

In Memory of Mona M. Counts, PhD, FNAP, FAANP, FAAN

By Joyce Knestrick PhD, CRNP, FAANP, FAAN

Dr. Mona M. Counts is my mentor, former professor, practice partner and friend. , Mona was a founder of the NP movement. She has dedicated her career to the professional role development, scope of practice expansion, and improved health outcomes through increased access to health care for both urban and rural populations. Mona started her career in medicine but changed her path to nursing and never looked back. She believed that in her many roles as an NP she has been able to shape the health care in the US and helped move the needle to better access to care for patients by utilizing APRNs. Her work on behalf of our profession has improved the visibility of NPs as primary care providers. From her days on the ski slopes badgering national leaders to her work in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, Mona lobbied tirelessly to shape policies for NPs' inclusion as designated (thus reimbursed) providers by governmental agencies and other insurers. When my son was at his Eagle Scout dinner in Pittsburgh, the president of Highmark Blue Cross asked if he knew Mona. He told them not only was she a great NP but taught him to ski!. After much work on her part and my son's encounter, we were finally listed as provides on the Highmark panels. Her work continued as she provided testimony in front of health administrators and policy makers describing the community clinic we ran in Appalachia, which resulted in increased funding for the development of rural health clinics in the US.

Mona (Doc Counts) always did it her way. We appreciate her service as a past president of AANP, past Chair of the AANP Fellows and part of the AANP certification board. She left a legacy of being a mover, a shaker, an innovator, a person who eloquently spoke her mind. Her memory endures as her impact on the profession continues.



Introduction

This was one of the initial interviews of the charter fellows conducted by Judith Lynch. Mona was an inspiration to all who knew her. She was a mentor, teacher, innovator and expert practitioner who single handedly made changes in the health care system. She was one of the first nurse practitioner in the country to have an independent practice and offered healthcare in a community that lacked healthcare resources.

Abstract

In this short interview Mona discusses how the fellowship increases the visibility of nurse practitioners through recognition of leadership. This recognition offers the opportunity to work together to engage in political activities on the local, state and national levels to change the face of healthcare. She discusses the need for mentorship to assist younger nurse practitioners to become leaders. She concludes with a call for nurse practitioner education to include the business of healthcare in the curriculum.

Keywords

Nurse practitioner, advanced nursing practice, independent practice, leadership.

Transcript

Mona M Counts

AANP Oral History Project

Celebration of our Charter Fellows

Interview with Judith Lynch

Dr. Counts has been active in the nurse practitioner movement since 1970 when she started the role at Emory University. She went on to help initiate programs at several other universities including George Mason, Baylor, and Penn State. She then moved to West Virginia to begin a program to provide healthcare to underserved areas. She is now recognized as a national nursing leader who has participated in three White House Panels to study primary care issues with a focus on access. She served the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) as President in 2004 (a four-year commitment), and was elected to the AANP Certification Board in 2009. She is also a consultant to the AANP Foundation. She is a Fellow of the National Academies of Practice, an Everyday Hero in Readers 'Digest, and was featured on a segment of *60 Minutes* discussing rural nurse practitioners. She recently received the Loretta Ford CCA Association Life-time Teaching Award.



Dr. Counts continues to teach full-time as the Eloise Ross Eberly Professor at Penn State and practices 16-20 hours at the Primary Care Center of Mt. Morris Inc., which is run solely by nurse practitioners. Begun in 1994, the center now serves an estimated 6000 patients. Dr. Counts holds the Chair of the Technical Advisory Panel for CMS looking at CPT coding for Medicare and has a grant for a mobile health unit in rural Pennsylvania. The following interview took place on Dr. Count's farm where she lives with her husband, John Yellets, a retired coal miner and educator. Her daughter is also a nurse practitioner who works alongside her mother. The farm has served over 400 children who, as Dr. Counts states, "needed a place to stay."

JSL: What were your hopes for the Fellowship?

MC: I have long wanted to increase the collegiality of all nurse practitioners working together to counter the popular portrait of nurses eating their young. The Fellowship accomplished this not only by increasing recognition of the NP role, but by participating in local, state, and national political activities with other NP organizations. Fellowship members also tap the capabilities of NPs and use AANP resources to achieve change. I particularly like the mentorship program as it produces future leaders who will have a positive impact on the healthcare system.

JSL: What focus should the Fellowship be taking for the future?

MC: There is no greater issue facing this country than healthcare reform. We need to fund more research projects looking at NP productivity and the importance of billing under our own names. We also need to focus more studies on NP outcomes of care and the co-ordination of care in a holistic manner. The business of healthcare should be a requirement in every NP curriculum and the Fellowship must work with NONPF to achieve this goal.

JSL: You are active in so many professional activities. How do you find time for a personal life?

MC: I love our farm and enjoy brush-hogging the fields to defray stress. I love to raft, and I also teach skiing on weekends. All in all, my life is rich, and I would not change one part of it.

JSL: I've enjoyed our time together, Mona. One of my favorite memories is from a conference in Colorado when we were roommates, and you arose to be at the Continental Divide by sunrise to greet the truckers who had been driving all night!

MC: That is what is so great about being a nurse practitioner: The people you meet and the changes that you can see happening to each person you care for!

