



PUBLIC HEALTH NURSING LEGACY PROJECT: CAREER PROFILE

Sharon Surrency, RN, BSN, MPH

Sharon Surrency has served as a Care Coordinator, REACH Nurse, Nursing Supervisor, Nursing Director, and Executive Community Health Nursing Director of the Alachua County Health Department. She has been a public health nurse for 30 years.

Surrency graduated from high school in Ocala, Florida in 1969. She then received an Associate of Arts from Central Florida Community College. Following that, she received her Associate of Science in Nursing from Santa Fe Community College. Later, she returned to school, graduating from the University of Florida with a BSN. Finally, she received her Master's Degree in Public Health from the University of South Florida. While pursuing her nursing education, she also completed a certificate as a firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician.

Surrency recalls that her decision to become a nurse was based on a personal experience with a school health nurse. "When I was little, growing up in Ocala, we would pass the hospital and I would wonder what was happening to the people in there and was anyone doing anything about it. We had a school nurse named Nan Andrews who was kind and gentle and seemed to be a 'friend' to kids. I wanted to be like her."

After completing her initial nursing education, Surrency worked on the floor at Shands Hospital and Alachua General Hospital in Gainesville, Florida. She worked in both Surgical Specialties and the Burn Unit. She then moved to a family practice as the sole office nurse, at that time, to the Department of Health Children's Medical Services office. She is still employed there. Surrency reports that she became a public health nurse "When I saw the ad in the paper for a community health nurse. I thought that would be 'Interesting'; little did I know!!!"

A special memory of her work:

"I remember working with REACH (Rural Efforts to Assist Children at Home) a Robert Wood Johnson Demonstration Project, I was a home visiting nurse to children with special needs. I felt I made the biggest impact there because I could work with them on their turf. I saw them in the community (grocery store, post office, et cetera). It was not just an episodic visit but a lifestyle together. I had asthmatic children that we were able to make changes in their home to avoid triggers and keep them healthier. Once, while making a home visit, I saw kids playing in the ditch after a rain in a housing project. I realized they were playing in raw sewage. With my connections in the city, I was able to draw this to their attention and was instrumental in getting a sewer system in the small community with loans and grants just by my documentation and other information about the topography in that community."

Surrency recalls “There were many instances of families telling me that what we did made a difference in their lives. I felt and still do feel proud, accomplished, and successful in this on-going ministry to people and communities.”

Some of the major challenges to public health during the time she has been employed as a public health nurse in Florida included dealing with the bureaucracy, rules that don’t fit rural communities, lack of access to resources for some who need it most, and pay for nurses.

Her advice for new public health nurses: “Stay true to your mission and your ideals and the rest will fall into place. Nursing is an art and we need to embrace it as such and try as best we can to avoid people putting it into a mold that doesn’t always fit.”

Surrency keeps in touch with public health nursing colleagues such as the members of the FAPHN board, Jean Munden, and Janie McCluney. She emphasizes that “nursing leadership is an art as well. It is very hard to groom nurses to be patient and to be political leaders but it is very important.”

Date completed: Fall, 2011

Career Journey written by Sharon Surrency and summarized by Kim Curry