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Patricia Burns oral history interview by Andrew Huse, October 29, 2003

Patricia A. Burns (Interviewee)

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USF Florida Studies Center
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Dr. Burns came to USF in 1997 as the dean of the College of Nursing

Arrival at USF

Dr. Burns knew that USF was a large university. It had schools, colleges and experiences similar to those she had at the State University of New York at Buffalo. The College of Nursing was also similar in size and programming to her experiences at SUNY Buffalo. She thought this could be a good fit.

Dr. Burns was at SUNY Buffalo for eighteen years, she was department chair of the Nurse Practitioner Program. This was a graduate program and she had been director since 1981. She was nationally and internationally recognized researcher in female urine loss problems. This meant that she had teaching experience, administrative experience and research experience to bring to USF. She thought the College of Nursing was “ready to take a bigger part in the national picture.” Since she has been here the Carnegie classification has changed for the program at USF. This is all a part of her vision for what she wants the school to become and thinks “we’re making great strides in that arena.”

When she first arrived at USF she had “an excellent faculty, a very well established teaching faculty.” They had made some great contributions. The biggest challenge was meeting the mission of a Research I university. Dr. Burns wanted to create an environment where the faculty could feel a change in support and workload to make themselves outstanding teachers and researchers. They established a research center with a full time coordinator and part time data entry workers. They have part time staff to help with grant applications. They submitted forty-two proposals this year. Their funding has increased ninety-three percent from last year so there have been great strides made in the last year and the faculty are being recognized nationally in their field. They serve on study teams at the National Institute of Nursing Research, reviewing grants and working with other colleagues on a national level.

They work closely with the associate director for research and the associate director for academic affairs. They both work with faculty assignments and faculty evaluation of

their assignments, therefore goals are set annually and faculty members are provided with everything they need to meet those goals every year. They also have gotten external funding for endowed professorships. They have the Acute Care Professorship sponsored by the Gordon Keller Alumni, the Louis and Leona Hughes Endowed Chair in Chromatics, and the Lyle and Beatrice Thompson Quality at End of Life Professorship. The amount of professorships and the level of endowment dollars you bring in raises the standard of the entire college.

In her inaugural address on January 17, 1997, Dr. Burns said that she wanted to “empower the faculty, create an environment conducive to teaching, scholarship and service, and raise the national ranking of the college to within the top twenty.” The research dollars necessary would have to be five to six million a year. They are at three million now, so they are halfway to their goal. Success breeds more success and as the faculty see the successes of the school they enjoy it and hope for more.

In 1997 they were at about \$585,000 in funding, which was mostly in training grants. They were not NHI funded; the money came from other sources. Getting funding from other areas is helping the school grow. They are growing in student enrollment. The Ph.D. program began in 1997 and they now have thirty-nine Ph.D. students and have “generated over 750 FTE for students.” When she came to the school they were generating about 500 student credit hours so they weren’t generating FTE at the time. They have more than doubled the student enrollment and increased their scholarly productivity.

They have also planned to increase the space and, on September 16, 2003, broke ground on the new College of Nursing and the new entrance to the Health Sciences Center. It will be a three-story building which will be “a signature building for the corner of Bruce B. Downs and West Holly and everyone will now know where the health science center is and where the college of nursing is.” There will be a center for Advanced Nursing Education, Blue Cross and Blue Shield provided \$750,000 for it, which was matched by the state of Florida.

When she arrived the new building was not in progress. The College of Nursing was in a 26,000 square foot building that was built around 1978. Its office and laboratory space was very small. The student lounge was very small and students had nowhere to sit and speak with professors. Faculty shared an office with three other people. There were three “dorms” where faculty shared space with other faculty. They had a little table, a chair, and not enough room for a filing cabinet. The wiring in the building was old and exposed. Secretaries were two to a cubicle. Everyone was pushed into small spaces and there was no room to do research or clinical teaching. In her first year she gave a presentation to a committee on new buildings, which was convened by the president. The committee put the College of Nursing as a priority on the funding list. Dr. Burns worked very hard and had a specific plan to get the college a new building. The faculty wanted to get a better email system, because their email was crashing regularly, and they wanted to get a new building.

The old building was very different from the new building. They had 26,000 square feet and now they have over 70,000 square feet. It will be a new College of Nursing addition and a complete renovation of the old building. There will be student-learning communities on the first floor, including a completely redesigned student affairs department and gathering places for the students. The second story above the learning communities will be faculty research areas. There is a 100-seat informatics laboratory and good clinical space donated by George and Mary Miller's families. They donated \$500,000 to a center for virtual learning. They have three case method classrooms on the second floor. This is the latest in student-centered methodology for the instructor and the students. There will be a new dean's suite and an executive boardroom. There will be space for graduate students, research assistants and faculty lounge areas. This project is due for completion in the fall of 2005.

She found out that they were fourth or fifth on the building priority list in 1998, the College came into the planning year in 2002, but Dr. Burns knew that they were moving up the list in 2000. The planning began last year and they worked on everything for a whole year.

They have also completely changed the way they teach undergraduate nurses. Traditionally nursing teaches clinical skills and patient care by sending a group of ten students and a faculty member to a hospital. After they are at the hospital for a while they go somewhere else to do something similar. While considering the resources and needs of the Tampa Bay area they decided that it would be best to do something that is very collaborative. She met with the directors of nursing and the hospital's leaders to work towards fulfilling the program's needs and the hospital's needs. They created six clinical teams, so essentially each hospital has its own nursing program. Rather than admit seventy students a year, she offered to admit sixty students twice a year. This would double the people in the program without any rise in funds. She offered to give the hospitals twelve nurses twice a year for two years. They would have forty-eight student nurses in two years that they can work with, train and recruit. These nurses will want to work into the institution after graduation. The idea is send a nursing student to a specific place and match them one on one with an expert nurse. They are matched with a preceptor in the first week of class. The student begins to care for patients under the guidance of their expert nurse. This changes the whole way nursing education is done. It is innovative and changing the old model and also puts the USF College of Nursing on the map. She has students coming from as far away as Ft. Lauderdale and Miami because they know that the program is good.

This is the first year of people leaving the program with its new focus and about fifty percent stay at the hospital where they trained. These students do not have to do the orientation that they had to do before. This is a better educational and clinical experience for the students and it saves the hospital money. This was started in 2001 and has gotten off to a great start.

Ways the College of Nursing is different at USF

There was a definite segregation of the University and the Health Care Systems when she started. Dr. Burns has tried to bridge that gap. The agencies were competitive as well; they would offer fifty cents more an hour to steal a qualified nurse from another facility. Dr. Burns worked with a reporter from *The Tampa Tribune* on the nursing shortage and the limits on numbers of students who could be admitted. They then had a dinner meeting with all the vice presidents of patient's services in the Tampa Bay area. At the meeting they discussed issues and common ideas concerning nursing shortages and how they could all work together. "The clinical collaborative was the next step in making this whole community join together to be pro-active nursing" not just trying to get vacancies filled. This has been very successful. There is an advisory board of all of the vice-president's for patient's services, which is co-chaired by Sandy Jensen from the Veteran's Administration Hospital and Deborah Martuccio from the University Community Hospital. They work on common problems in the college and the educational curriculum, plus what the community needs. The collaboration that occurs between the community, the College of Nursing and the hospitals is very rewarding to Dr. Burns.

Their next step is to look into nursing care research being done in area hospitals. All the students and faculty are in the process of developing research projects to improve patient care. All these things will raise the national recognition to the Tampa area.

Unique population in Tampa

Tampa has a unique population and the program has been designed so that it mirrors the population. There are a large number of Hispanic and African-American people in the area and they have tried to bring in Hispanic and African-American students. They have also started a program called "Nursing Professionals of the Future" which operates in mostly Hispanic schools. Middle school children are taught about careers in the health profession. One of her colleagues, Elaine Shimberg, wrote a book called "The Eagan Twins." This book features nursing in a realistic manner. This book and this program have been good for middle school students. They have expanded the program this year to incorporate six schools and a bilingual professional runs it. They are working to expand the efforts even more. They are trying to bring nursing to underrepresented populations. Dr. Burns would like to guide and support these people through their high school years and admit them as honors students in their freshman year at USF. Hopefully they could be endowed with fellowships when they begin.

The population in Florida is statistically older than many other areas of the country. She wants to increase the education of USF students in their knowledge of home health care and care for the elderly. She suggested that a learning environment in their college could show how "you could do tele-health from an office to a home, what the role of the nurse would be in that environment and how that whole environment and industry has changed dramatically over the last twenty years and will change dramatically more in the next twenty." Hopefully they will be able to develop new and innovative ways to teach and learn for elder care. This is a great time to work on this initiative because the college will be opening the new building.

The new building is allowing people in the college to alter their ways they teach and learn. They will be doing innovative testing and technology development in their new laboratory.

Taking over the deanship

Personally it was very challenging. The college had operated in a certain manner and had a vision. She took “three steps forward and four steps back.” They made progress and lost a little bit, then made more progress. She is glad that she has been able to see faculty grow. There were certain assistant professors at the college when she arrived that did not believe they could get national funding, these people are now leaders, presenters at conferences and have funding. This success makes her feel great because she is only as good as the faculty. She is able to get strength from the progress in the College, the progress in the Health Sciences Center and the community involvement.

Future Plans

Dr. Burns wants to help the faculty develop, and help them excel. She also wants to make the education programs better and better. She would also like to move the program forward in their research collaboration with the community partners. Hopefully each team will identify a specific area of excellence in each hospital. Morton Plant Neece has large cardiac and orthopedics programs so hopefully they can get an endowment program and create research areas so each team can have an area of expertise. These things will take a few years, but they are making progress and success leads to more success.

How is the college different than in 1997

The college of nursing is talked about “everywhere” and this is great for Dr. Burns to hear. She knows that the challenge of making the school well known has been met. The vice-presidents for patients’ services were at the groundbreaking for the new building and this indicates the level of community interaction. These men were as proud of the new building as they would have been if it was theirs, and in many ways it is theirs. She is still challenged by trying to move the college into the top twenty. Some people don’t think the college is ready for that, but they have almost three million dollars in funding this year and if they could get to six they could be in the top twenty.

People that have impressed her

Dr. Judith Kashmer is her Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and she is “outstanding.” She has helped create the curriculum, and helped with interdisciplinary measures between the College of Nursing and the College of Medicine. This has been invaluable. Two researchers, Dr. Mary Webb and Dr. Theresa Becky are both doing research on women with heart disease. They are star women’s health/heart researchers and are funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research and are the “nucleus for making the University of South Florida College of Nursing a center for women’s heart health.” Dr. Mary Evans has been “instrumental in mentoring junior faculty” while producing her own scholarly work. “She has been invaluable to the team.”

Cooperation between Colleges of Nursing, Public Health and Medicine

There have been and will continue to be collaborative efforts between the College of Nursing and the Colleges of Public Health and Medicine. They just began a master's program in bio-medical ethics, which has courses taught in all three colleges. There are at least twenty-two people in this program and it just started in September. They already had an Occupational Health and Masters of Public Health dual degree program. They have worked hard to put programs together that will be useful. There are also lots of people that take their electives in other colleges.

Dr. Burns is happy that she is in an environment “where you are allowed to take your ideas and make them come true” and “there aren't large constraints or barriers to following your vision and making the College of Nursing something that this University can be proud of.”

Advice to people considering nursing

“Nursing is a fabulous profession, there are many many avenues that you can take in nursing” there are “opportunities for professional growth that surpass any other profession, you can make nursing a career for life” and “it's a very rewarding profession.” Students don't recognize what avenues the profession can take and that is what the middle school program was designed to do. In this program they bring in a forensic nurse, or a nurse with a JD degree. They might bring in a transport nurse or a specialty nurse that is doing dialysis work. This way the kids recognize that nurses don't just work in hospitals, but in all kinds of careers.

Media portrayal of nursing

The television shows play to the adventurous side of nursing. Research has been conducted concerning the portrayal of nursing in the media and there is a negative side to it because there are sometimes portrayals of nurses in a more risqué manner and this does not help the profession. Media coverage that gives insight into the real life helps give people an indication of why nurses get into their profession.

End of Interview