

A portrait of Dr. Nada El Hussein, a woman with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey blazer over a white top. She is looking slightly to the right. The background is dark and out of focus.

Leading for Change and Excellence

Dr. Nada El Hussein

If becoming a leader is a journey, how do you know when you've arrived at your destination – that you are now a leader?

For Nada El Hussein, MD, MHSc, the definition of what it means to be a leader has evolved – and continues to evolve – throughout her leadership journey.

“Becoming a leader is a process. As a person, I continue to develop new skills and evolve as I grow as a leader. I think that leadership is a marathon rather than just a race,” she says. “An effective leader must be able to adapt to different situations. For example, the style and skill sets for leading in a crisis may be different than what is needed when everything is going well and in a steady-state.”

“A true leader may also need to change the ‘lens’ when tackling problems or approaching situations in order to trouble shoot and innovate.”

A vascular neurologist now practicing at Duke Health in Durham, Dr. El Hussein is a class of 2017 Leadership College alumna. That year-

long program helped launch her leadership voyage. What resonated particularly with her during the course was the idea of leading with authenticity and the principles of team building.

“I think leadership can be learned and polished. For this reason, I encourage people who are called or like to lead but believe that they don't have the appropriate skills, to seek opportunities to further develop their leadership skills,” she says.

Dr. El Hussein is also a graduate of the American Academy of Neurology Transforming Leaders Program.

“The most important take-home messages I learned about leadership are to lead yourself and lead with purpose so you can lead others,” she says. “In my practice, I try to reflect often into what I'm doing well and what I can do better, and whether my purpose shows in my actions and is true to my core values.”

She also emphasizes the importance of involving stakeholders, engaging team members and building relationships.

“A key concept I learned from the Leadership College is that leaders do not all need to have the same style or personality traits to be effective – they bring different ‘colors’ or characteristics to the leadership role. [\[See ‘The Colors of Leadership’ on page 14.\]](#)”

“That was an eye-opener,” Dr. El Hussein says. “There’s not one color for leadership. Understanding yourself and your own ‘colors of leadership’ can help you harness your strengths to lead and help you understand what others perceive in you especially in times of crisis. It also allows you to be mindful of the ‘colors’ of other members in your team and potentially lead to stronger relationships.”

As a wife, mother and a physician, Dr. El Hussein is particularly attuned to the issue of work-life balance and focused her Leadership College project in 2017 on ‘Self-managed Time Off,’ which she researched while at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center in Winston-Salem. [\[Watch Dr. El Hussein’s MedTalk presentation on her project here.\]](#)

“We all need some sort of balance to be happy” she says. “Burnout in physicians is very common and neurology is one of the highest ranking specialties for burnout. Physicians tend to be driven, high achievers and willing to take on multiple responsibilities, but we all need to find our balance to continue to thrive. What this balance looks like may vary from one person to another, but as we acknowledge this in our fields and institutions, we get closer to achieving this goal.”

Dr. El Hussein describes her work days as “varied” with multiple activities, which is why she particularly enjoys academic medicine. Her clinical practice includes inpatient and outpatient stroke neurology as well as TeleStroke. She also holds two leadership positions: one as director of the vascular neurology program, where she sees her role as providing the tools, mentorship and environment “to train the next generation of stroke neurologists;” and the other position is as medical director for the TeleStroke program.



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This program is a service allowing community hospitals and physicians to get timely consults with a stroke specialist via telehealth at any time.

“The missions of both of these programs are very meaningful to me and I work with exceptional teams to achieve the big goals we have,” she says.

As her leadership journey continues, Dr. El Husseini has developed a more defined idea of leadership.

“Leading is a service and, leading by example, with purpose and with authenticity, makes this service more impactful.”

