



Marie-Eileen Onieal, FAANP

Dr Onieal has been a leading force in health policy, education, and organizational leadership. She was educated as a pediatric nurse practitioner, was employed in the Harvard University health care center and eventually became director of Rocky Mountain University of Health Care Professions. She was president of the American Academy (Association) of Nurse Practitioners, Chair of the National Alliance of Nurse Practitioners, and a Public Health Service Policy Fellow. She served as the Health Policy Coordinator at the Bureau of Health Quality Management in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and became an expert in Bioterrorism.

Abstract

In this interview Dr Onieal discusses the formation of the Fellows of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners as a recognition of expertise in the profession. Being recognized by peers has assisted leaders with their policy work in multidisciplinary groups.. She further discusses the merger of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners with the American College of Nurse Practitioners. The merger encompasses a broader agenda and unites nurse practitioners to speak in a unified voice.

Short Bio

Dr. Onieal is currently the Director of the Doctor of Nursing Practice Program at Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions in Provo, Utah. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Pace University, New York and received a master's degree in Management of Human Services from Brandeis University in 1995. She holds a Certificate as a nurse practitioner from Northeastern University and finished her doctorate in Nursing and Health Policy from the University of Massachusetts, Boston in 2005. Her PhD Dissertation was on Hospital Closures in Massachusetts: A Case Study of the Waltham Hospital Closure.

Until 2001, Dr. Onieal served as the Health Policy Coordinator at the Bureau of Health Quality Management in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. During her tenure, she developed regulations and protocols for the therapeutic use of marijuana; facilitated regulations for needle stick injury prevention for Massachusetts hospitals; and wrote guidelines about the use of body art (tattoos and piercings). She also coordinated the submission of an AHRQ grant to evaluate the effects of the Massachusetts Reporting System and served as Project Director.

On September 11, 2001, her world, like ours, changed. She assisted in the development of the application for Phase 1 of the HRSA Hospital Bioterrorism Preparedness Program funding. She was also a member of a multidisciplinary team that wrote regulations to implement a bioterrorism plan and response for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This included estimating the number of beds needed along with the type of bed (isolation), and the number of hospitals that would be needed by location and size. This plan also facilitated the disbursement of bioterrorism funds. Through this experience she became known as a bioterrorism expert and was re-immunized to smallpox so that she could be a first responder. This was truly an interdisciplinary position as she worked in collaboration with police, fire personnel, Federal and State officials, and politicians. This was done within the context of her position in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, but her title was changed to Hospital Preparedness Coordinator. This plan was implemented during the Boston Marathon bombing in

2013. She left this position in 2004 to write her dissertation and returned in July 2006 to become the Director of Health Services in the Department of Youth Services. She coordinated and monitored all delivery services for youths at risk in 64 sites in Massachusetts. She maximized resources by changing staff patterns so that sites had the most judicious use of health personnel. In addition, she reformulated policies and protocols and monitored contracts. Here she met many nurse practitioners and registered nurses who “truly cared for these kids”.

In August 2006, Dr. Onieal became a member of the Rocky Mountain University faculty during its first cohort. She taught role transition and health policy in a hybrid program that is 75% online and 25% on campus. In 2008 she became Co-Director of the Program and in 2010, after retiring from the Commonwealth, took over as full-time Director of the DNP program. She is proud that this program is interdisciplinary with many health professionals sitting around the table to constructively discuss ideas for the future of health care. Her students come from all over America and are taught by seven faculty members at present. Her position is 60% administrative. She is on campus whenever the DNP students arrive for on-campus activities and oversees all IRB applications and the final scholarly projects.

Dr. Onieal is one of the founders of the AANP and held positions as Treasurer, Chief Financial Officer, President-Elect, President, and Immediate Past President. She is now on the Foundation Board of Directors. She was Treasurer and Chair of the National Alliance of Nurse Practitioners and a 1997 National UPHS Primary Care Policy Fellow. She is currently the Editor-in-Chief of Clinician Reviews.

Keywords

Nurse practitioner, leadership, policy, education , advanced practice nurses.

Transcript

Marie Eileen ONeal

AANP Oral History Project



Celebration of our Charter Fellows

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The following interview took place at her home in Haverhill, Massachusetts.

JSL: What an incredible career! You certainly have helped to take health care in Massachusetts to a leadership position in the U.S.! How did you feel when you were notified of your inclusion in the charter membership of the AANP Fellows?

MEO: It had always been one of my goals to have a way in which to recognize achievement within our profession. I was pleased and honored to be included with the “big shots” that I had admired for such a long period. I also saw the Fellowship as a mechanism to recognize the “Parents” of the Academy; those women and men who started the organization and worked so hard to help it prosper within a set of overwhelming barriers to practice.

JSL: What has the Fellowship meant to you personally and professionally?

MEO: When I was in private practice and, later, in my “policy wonk” period, it did not mean as much to me as it has since I have entered academe and leadership positions. When I deal with other professionals, being a Fellow adds value to my credentials. Deans and Directors of programs as well as politicians and others in leadership positions appreciate the fact that your peers have recognized you as being outstanding in your profession.

JSL: What focus would you like to see the Fellowship take in the future?

MEO: I do not think that the Fellowship is publicized enough. From the outside view, it seems to be an “elite” group. I would like to see us be less insular. We need to reach out to students and faculties about our programs and goals. Mentoring should be one of our primary reasons for existence – every Fellow should be a mentor and the only way that can happen is if others know what we can accomplish for them.

JSL: How do you feel about the combined Academy and College?

MEO: I see this merge as a basically positive one although I think that it alienated many people in both organizations. The Academy was the first and only organization to represent the nurse practitioner as a clinician; the College had a very different agenda and was a much smaller organization. I think that a great deal of Academy history has been thrown away with this merge and hope that very soon all will recognize how important the roots of each organization were to those of us who fought the original battles for key practice issues such as licensure, reimbursement, and prescriptive authority.

JSL: What about a personal life?

MEO: I am lucky in that I can do my job from anywhere in the world. I like to travel and have been to Mexico and Venezuela in the past few years. I also travelled across the country and saw all the National Parks and that was a wonderful experience. I have been married since June 2004 and we live in Haverhill, Massachusetts on the North Shore of Boston. I continue to love golf although I cannot find as much time as I would like to play.

JSL: Do you have any last words for the Fellows?

MEO: I look forward to seeing continued growth and activity in future Fellows. Each of us needs to write down the history and values of the organization. Renew and re-energize the members and, above all, teach everyone “rabble-rousing”. Do not become complacent.

JSL: Marie-Eileen, thank you so much for your time. You are a valuable asset to our organization and our profession as well as a health advocate for consumers.