

## **MAKING A DIFFERENCE: MAILAJA MOHAMMED**

**Griffin Spencer**  
(From *Rivier Today*, Spring 2024)

A strong advocate for higher education, Mailaja mentors and encourages others to seek professional advancement.



**M**ailaja Mohammed is a Nurse Practitioner in the Emergency Department at Southern New Hampshire Medical Center, a Family Nurse Practitioner at Foundation Medical Partners, and a Hospitalist at Holy Family Hospital. A native of Ghana and a member of the University’s Board of Trustees, he earned his Associate of Science in Nursing in 2007 and his Master of Science in Nursing – Family Nurse Practitioner in 2016.

### **What initially brought you to the United States from Ghana?**

*Mailaja: In 1987, I had come to the United States just to visit, and I fell in love with the country. I came back three years later to pursue my education and lived in Brockton, Massachusetts.*

### **How did your NCAA Division I student-athlete career at UNH come about?**

*Mailaja: Growing up in Ghana, we played football, also known as soccer. When I got to the practice field in high school, they were looking for football players, and I thought “football” meant “soccer.” I arrived at the field and saw all these kids in pads, and I thought, ‘OK, this is not the football that I know ... I’ll give this a try.’ Initially, I was the kicker, and somehow, somehow, I was recruited by Tom Coughlin (former Head Football Coach at Boston College and a two-time Super Bowl Championship Head Coach) and Chip Kelly (the current Head Football Coach at UCLA). That’s how I ended up at the University of New Hampshire.*

**What led you to pursue a career in the medical field?**

*Mailaja: I graduated from UNH with a degree in Animal Science and had the intention of going to veterinary school. Once I realized it was too expensive, I had to rethink what I wanted to do. I ended up at Winchester Hospital working for Sodexo, the company that ran the food services and housekeeping. For eight-and-a-half years, I worked as a Housekeeping Manager. While I was working in this position, I met lots of nurses. I became friends with many of them, and that's how my journey into nursing started. The nurses encouraged me, telling me that pursuing a career in nursing was possible. I enjoyed seeing some of the things that the nursing staff did, bringing patients back to health and taking care of their patients' family members. I became very interested in it and decided to pursue a career in nursing.*

**What first steps did you take to pursue this new career?**

*Mailaja: To get started, I went to school for a month to become a Licensed Nursing Assistant. To earn an additional scholarship from Winchester Hospital, I had to work a minimum of 24 hours a week in the Emergency Department. I applied to Rivier and received my ASN in 2007 while working in the Emergency Department and as a Housekeeping Manager at the same time.*

**What impact has your education had on others?**

*Mailaja: Most of the people that worked in the housekeeping department were immigrants from other countries. I encouraged them to make sure they go further in their education and not to think housekeeping is the only thing that they can do. Once they learn English, they can do something better. At Rivier's 2023 graduation ceremony, I witnessed one of my former employees from Winchester Hospital walk across the stage and receive her nursing degree. She came to this country from Haiti and didn't speak any English. I encouraged a lot of the housekeepers to further their educations, not necessarily in nursing but in any field, and a lot of them did.*

**What advice do you have for prospective nursing students?**

*Mailaja: For anybody that wants to get into nursing, the best place to learn is to work in the emergency room. You don't know what's going to walk through the door, and you see everything in the emergency room—working there was a huge step for me.*

**How has Rivier grown over the years through your eyes?**

*Mailaja: Everything looks new since I was there in 2005. The Nursing Simulation and Clinical Education Center was completely renovated after I completed my master's degree in 2016. The new Science and Innovation Center, residence halls, and new sports teams will bring even more students into the University.*

**What does it mean to you to give back to Rivier through your work on the Board of Trustees?**

*Mailaja: Through my role on the Board, I'm helping to make sure that students have the best possible experience at Rivier. My input relative to the nursing program and students is always valued. I have the opportunity to talk to high school students and incoming freshmen who are interested in nursing. I tell them about my experience, and "if I am able to do it, they can do it too." This means a lot to me ... There is a dire need for nurses; we need many more nurses to support our hospitals, and Rivier is the perfect school to educate them. ■*