

Introduction Vanderbilt Nursing

The campus of Vanderbilt University Medical Center spans several city blocks and crosses county and state lines. Practicing in all of those locations are Vanderbilt nurses. Founded 131 years ago, Vanderbilt University Medical Center is driven by discovery and the immediate incorporation of new knowledge into innovation in patient care and physician and nurse education. Our Professional Practice Model is patient and family centered, supported by a strong shared governance structure and solid interdisciplinary teamwork.

Achieving initial Magnet Designation in 2006 was an indication of the commitment of the Medical Center to our staff and community. Creating an environment that provides nurses the ideal place to practice nursing also supports safe patient care and quality outcomes. The high level of interdisciplinary teamwork is a tribute to our colleagues and the partnerships we have created with them.

Information taken, with permission, from Eulogy for Quida M. Tucker (August 20, 1916 – March 26, 2010)

At her memorial service, Quida Tucker's daughter spoke about her role as a nurse at Vanderbilt. In 1934, she got on a train with her trunk and her dreams of being a nurse and made a 400 mile journey to Nashville to Vanderbilt Nursing School. There were no return tickets, no car, and no resources that would enable her to go home for the holidays or summer vacation. She had essentially left home for good. Quida completed her nursing degree and had a 40 year career, all but three years at Vanderbilt Hospital.

She worked 56 hours a week and bore tremendous responsibility for \$65.00 a month. However, she did derive a deep sense of satisfaction and pride in what she did. During those ensuing years, she married and had 3 children. Just when she was "cutting back", her husband died. She resumed her work and soon became the Assistant Director of Nursing Services for Vanderbilt Hospital. Quida also served as the Acting Director for two stints.

Her children recall her in those pre-computer, pre-calculator days working at the dining room table with stacks of ledger paper and an adding machine, working out the budget she would have to defend and administer. She did not have a degree in hospital administration or finance; just sheer intelligence and the same determination that drove her as an 18 year-old to get on that train in tiny Jackson, Alabama.

Beyond that professional life, Quida's focus was her family and children. She was devoted to them and lived her life as an example of kindness and high principle.

"I think she saw the world with such a clear eye and liberal spirit because she worked in a nurturing, but necessarily unsentimental profession, where the daily agenda was life and death and the truth could not be evaded."

We acknowledge Quida and many others who paved the path for nursing at Vanderbilt.

Eula McCall has been at Vanderbilt for 46 years. She started in 1964 in a 12 month “Certified Nursing Technician” program. Eula says that she learned to “always have the proper support, whether it was moving a patient or wearing support hose and support shoes. Nurses wore the proper attire. The clean white polished oxford “clinic shoe” and the clean white uniform was our attire. And most of the nurses wore dresses.” Her work was in the “old” hospital – now Medical Center North. She entered nursing school in 1969. Continuing her work at Vanderbilt, she remembers the move in 1982 to what today is Vanderbilt University Hospital.

During her years at Vanderbilt, Eula has practiced nursing in many areas; obstetrics, general surgery, general medicine, sub-acute and currently orthopedics/urology. She has also filled a number of roles; CNT, direct care nurse, medication nurse, charge nurse, assistant manager and acting director of nursing for the sub-acute unit.

Eula remembers giving medications. “They were not unit dose. You had a cart with cutouts for 30 or more rooms and you placed a cup in each space. In front of each cup you placed a small card with the patient name and name of medication. If you had six meds for that patient, you had six small cards (Med cards), in front of that cup. The medication nurse gave meds for every patient on the unit. Meds came in ampoules and vials, the nurse had to calculate the correct dosage. On the unit, we added meds to the IV bottles, and mixed our own Penicillin. Most pain medicines were either PO or IM, no IV pain meds. The medical students started the IVs.”

Times changed. “The pharmacy tried a new robot. They would fill “his” drawers with the medications, and put “him” on the elevator and punch the floor number. Most of the time, he would get to the right floor, but might go in the wrong direction and have to be redirected. Now, I have been introduced to PYXIS, Surmed, HED and Acudose. I have gone from mixing my own meds and autoclaving bedpans, emesis basins and urinals to scanning medications and armbands. From wheeling a cart with meds for 28 patients, to wheeling a computer on wheels that does everything, ALMOST!”

Probably most interesting is when Eula first came to Vanderbilt; she parked across the street from Medical Center North. Now she parks 3 blocks away (like everyone else) and rides the shuttle. Her first paycheck as an RN was \$259.46 for a month.

Outside of Vanderbilt Eula leads a rich life filled with travel, family and friends. She has traveled to 43 states, most national parks, 5 World’s Fairs and several foreign countries. She is an avid reader and sings in a community choir that has done back-up for country artists.

“Working these 45 years through all the changes and additions helped make my rich life possible. I have been truly blessed!”

We acknowledge Eula and many others who help us remember how far we have come.

Christy Stratton was the recipient of the Nurse Residency Acute Care Surgical Track “Spirit Award” – given to her by her peers in the most recent Nurse Residency class. She was surprised and honored. However, after you spend a few minutes with talking with her, you aren’t. Christy has that calm, confident, gentle, caring spirit that you would want in your nurse. She is a nurse on the 3rd floor Round Wing.

Christy was born in Nashville and has lived her whole life here. Nursing is a second career for Christy; her first was health promotion and exercise physiology. However, she always found herself in the role of being the one to respond; “to give first aid, to be the caretaker.” People always seem to think she was a nurse, even before she became one. She knew she wanted patient care, seemed to come naturally to her.

Christy’s mother works at Vanderbilt and actually Christy worked here as a care partner in 1995. She says, “I looked up to the nurses. They worked hard and faced difficult situations, but were always positive”. The nurses she worked with encouraged her to go to nursing school and supported her.

Vanderbilt was her first, second and third choice of where she wanted to practice nursing. Having seen the nursing staff here first hand, she wanted to be one of them. Knowing about our Nursing Residency Program and Magnet Designation was “icing on the cake for her”.

The Residency Program has, “decreased my anxiety and given me more confidence”, Christy said. I learned things in the Residency Program that have made my transition to the unit much easier. Everyone has been helpful and they want me to be successful. The nurses here work hard, respect each other and also have fun. The on-line resources for questions and evidence are invaluable. We really have access to so many tools and information to support what we do for patients.”

Christy knows absolutely that going back to nursing school was the right choice for her. “I know I am making a difference in people’s lives. My reward is the looks on their faces and the simple ‘thank you’”.

In her life outside of Vanderbilt, Christy is a singer and writes poetry, which she translates into live performances. She is close to her family and active in her church. She has a new puppy which is both work and fun. True to her first career, she is avid exerciser and in the future would like to be involved in prevention programs around childhood obesity.

We welcome Christy and thank her for reminding us that we are doing the right things.

Grace Plunkett is a soft spoken, extremely polite 18 year old, in her first year of college. Her mother works here and Grace was born at Vanderbilt. Grace has wanted to be a nurse since she was in the 7th grade.

One of her best friends was treated at Vanderbilt for osteo sarcoma. Grace visited her many times during her treatment here and remembers the nurses and how helpful they were. Grace saw that nursing was a role that mattered, that made a difference.

Grace is fluent in Spanish and has been on several mission trips to Honduras. She works with the doctors and nurses and also does translation. Grace knows that a nursing career will support her to continue her passion for helping people and also taking that passion to third world countries.

“Working as a nurse at Vanderbilt just seems like a natural next step to me. I feel comfortable there already, like Vanderbilt is part of my family.”

We wish Grace well in her education and look forward to the day she becomes a Vanderbilt Nurse. We also acknowledge Grace for letting us know that the future of nursing at Vanderbilt will be in capable hands.

From autoclaving bed pans and wheeling medication carts to computers on wheels, automatic dispensing machines and bar code scanning, we have come a long way. We now have a new state of the art Critical Care Tower with “SMART” beds that perfectly satisfies the needs of care teams, patients, and families, while creating a platform for innovative health care. We have transformed a shopping mall into a user friendly clinic space with “kiosk” check-in and “pagers for patients”.

We have systems that support family members to call for an emergency team if they believe that is what their loved ones needs. We support family members to remain at the bedside of their children during emergency situations. We have sophisticated systems that prevent the ordering of the wrong dose of medication and alert us to care that needs to be completed. We have research at our finger tips for what is the best evidence-based care and real time data to measure how we are doing.

We certainly have come a long way. Nursing care is delivered just a little differently than it was 46 years ago. However, one thing has not changed, the special meaning of being a nurse at Vanderbilt. By the way, if you were wondering; when Grace was born, Eula had been a nurse for about 20 years; Grace also worked with computers in grade school.

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