



# Bradley Quarles

*Advocacy, Passion and Drive* by Mary Ann Hutcheson



Bradley Quarles, an Irmo High School alumni, is not one to waste precious time. His passion involves assisting others and advocating for those who cannot help themselves. When Quarles was a sophomore in college, he experienced the tragic loss of his cousin from suicide. Sadly, he learned how prevalent suicide was among college students. As president of the “Men in Nursing” chapter at USC at the time, he searched for a navigational tool to address the problem of suicide on campus. In 2017, Quarles advocated for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number to be placed on the back all of students’ Carolina Cards at the University of South Carolina. Four years later, as a result of Quarles’ advocacy and implementation efforts, South Carolina’s Governor Henry McMaster signed the “Student Identification Card Suicide Prevention Act” into law. In April of 2022, Governor McMaster presented him with the Order of the Silver Crescent, the state’s highest service award, for his work. The college of nursing and school of medicine named Quarles as the first student to receive the prestigious award in school history.

The bill requires all public and private colleges and universities in the state, along with all public schools serving 7-12 grades, to provide the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number and additional crisis resources on the back of all student ids. “I thought,” explains Quarles, “what can somebody from a nursing profession, that

has empathy and compassion for people, who really puts out solutions for people, bring to the table in a political environment?”

Quarles has no political aspirations per se but seeks support from the political forum because he identifies problems and desires efficient and effective solutions. “It is just a great place to get what I need,” he says. Yet he also discloses that, were he not in the nursing field, he would most likely be involved in politics and law. “It is my personality, one of my ‘other itches I like to scratch.’ But the beauty of medicine is stability, and I can still advocate there; perhaps in another lifetime.”

After graduating from the University of South Carolina (USC) in 2018 with a nursing degree Quarles took a position in the cardiovascular intensive care unit with Prisma Health. He is presently enrolled in USC’s School of Medicine graduate program in Nurse Anesthesia and plans to be a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) in May of 2023. His drive, determination and passion for advocacy comes from several areas, athletics being first and foremost. He earned his black belt in Taekwondo at ten years old and was a competitive swimmer from ages twelve to eighteen; becoming captain of the Irmo High School swim team. Both sports taught him about leadership, discipline, and dedication. He strongly believes that self-care is important. For him to take care of others and perform advocacy work, he must make sure he takes care of himself first. “You run out of steam if all you do is try to help other people but don’t look after yourself,” he says.

He also believes that much of his empathy and compassion comes from his parents’ backgrounds in the medical field. From them he learned to treat people with respect, administer care, and treat people the way he wants to be treated. It’s what drives him—to not just exist, but really make a mark and leave an impact on society.

### Motivation and Mentors

Quarles has a long list of people for whom he is deeply grateful, “You can have ideas, but a lot of people have to believe in you. Somebody has to give you an opportunity. My educators, my parents, and my faculty members were just some of the people that believed in me.” He credits his parents first for demonstrating by their own behavior, then instilling the drive in him to help others. From there he mentions Dr. Patrick Hickey, a nursing professor at the College of Nursing and his chapter’s faculty advisor and mentor for men in nursing when Quarles was the president. He saw Hickey as driven and dedicated. Among other things, Hickey was notable for climbing the seven highest mountains in all seven continents. Quarles looked up to him in college and remembers that Hickey instilled in him the philosophy of “paying it forward.” Quarles knew it was his responsibility to pay it forward for the next generation and is determined to do just that. The Dean of the College of Nursing, Dean Andrews, was also a huge influence. She believed in him and in advocating for others, and she always promoted good student work.

Teachers were a big influence in Quarles’ life. Every grade or school year, he had a particular teacher who made a huge influence in his life. There was one in particular in 2009, his seventh grade English teacher at Irmo Middle School, Doctor Ware. That was also the year that the Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps was collecting gold medals, and Olympic fever hit the young Quarles who wanted to swim in college. Doctor Ware encouraged him to do more. “You have a future beyond swimming,” she told him. He says, “She was the first teacher for me who really believed in me. She inspired me. And she might have been the turning point, the catalyst for all of this.” He adds, “Who I am today I owe to educators. Teachers don’t get what they deserve for their hard work.” And he adds, “Good talent can come out of schools.”

Quarles does not boastfully talk about his awards and recognitions but instead prefers to use those opportunities to gather more support for advocacies. His wife is understandably proud of him and loves to talk about him and his successes. “We don’t look for credit or awards; it’s what we do on a daily basis. In some respects, talking about awards can be embarrassing. This is just what I like to do, this is my job,” he says. Instead, he puts the credit on the many positive people in the atmosphere around him. “I can only go as far as the people around me let me go; if I am around unproductive people, I am hindered.” He realizes that he is not alone in his work—it is a collaborative effort with talented, driven and compassionate people.



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### Future Aspirations

“We lose up to 697,000 people a year to heart disease,” Quarles remarks, and awareness of this disease is his next big project. When Covid arrived, those most affected were of low socioeconomic status and those with comorbidities like diabetes, high blood pressure or respiratory issues. “In area code 29203 alone, we have the highest amputation rate in the country due to poor vasculature,” says Quarles. Thanks to his contacts within USC’s College of Nursing and School of Medicine, his college internship with the former Mayor, and now Columbia’s present Mayor, Quarles’s next project is slowly coming to fruition. It involves creating a city-wide effort to advocate for heart-disease awareness in Columbia. From studying the history of breast cancer awareness and the formation of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, he is hoping to recreate from that success a heart awareness month in February. The project is a collaborative effort between the College of Nursing, the city government, our hospital system, our basketball teams and coaches, and the American Heart Association. Sadly Quarles notes that there is nothing being done at present at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) level regarding heart disease awareness. USC and Columbia would be country-wide leaders in this endeavor, the first school/city to advocate this cause. Having the program recognized by the NCAA and the Southeastern Conference (SEC) would broaden the audience. It would provide ownership and accountability for this prevalent issue in our State and region.

Quarles acknowledges that the challenges today are totally different from previous generations, including climate effects, political changes, a pandemic, gender/identity roles and many others. He is excited about tackling each challenge that comes be-



*“When I was in nursing and making money, if someone thanked me, looked me in the eye and told me I was really appreciated, that was something worth a ‘cajillion’ dollars to me. Making patient’s happy with their care and providing them a voice is priceless. I am looking forward to what the future holds.”*

fore him, and at twenty-six years of age, there will be many more. He is optimistic about what lies ahead. We can be thankful that young professionals like Quarles and his colleagues will continue to work together to improve the lives of those around them. ■

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