

Mary Ellen Roberts DNP, RN, APN,C., FAANP, FAAN  
Interview for AANP History Committee Oral History Project

**Introduction:**

Dr. Mary Ellen Roberts is a renowned leader and educator of nurse practitioners. Currently Associate Professor and Director of the DNP Program at Seton Hall University, Dr. Roberts is an adult and acute care nurse practitioner with expertise in cardiovascular care. She is Past President of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, Past Chair. of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) Certification Board and Past Chair. of the Fellows of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (FAANP). She has lectured and published nationally and internationally on cardiovascular disease management as well as on the role of the nurse practitioner.

**Interview Abstract:**

The interview focuses on Dr. Robert's commitment to the nurse practitioner movement, including the development and evolution of the Fellows of AANP (FAANP). Dr. Roberts was inducted into the second class of Fellows, in 2001, participating in the composition of organizational guidelines, in 2002. Early Fellows were concentrated in academia; FAANP continues to work at increasing inclusivity by embracing clinical, research and policy experts, as well. Dr. Roberts considers herself a "doer," and would like to be remembered as a person who tried to move the nurse practitioner movement forward. She recognized the need for a national NP organization to accomplish this goal, becoming a state, then a regional AANP (American Academy of Nurse Practitioners-now American Association of Nurse Practitioners) representative. She is one of only two people to have served in all three AANP positions: President of AANP, Chairperson of FAANP, and Chairperson of the AANP Certification Board. Dr. Roberts envisions the Fellows as a brain trust which should be tapped by the AANP Board to write rapid response articles on such topics as Gun Control and the Opioid Crisis. She emphasizes the need for nurse practitioners to be involved in professional organizations at the state and national levels to assure that the profession endures, noting that if we aren't attentive, it is "ours to lose."

**Biographical Sketch:**

Dr. Mary Ellen Roberts, currently an Associate Professor and Director of the DNP Programs at Seton Hall University, is certified as an adult and acute care nurse practitioner with a specialty in cardiovascular disease. Valued as an expert clinician and educator, she has a long history of distinguished leadership in nurse practice organizations. She received her BSN from St. Elizabeth's University, her MSN from Seton Hall University, and her DNP from the University of Iowa. Recognizing the need for national organizational impetus to nurture and promote the nurse practitioner role, she was elected as both an AANP NJ State and an AANP Region 2 representative before serving as AANP President, Chairperson of FAANP, and Chairperson of the AANP Certification Board. She serves on the editorial board of the Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and the Internet Journal of Advanced Nursing Practice. She is a member of FAANP, and FAAN, and was a charter member of the AANP Political Action Committee. She has planned AANP National Conferences, been an item writer for the AANP Certification Board Adult and Family Nurse Practitioner exams, and lectured and published widely on

cardiovascular issues and on the role of the nurse practitioner in our contemporary environment. She is committed to assuring the advancement of nurse practitioners and serves on the National Task Force for Quality Nurse Practitioner Education. She has been the recipient of numerous prestigious awards including the AANP Towers Pinnacle Award, and, in 2023, the FAANP Legacy Award.

Date Interview conducted: 4/30/18

Interviewer's Name: Carolyn T. Torre RN, MA, APN, FAANP

Place for Interview: Short Hills, NJ

Education: BSN: St. Elizabeth's University: 1985: MSN: Seton Hall University: 1990

DNP: University of Iowa: 2011

Key words:

nurse practitioner; leader; educator; president; chairperson; cardiovascular disease; certification

## **Interview Transcript: Interview with Mary Ellen Roberts**

1. Q. What has changed since you were inducted as a Fellow?

A. **I was inducted in the second class of Fellows, in 2001. There were no operating guidelines; there were just 30 Fellows between the first and second classes; we had a chairperson. In 2002, I participated in developing Operational Guidelines. At first, there were more academic/educators than clinicians, research, or policy experts; we have worked hard (and are still working) to try and be more inclusive.**

2. Q. What do you see as the pivotal moments in the past years?

A. **The first pivotal moment was 2003, when the AANP Board accepted the Fellows Operational Guidelines. Also pivotal: when we Fellows reached 500 members in 2015; the film about the Fellows by Sue Hagedorn, to celebrate our 15th Anniversary, that same year. Finally, an important pivotal moment was when the AANP Board realized that the organization had a brain trust in the Fellows.**

3. Q. How have you been able to impact the Nurse Practitioner movement?

A. **Through my involvement in the organization and through my determination to keep the organization moving forward. I joined AANP as a student nurse practitioner in 1988. In 1990, another member and I formed AANP's first Public Relations Committee and we sold coffee mugs at the DC conference with the AANP logo. In 1994, I was elected first NJ State Representative. In 1997, I was elected Regional Representative and became the first person from NJ on the AANP Board. I was instrumentally involved in the merger of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners and the American College of Nurse Practitioners in 2013.**

4. Q. Is there anything you would change if you had it to do over again?

A. **In the beginning, I don't know if we adequately articulated what the Fellows were and what we could contribute to the organization.**

5. Q. What advice would you give to yourself in 2000?

A. **I was never one to sit back and wait; I was serious and one for action. Looking back, I would have liked to stop and enjoy the ride. However, this was not substantive, because I did what I intended to do.**

6. Q. How would you like to be remembered?

A. **I would like to be remembered as a doer, as a person who wanted to move the nurse practitioner profession forward. I saw that this could be done through a professional organization and I worked to make that happen, first at the state level, and then through AANP. Having been elected as AANP NJ State Representative in 1994 and Regional Director (2) in 1997, I was then**

**elected as AANP Recording Secretary in 2001 and President-Elect in 2003. I served as AANP President from 2004-2006, came back to the Board as a Regional Director (2) in 2008, was elected Chairperson of the Fellows in 2014, and am, since 2017, Chairperson of the AANP Certification Board. After Mona Counts, I am the only person to have served in all three AANP positions: President of AANP; Chairperson of the Fellows and Chairperson of the AANP Certification Board.**

7. Q. What advice would you give to new nurse practitioners?

**A. Keep yourself involved in your profession through state and national professional organizations. The profession is "ours to lose."**

8. Q. What do you see in the future?

**A. For the Fellows: they will continue to grow and to become more involved in meeting the needs of the organization: they are already, for example, reviewing grant applications and conference abstracts. I urgently think the Fellows should be tapped to write Rapid Response Articles on behalf of AANP about current topics, such as Gun Control and the Opioid Crisis. For Nurse Practitioners: they will be the provider of choice, going forward. As Loretta Ford says, "we need to keep the nurse in nurse practitioner." We must guard against being subsumed by the medical model.**