



Dr. Karen Devereaux Melillo is certified as an Adult-Gerontology Nurse Practitioner. She earned her Ph.D. from Brandeis University and a Master of Science in Gerontological Nursing from the University of Massachusetts Lowell, which prepared her as a Gerontological Nurse Practitioner. Dr. Melillo has devoted her career to improving the care of older adults through research and gerontological nursing education. Her research has studied the utilization of nurse practitioners in institutional long-term care, the application of a wandering technology device for older adults with dementia, and the impact of physical fitness and exercise activity on older adults. Dr. Melillo is also a prolific author with more than 100 publications. She currently serves as Interim Dean and Professor, Solomon School of Nursing, and Vice Dean, Zuckerberg College of Health Sciences, at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. She has received many honors, including, AJN Book of the Year Award for the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Geropsychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* (Melillo & Houde, 2005, 2011), which she co-edited, recognition in the elite group of 'Geriatric Nursing Leaders of Today' in *Geriatric Nursing: Growth of a Specialty* (Ebersole, 2006), Fellow of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, and Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America.

#### Interview Abstract

Dr. Melillo has dedicated her career to improving gerontological nursing care through research and education. She is board certified as an Adult-Gerontology Nurse Practitioner. Additionally, she is educated with a Ph.D. in Aging, Long-Term Care, and Health Policy and a Master of Science in Gerontological Nursing. Recognitions include Fellow of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners and Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America.

In the interview, she indicated that choosing the Gerontological Nurse Practitioner (GNP) program for her Master of Science degree was her most important academic decision. This decision allowed her to pursue her passion for researching the utilization of nurse practitioners to provide care in institutional long-term care settings. As a graduate of her Master of Science GNP program, she felt honored to be a member of the nurse practitioner (NP) profession. Through her activities with the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP), she connected with the organization's goals and mission, motivating her to pursue Fellowship in AANP.

Dr. Melillo felt honored and humbled to be selected as a Fellow of AANP. Her hopes for Fellowship included working with like-minded nurse practitioner leaders to advance educational preparation and full utilization of NPs to meet the healthcare needs of older adults. She observes that the scope of NP practice has grown since her induction as an AANP Fellow. She also indicates that her involvement as a Fellow has contributed to her academic role in launching several global health initiatives.

Looking to the future, Dr. Melillo encourages present Fellows to network and take advantage of opportunities to connect and to be engaged. She predicts that NPs will be the leaders and champions of our healthcare system in years to come.

### Biographical Sketch

Dr. Karen Devereaux Melillo, PhD, A-GNP-C, FAANP, FGSA is Interim Dean and Professor, Solomon School of Nursing and Vice Dean, Zuckerberg College of Health Sciences, at the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UML). She earned her PhD from Brandeis University, 1990, and a Master of Science Degree in Gerontological Nursing from UML, 1978, preparing her as a Gerontological Nurse Practitioner. She is a Fellow in the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners and a Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America.

Her research has examined the utilization of nurse practitioners in institutional long-term care, physical fitness and exercise activity of older adults, and the application of a wandering technology device for older adults with dementia. She has received numerous awards and has co-edited the book, *Geropsychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* (Melillo & Houde, 2005, 2011), the 2nd edition of which received the **AJN Book of the Year Award** (first place in two categories: mental health, and gerontologic nursing). Identified as one of only 15 'Geriatric Nursing Leaders of Today' in *Geriatric Nursing: Growth of a Specialty* (Ebersole, 2006), Melillo has well over 100 publication credits to her name.

Keywords: gerontology, gerontological, long-term care, American Association of Nurse Practitioners, AANP, Fellow, Fellowship, nurse practitioner

Karen Devereaux Melillo

Interview

AANP Oral History Project



## Interview

### **Why did you wish to become a Fellow?**

As a 1978 MS GNP graduate from UMass Lowell, I felt honored to be a member of the NP profession. Choosing this GNP program for my MS degree was the single most important academic decision I could have made. The opportunities to specialize in gerontological nursing, and to have APN preparation, provided a path to professional satisfaction that I could not have imagined. I was able to pursue my passion to conduct research on the utilization of nurse practitioners in institutional long-term care. As an author in the JAANP, and member of AANP, I felt a strong affinity to the organization and its goals and mission. I was also proud to have nominated two outstanding individuals for the Massachusetts AANP State Award for Excellence, both of whom were selected (Drs. Alice Bonner, NP, and May Futrell, NP Advocate).

### **How did you feel when you were notified that you were selected as a Fellow?**

As noted, I was honored and humbled to be recognized for this achievement. As a result, it has been a privilege to honor and recognize others with nominations and selection as Fellows of AANP, to further promote the image and accomplishments of those with whom I have had the privilege to teach and/or work with (Drs. Angela Nannini and Sue Mullaney).

### **What were your hopes for the Fellowship?**

It was my hope that my achievements related to NP clinical practice, research, education, and health policy, would contribute to the mission of the AANP and to the FAANP initiatives. To be considered for selection in the Fellows of the AANP was an immense honor. With my educational preparation as an MS-prepared GNP and PhD doctoral preparation in Aging, Long-Term Care, and Health Policy, my hopes for the Fellowship were that I'd be with like-minded APN leaders who worked toward advanced educational preparation and full utilization of APNs to meet the health care needs of older adults.

### **How did being in the Fellowship help you think more globally about being a Nurse Practitioner?**

In my current academic leadership role, I am overseeing our Solomont School of Nursing's International Committee which has launched numerous global health initiatives, including three faculty-led student trips to Ghana, Africa (accompanied by NP faculty); two trips to University of Cadiz, Spain (accompanied by NP faculty); two trips to Shandong University, China (accompanied by NP faculty and TT faculty) for students at all academic program levels, and including a faculty exchange; and a 17-day trip to Chile, the focus of which was exploration and observation of the mental health system (accompanied by NP faculty). A current MOU is being developed for both faculty and student exchange with Naresuan University, Thailand, where two nurse faculty have served as Visiting Faculty (2017, 2018).

**What advice do you have for the present Fellows?**

The bond of APNs for professional growth and networking offered by FAANP is immeasurable. Leadership opportunities abound. Take advantage of every chance to reach out and/or respond to inquiries and requests. We share a common goal to improve health care for all populations, and the role of the APN in this process is critical. We need FAANP voices to share their experiences with a wide audience, and the FAANP leaders can be that voice now, and in the future.

**What motivates you to maintain your Fellowship?**

There are certain professional associations and memberships that define who one is as a professional. For me, FAANP is one such organization and status.

**What changes have you seen since you became a fellow?**

The scope of practice authority has grown significantly since my induction as a Fellow in AANP.

**What do you see as pivotal moments in the past years?**

AANP's leadership, including Fellows, has gained national recognition with outreach and marketing campaigns that inform the public, policy makers, and other health professionals about the impact NPs have in meeting the needs of individuals, families, communities, and population health.

**What you would change if you had it to do over the again?**

I would not change the path I took. I was privileged to have taken a route toward MS NP preparation as a Gerontological Nurse Practitioner (now Adult-Gerontological Primary Care NP) that I would not have predicted, had it not been for the UML Graduate Program interviewer – later mentor – who I met in 1977 when I was exploring graduate programs, Dr. May Futrell. The path allowed my passionate engagement in the academic, research, and practice world, for which I am professionally and personally profoundly grateful for.

**What advice would you give to new nurse practitioners?**

Be engaged – with your practice, your colleagues, your patients and their families, your communities, and your professional association.

**What do you see as the role of Nurses Practitioners in health care in the next 25 years?**

I do believe it will be NPs who take on the challenges of meeting the primary care needs of the underserved, in whatever care setting that may be, and that they will champion our health care of the future as leaders, policy makers, influencers, rese

