



What motivated you to become a gerontological nurse educator?

I started out nursing in critical care, working with acute conditions. Over time I realized that our healthcare system was failing to address the causes of these conditions. We needed to address not only the risk factors, lifestyle changes and adherence to treatment, we had to address the emotional factors that motivate or inhibited our patients to take actions that would preserve and improve their health. I think a pivotal moment for me was when I was discussing smoking cessation to an older patient with a group of student nurses observing the class. He had been smoking since age 12, and was certain it was the reason he had lived to age 82. We discussed how smoking was “robbing his heart of oxygen 3 ways” and I demonstrated by clapping my hands – speeding them up as the heart rate would increase, putting them closer together as the vessels contracted. I had the patient clapping along with me. The we talked about how the carbon monoxide was blocking one of the sites for oxygen further reducing the amount going to his heart. At this point the patient was rapidly clapping, and he stopped and looked at me and said- so why am I giving myself all this applause if I am killing myself with these things – OK, take these, toss them out I quit. The student erupted with applause for the patient. But the best moment was a week later when I was passing a room and heard someone clapping, I peeked inside and there was one of the students doing the same demonstration for a different patient- I knew I had made a difference.

Who is a key person who supported you in becoming a gerontological nurse educator?

When I completed my Adult Clinical Nurse Specialist certification I needed a position that would allow me to work and continue my PhD education. The position I found was providing primary care in a long-term care setting though contact with Sheri Innerarity PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, FNP-BC. It was in this setting I saw how small



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changes created big impacts in the lives of my patient population. I was further supported with a pre-doctoral fellowship in gerontology through the John A. Hartford Foundation with Dr. Graham McDougall Jr PhD as my mentor.

Key words of wisdom for those nurses interested in becoming a distinguished educator in gerontological nursing education?

If you have a passion for teaching nursing and for working with older adults, you should apply. We need more people recognized in this field – more leaders to set the example for the next generation of nurses.

Favorite experience as a gerontological nurse expert educator?

I would say that taking students into the clinical setting and working with older adults has been my most rewarding experience, currently I teach the Gerontological Nursing Course and I have the opportunity to infuse enthusiasm for caring for this population into my students in the hopes that they will choose gerontological nursing as their career path.

Where would you like to see gerontological nursing education to be at in 5 years?

We need to increase the number of nurses focusing on the older adult as our population ages. I think this is going to require an intense effort on the part of educators. Students need to see the value in caring for this population, the complexity of the health needs, and the amount of expertise the role requires. Gerontological nursing is highlighted throughout the programs I teach in, what we need now is to move towards a strong inter-professional team approach that includes nursing as a core element.