

SPOTLIGHT on Maternal Child Health Nursing

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared 2020 the Year of the Nurse and Midwife. We are spotlighting different nursing specialties throughout the year as part of our celebration.

Maternal Child Health (MCH) nurses are often public health nurses who work with pregnant or postpartum women, and families with newborn infants or young children. These nurses devote their lives to caring for mothers and children by giving lifesaving immunizations and health advice and are often the first point of care in their communities.¹ Examples of MCH nurse positions include maternity nurse, lactation nurse, mother/baby expert, postpartum nurse, labor and delivery nurse, and many more.

Fairfax resident and VNA member Dena Carey, BSN, BS, RN is the Associate Vice President of Women and Infant Health Services at Virginia Hospital Center (VHC), and she has served the commonwealth as a registered nurse for more than a decade. Dena's commitment to excellence and practical business knowledge has helped elevate women and infant health at VHC and improved clinical quality, patient experience, safety and outcomes for women and newborns throughout the Northern Virginia and Washington, DC region.

"Dena's made a remarkable impact in a short time," says VHC Chief Nursing Officer Melody Dickerson. "She embraces change and is a role model



for holistic care that envelops the family unit. She quickly translates the latest evidence-based research into practice improvements for our NICU babies. Her strong record of innovation, outstanding leadership and community involvement have not only raised Virginia Hospital Center's ability to deliver ideal care to our NICU patients, but also fostered awareness and involvement outside our hospital walls."

In just three years, Dena elevated the NICU from Level II to Level III to provide higher-level care to sicker, younger babies. Under her leadership, the number of beds doubled (from 14 to 28); average daily census grew (from 14 to 18); physician coverage doubled; and staff tripled (from 27 nurses to 64). The Level III NICU now features a multidisciplinary team of pediatric subspecialists and specialized nurses who care for babies born before 32 weeks gestation, weighing less than 1,500 grams. Some are as small as 500 grams.

Dena also contributed to outpacing national NICU benchmarks as a member of the Vermont Oxford Network (VON), a nonprofit voluntary collaboration of 1,200 hospitals working to improve neonatal care around the world with data-driven quality improvement and research. Members track performance over time to benchmark their practices and outcomes. Just three years after joining VON, the VHC NICU now exceeds benchmarks in every quality outcome, including mortality, chronic lung disease, infections, retinopathy of prematurity and severe intraventricular hemorrhage (IVH). For example, Dena was instrumental in reducing IVH risk. She championed improvements to the transport process to give newborns a smoother ride from Labor & Delivery to the NICU and protect the arteries in their brains.

After seeing a need to improve language development in premature infants, Dena developed

the Book Buddies Program. She discovered research that showed NICU babies benefit when their parents talk to them and collaborated with the NICU Parent Advisory Council to create the unique program. Volunteers read to babies daily to promote language and speech development and provide company when parents cannot be there.

Dena earned her Bachelor of Science in Health Assessment and Promotion from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, VA in 2004, and her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY in 2006. A health assessment and promotion course at James Madison University changed her focus to healthcare. After she graduated, she worked as a unit secretary in a hospital.

"When I saw what nurses did – day in and day out – I realized I wanted to be on the other side of the desk," she says. "I wanted to be the point of care for the patient." Now enrolled at Virginia Tech in the evening Master's of Business Administration program, Dena hopes to earn the knowledge and understanding of the business landscape to drive her future as a nursing executive connecting women's health to the business challenges healthcare faces today.

If you or someone you know would like to be featured in the next edition of *Virginia Nurses Today* or the Virginia Nurses Association Facebook page for Year of the Nurse spotlights, please complete the form at <https://tinyurl.com/qto2zm5>. For questions, contact VNA Communications Coordinator Elle Buck at ebuck@virginiannurses.com.

References

- <https://www.who.int/news-room/campaigns/year-of-the-nurse-and-the-midwife-2020>

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