reflect.

“Family is really important to me—not to say they weren’t before,” said Ricks who has six children who range in ages from 14 to 30, four of whom still live at home, and a six-year-old grandchild. “I don’t want to put things off anymore. I have a 30-year-old daughter who said I can’t lose my daddy when I got sick. That has brought us to the hard reality that relationships are very important... I have four teenagers. I need to be present.”

Ricks served in the Army for 10 years but was discharged after he was wounded. His injury was a blessing in disguise because it made him fall in love with nursing and that love continues to sustain him.

“The care I got was great,” he said of the staff who treated him.

Ricks holds a bachelor’s degree from Emory University and a master of science in nursing from United States University in San Diego. Currently, he’s working toward a doctorate in nursing practice, which he plans to obtain from American Sentinel University in April 2023.

He is also a pastor and hosted a radio ministry called Soul Purpose on local stations in San Diego, was an associate minister of New Millennium Church in Los Angeles, served as ecumenical co-chair of the National Black Nurses Association and is the past president of the Council of Black Nurses in Los Angeles where he worked with the current president to launch the campaign, “L.A., It’s Time to Get the Vaccination” to encourage residents to get the COVID vaccine.

“I’ve likened it to 9/11 for the health care industry,” he said of the global pandemic. “It’s pretty catastrophic. In our lifetime, many of us have never experienced anything like this. To have experienced it and lived through it is pretty mind boggling. We’re still trying to wrap our mind around what happened, why it happened and what could have been done differently and better. We’re still gathering data. This is a time to reflect on how we will prepare for the next event.”
“I think it’s a great time to become a nurse. African American nurses are desperately needed. Research shows that patients have better outcomes when they see people who look like us. We’re like 7.8 percent of the nursing population, and being a male nurse is really smaller than that. We need to encourage males and African Americans,” he said. “I try to mentor as I was mentored...get involved in professional organizations, recruiting and explaining why it’s important is key. I have forged relationships I never would have had the opportunity to do. It’s a wonderful profession for a male looking to take care of his family. It’s so versatile—you can do bedside all the way up to the boardroom. It’s good to help people...Everybody has a story. Everybody has an issue or some issue. Everybody has a heart. Sometimes we have to dig really hard to get at that heart. The most important thing I can do now is care for the people who care for the people.

“I’m not winding down. I’m working on a doctoral degree and trying to get to the C suite—CEO of a hospital or system. If we want to change the narrative, we have to be the writer of the narrative. If we want to see changes, we have to get up there and make the changes. That’s why as old as I am, I’m trying to get this doctorate degree,” he said, barking out a laugh. “We can either be at the table or on the table. I’d prefer to be at the table.”