

Shirley Bearden RN, CBN

With 38 years of experience at Mercy Hospital, and the first 25 years in ER and ICU, I have thrived in high-pressure environments that demand critical thinking and resilience. However, my journey has extended beyond patient care—I have also navigated the personal and professional challenges of obesity and metabolic health. After undergoing gastric bypass in 2010, I realized the transformative power of bariatric and metabolic surgery (MBS), which led me to a new mission: expanding access to care and advocating for policy changes to support those in need.

In 2012, I was approached to build a bariatric program, an endeavor initially beyond my expertise but well within my passion for challenges. With the support of administrators and an unwavering commitment to learning, I helped establish and successfully accredit an MBS program that continues to impact lives today. This experience ignited my drive to contribute at a broader level, advocating for policy improvements and expanding access to care.

As a dedicated member of the OK AR ASMBS State Chapter, I served as the AR IH STAR on the Access to Care Committee, ensuring critical information reached my region and sharing insights at Mercy-wide Bariatric Specialty Council Meetings. In 2022, when ASMBS introduced new MBS standards, I took the initiative to present them to our Council. Our surgeons subsequently brought them to the insurance board, resulting in key approvals for our employees—an achievement that underscored the importance of proactive leadership in healthcare policy.

My passion for innovation led me to challenge myself further by joining the CBN Marketing Subcommittee, an area where I had no prior experience. Not only did I enjoy writing articles for the CBN Newsletter and collaborating on ASMBS event materials, but I was also entrusted with the role of Leader from 2022-2024. This opportunity strengthened my ability to strategize, communicate, and lead initiatives beyond my clinical background.

Additionally, I joined the Accreditation Subcommittee, immersing myself in policy and accreditation standards, an area I have quickly grown comfortable. When asked to step into a co-leadership role, I embraced the challenge once again, reinforcing my commitment to excellence and growth.

I am honored to be nominated for this role and if given the opportunity I will strive to bring my experience, adaptability, and leadership to the IHSEC. My vision for ASMBS includes strengthening our accreditation body and enhancing our influence on healthcare policy, particularly in securing bipartisan recognition for the importance of Access to Care, obesity medicine, and obesity education. While I acknowledge my limited political experience, I am eager to learn, collaborate, and find solutions—because, as always, **challenge accepted**.