



WELL@UHA CELEBRATES WOMEN IN MEDICINE MONTH: Inspirational Women in History

Joyce Nichols, PA
June 28, 1940 - July 29, 2012



Joyce Nichols was the first woman to be formally educated as a physician assistant (PA). She also happened to be the first African-American woman to practice as a PA. Nichols was working as a licensed practical nurse (LPN) at Duke University when Dr. Eugene A. Stead, Jr. established his 2-yr PA educational program in 1965. She learned about the program from a former Navy corpsman who worked with her in the cardiac unit. The program was originally designed to build on the past experience and training of ex-military corpsmen. Thus, Nichols had to overcome a number of obstacles to gain entrance into the program. She was a woman; she did not have a corpsmen background; she was an African-American; and she had little money to pay for her education. However she was persistent and gradually won the faculty's confidence and support. She entered and graduated from the Duke PA Program in 1970.

Professionally, Nichols helped found and served on the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Academy of Physician Assistants. As a preceptor and adjunct faculty member of the Department of Community and Family Medicine, she taught many medical and physician assistant students over the years. She was inducted into the Duke University PA Alumni Hall of fame in 2002 for her concerns for poor people and her advocacy skills. As a private citizen she served as a commissioner to the Durham Housing Authority winning many legal concessions for tenants. She served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Durham County Hospital Corporation and the Lincoln Community Health Center. In 1991, Nichols received the prestigious Nancy Susan Reynolds Award for Advocacy and in 1996 she was named the **AAPA Paragon "Humanitarian of the Year."**

Source: Physician Assistant History Society <https://pahx.org/assistants/>