

FLORIDA ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH
NURSES

**PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING LEGACY
PROJECT: CAREER PROFILE**

Bobbie C. Thackeray



Bobbie Thackeray, R.N., B.S.N.
County Health Department
Assistant Director

Years as PHN: from 1969 to 2008
Locations: Broward Co HD/Hillsborough Co HD
Positions held: PHN I, PHN II, PHN Sup I, PHN Sup II, Nursing Director, and Assistant County Health Director

Mrs. Thackeray had an experience in her junior year in high school which helped define her interest in Public Health Nursing. She worked as a Candy Stripper @ Hillsborough County Hospital for the indigent, which was in Tampa and is now the Genesis Clinic. Also in junior and senior years in High School, she worked providing nurses' aid care. The first case of body lice she had seen was at the County Hospital. She worked with the county social worker, learned more about home situations and their impact on care. This was the first of her experience in public health and looking at the whole patient.

Bobbie received her BSN from the University of Florida in 1969. She is a member of Sigma Theta Tau Nursing Honor Society. Post credits at University of South Florida in credentialing. She also took some of the MPH courses at USF when it started.

Work experience for Mrs. Thackeray includes working as a nursing assistant in college, surgical floor at Shands, TB control in Broward County and all facets of public health nursing in Hillsborough. In Hillsborough County, she was the Family Planning and OB Supervisor, Nursing Supervisor at the North Hillsborough Clinic. She was the Lead Worker at the WT Edwards clinic (the old TB hospital building). She was one of the first nurses in Florida to be an Assistant County Health Director (as well as the Nursing Director at the same time.)

The initial interest in Public Health Nursing started when working with the social worker at the old County Hospital in Tampa. During her public health rotation in college, she liked the well setting and the independence of the PHN. She liked the decision making involved in being a PHN, wellness aspect of care, and dealing with the whole family.

Bobbie worked with the school system to establish alternative setting for pregnant teens. Before that, the girls were automatically excluded from school, if pregnant in Hillsborough County. As the OB Supervisor for Hillsborough County Health Department, she worked with Gail Crosby to accomplish the task. She and Gail went to the school board, had the plan approved. The first school was at the old Jefferson High School and then it moved to Washington School. Carolyn Evers, retired PHN from Hillsborough County, then expanded the program. Bobbie wrote the first IPO grant for \$100,000 for OB care. Former Hillsborough County Health Director, Dr. Kwalick, and she went to the Hillsborough County Board of Commissioners and asked for and received \$5,000 for OB care for those in need of the care.

Mrs. Thackeray feels that there was one situation in particular where she made a difference in someone's life. She was working with a young mother to leave an abusive relationship. It was when The Spring first opened in Hillsborough County. She did leave, furthered her career and graduated from Junior College as an RN. The young lady said that Bobbie was a "role model" for her.

One of the main keys to public health nursing is if you like independent practice in a well setting, then being a public health nurse is fulfilling. Being a PHN is self-fulfilling, gratifying, and extremely rewarding. Public health is a passion not just a vocation. You have to be innovative. You have to "sell yourself" to gain the family's trust and let you in their home. Public Health is not a structured environment. You need a lot more than technical skills. You certainly learn to improvise, especially in the times when we did VNA care through the Hillsborough County Health Department.

Certain challenges in Public Health Nursing have been around for quite awhile. One for example is low salaries. There was the crisis regarding gas in the 1970s, waiting in line a long time just to get gas for the car. There was low compensation for use of your personal car for the job. Overall, the lack of respect for the profession of public health nursing from all those who impacted it, especially the politicians has continue to be problematic.

Advice for Public Health Nurses includes advocating for public health nurses. Be active in organizations, and work committees both in your agency and in the community. PHNs are invaluable in advocating for patients often left out of the loop in decision making for themselves. Public health is empowering people to better themselves, health and social wise. Aspire to positions of authority, to help influence decisions in public health.

Mrs. Thackeray does stay in contact with other public health nurses but there are too many to name. Hillsborough County Health Department has a retired PHN informal group that meets quarterly.

Additional information includes the fact that Bobbie was one of the first nurses to become an Assistant Director when the position was established in the state career service personnel system. **PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING IS A PASSION, NOT A VOCATION!**

Mrs. Thackeray has been a past FAPHN recipient of the Outstanding Public Health Nursing Leadership award in 2008.

Memorabilia available is a video/DVD "You've Got a Friend" which was filmed by a local TV station in Tampa following her for one week. Kathy Mason may have it. There is a metal cabinet at the main office at the HCHD which might need to go to the Public Health Museum at Jacksonville. There is also information on Joyce Ely, who was the first licensed midwife in Florida and who ended her career in public health in the Ruskin, Fl. area.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda LaComb-Williams
Linda LaComb-Williams, R.N.