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#141 NURSE OF DISTINCTION

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VISITING
NURSING
ASSOCIATION
GROUP, INC.

home visitor

Board of Directors Profile

Marlene Ventura, D.Ed.

Marlene Ventura, D.Ed., could very well be the national spokesperson for the nursing profession.

Her face shows an excitement and passion when she talks about her chosen field. "There are exciting things going on in nursing. There are lots of diversified opportunities like home care, nursing homes, patient education and independent practice. Nursing is an excellent career."

Nurses today do have many paths from which to choose. For Ventura, that path was research, a field she stumbled upon while working toward one of her many degrees. Prior to obtaining her Doctorate in Health Education, Ventura received Master's Degrees in Health Education and Social and Preventative Medicine as well as a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing. All of her studies took place at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Ventura has been employed at Buffalo's Veterans Administration Medical Center since 1975 and is currently Associate Chief of Nursing Service and Research. Wearing many different hats, Ventura says she develops and facilitates the hospital's nursing

service program and also is in charge of the center's quality assurance program. In addition, she's always involved in some kind of research.

For the past three years, Ventura has been working on a five-year study funded by the National Center for Nursing Research at the National Institutes of Health. The study focuses on the potential for patient self-help to reduce care costs and involves patients with peripheral vascular disease, or poor circulation, in particular. Each subject is asked to set measurable goals for himself such as increasing exercise, decreasing cholesterol levels and stopping smoking.

"We're trying to find out if this type of intervention and the utilization of various health care services



Marlene Ventura is honored as a "Nurse of Distinction" at the VNA's annual dinner meeting.

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INSIDE...

- Details on the VNA's 104th annual dinner meeting
- VNA President re-elected to statewide post
- A look at the VNA's Speech Therapy Department

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Annual Meeting

1988 Was Year of Recovery for VNA



From left: Henry Kempton, member of the VNA Group Board of Directors; Susan Larman, vice president of the VNA of Western New York; and Samuel Kriegler, M.D., chairman of the Board of Directors for the VNA of Western New York.

Recovery efforts by the management and staff of the Visiting Nursing Association Group, Inc. were praised during the VNA's 104th annual dinner meeting May 23 at the Buffalo Marriott. In his Report to the Community, Dennis M. Penman, chairman of the VNA Group Board of Directors, thanked every employee of the Visiting Nursing Association of Western New York and Home Care Support Services.

"We are appreciative of your loyalty and commitment. We are overwhelmed by your dedication and spirit! You have gone well above the call of duty. You struggled to find solutions to problems that threatened, not only our ability to provide quality services, but the very essence of our survival."

Penman called 1988 a year of recovery for the VNA... recovery from one of the most devastating years ever for the nation's home care industry. 1987 saw massive retroactive denials by Medicare which created fiscal havoc for agencies. Some just left the Medicare programs, while others were put out of business. In an effort to be visionary and, thus, progressive in the VNA's efforts to ensure its vitality, Penman said the Board of Directors worked closely with top management not only to seek recovery from the Medicare denial crisis, but also to respond to the community needs.

To meet those needs, the VNA continued its expansion into Western New York last year by opening new offices in Wellsville in Allegany County and in Jamestown in Chautauque County. At the same time, the VNA's Erie County branches were consolidated under one roof at a new administrative headquarters in

Amherst. During this time, Penman said, "efficient planning efforts assured that VNA services to the community would not be interrupted." As a result, the VNA of Western New York provided 118,423 home visits to 7,987 individuals in its five county service area during 1988.

Home Care Support Services also relocated twice during the year, due mostly to the rapid growth of the agency. When it was formed in 1984, HCSS provided 26,000 hours of service. In 1988, the agency provided 391,000 hours of service.

Penman also remarked on the success of the Amherst Adult Day Program, a Town of Amherst project administered by the Visiting Nursing Association Group. "This program has such an excellent reputation that other communities are now interested in the program and we have been approached to expand our efforts."

Penman explained that the success of the VNA enterprise is that it has always

been attentive to serving the community. "For more than 103 years, the mission of the VNA has been to serve the public -- and to do so, we have adjusted as the environment has changed. Our goal is to promote the individual's ability to be independent and to remain in their own homes with their family."

To further enhance the VNA's progressive and versatile nature, it has always sought out "partners" with others who have similar philosophical commitments to the community. Such an approach last year fostered discussions and ultimate collaboration with VitalAlliance and Millard Fillmore Hospitals. Although this merger is still awaiting final approval from the New York State Health Department, cooperative efforts began earlier this year when Home Care Support Services and Vitalnet moved their offices into a central location.

To speak more about the upcoming merger between the Visiting Nursing Association and VitalAlliance, Penman introduced Jan Jennings, president of the Millard Fillmore Hospitals, who said, "This consolidation of resources provides a strong foundation from which all of us can provide our gifts and abilities to serve our neighbors here in Western New York."

Jennings called the merger a "unique" move because everyone wins -- the VNA, the hospital, and, most of all, the community. "The VNA is a treasure of Western New York as is Millard Fillmore Hospital, and we're going to put our resources together to provide a stronger, more vibrant, healthier home care delivery system."

Jennings also noted that the cooperative effort will be the largest and most significant provider of home health care services in Upstate New York, providing quality as well as highly-technical care at affordable prices. He noted that it also will foster cooperation in a highly competitive market by serving as an example of enlightened leadership.



Jan Jennings, president of Millard Fillmore Hospitals, and Dennis Penman, chairman of the VNA Group Board of Directors, enjoy dinner conversation at the VNA's annual meeting.

Staff Members Honored



Victoria DiCenzo, vice president of Home Care Support Services, presents a service plaque to Robert Pauly, retiring chairman of the HCSS Board of Directors.

"It's a real tribute to the VNA that this many people would come together on a night like this." Those were the words of Jan Jennings, president of Millard Fillmore Hospitals, as he addressed the crowd of more than 130 people at the Visiting Nursing Association's 104th annual dinner meeting.

One of the highlights of the evening was the presentation of service awards to staff members. Susan Larman, vice president of the Visiting Nursing Association of Western New York, presented five year pins to Denise Donahue, Dorothy Govenettio and Diane Reboj. Michael Burkard, Donna Wood, Peter Searcello and Pat Higgins received ten year pins. Margaret Fischer, an L.P.N., received a standing ovation when she received her pin for 20 years of service to the VNA.

The service awards presentation was especially significant for Home Care Support Services this year. It was

the first time the five year old agency has awarded service pins. Victoria DiCenzo, vice president of HCSS, presented five year pins to Antonina DiGaetano, Fannie Lee, Almae Meniflee, JoAnn Polisenio, Marian Strunk, Ethel Thomas, Duane Weber and Elke Wood.

In addition to the staff service awards, two special presentations were made at the end of the evening. Marlene R. Ventura, D.Ed., a member of the Board of Directors for VNA of WNY, Inc., was honored by the agency for her recent recognition at a "Nurse of Distinction" ceremony in Albany. Ms. Ventura was selected as the finalist from Western New York to receive the honor from Governor Mario Cuomo.

Also honored was Robert Pauly, former chairman of the Board of Directors for Home Care Support Services, Inc. Mr. Pauly was presented a plaque in recognition for his many years of dedicated service to the HCSS board.



VNA employee Margaret Fischer, L.P.N., receives a standing ovation as she is awarded a pin for 20 years of service to the agency.

Program Close-Up

Speech Therapists Do More Than Talk

"Most people don't realize all the areas covered by speech therapy," says Linda Stachowiak, clinical supervisor for the Visiting Nursing Association's speech therapy department. "The discipline is much broader than what it sounds."

Every patient admitted into the VNA's care receives a very detailed assessment on the initial visit which includes an overview of all the modes of communication including talking, writing, hearing and reading. Based on that assessment, Stachowiak says, "An individualized treatment plan is developed which is highly specific depending on the impairment of each modality."

Eighty-five percent of the VNA's speech therapy patients are recovering from strokes. In addition, therapists see patients with degenerative neurological disorders, such as Parkinson's Disease, and those people who have undergone a laryngectomy. Patients of all ages who have suffered head trauma also can benefit from the VNA's speech therapy services.

Whatever the disability, Stachowiak says, "Our goal is to always have the person communicate their needs and wants." Providing service in the home is a big help in working toward this goal. "Our biggest advantage in the home environment is that it allows us to get a functional idea of what the patient needs are. Whether the person lives alone or with family and what type of dwelling the person calls home are two things speech therapists consider when developing the patient's highly individualized treatment plan."

For example, if a patient lives alone and has no way to communicate, the speech therapist will establish emergency procedures with fire and police departments. Another advantage to speech therapy in the home is that it allows the utilization of family members to carry out treat-

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United Way
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Board of Directors Profile

Marlene Ventura, D.Ed.

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reduces patient care costs," says Ventura, who adds, "then we'll figure out how to incorporate the study's findings into nursing practice."

Her involvement in this research was one of the reasons Ventura recently was named one of eight "Nurses of Distinction" by the New York State Legislature. Ventura says when she found out about the award, she was "surprised and very proud to be a nurse and represent this region of the state." Ventura was selected among 42 nominations from Western New York hospitals and medical facilities.

The "Nurse of Distinction" awards were presented at an April ceremony in Albany presided over by Governor Cuomo who has promised his support for a public relations campaign to enhance the image of nursing. That's good news for Ventura who says the nursing field is rapidly changing and the public needs to know that. "We need to increase awareness of the unique contributions nurses are making throughout the

state in a variety of settings. They need to receive more credit for contributing to patient care."

Ventura notes that many nursing organizations are trying to enhance recruitment of men and women to the profession by promoting tuition assistance programs and flexible hours. At the V.A., Ventura says nursing scholarships and fellowships are offered. She predicts the nursing shortage will adjust itself with the eventual redistribution of the health care system.

Ventura's involvement with the Visiting Nursing Association began during her clinical experience in college but she did not become a member of the Board of Directors until five years ago. At that time, she filled a seat on the Board of Directors of Home Care Support Services, the VNA's sister agency which was just starting out. "It was very exciting being there in the beginning watching the agency develop its own clientele and identity."

HCSS was one of three subsidiaries formed under a parent company, Visiting Nursing Association

home visitor

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Visiting Nursing Association Group, Inc.
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The Visiting Nursing Association Group, Inc. is a voluntary, not-for-profit corporation which provides primary support services for its subsidiary organizations.

The Visiting Nursing Association of Western New York, Inc., a nonprofit agency established in 1985, provides nursing, therapies, and social services to individuals in their own homes.

The VNA Foundation is a nonprofit corporation whose fund-raising and development efforts provide resources and services to VNA Group and its subsidiaries.

Home Care Support Services, Inc. is a home care agency which provides private duty nurses, home health aides, personal care aides and companions.

Chairman of the Board
Dennis M. Penman

President

Alexine I. Janiszewski

Editor

Ann Reynolds

Group, Inc., when the VNA reorganized in 1984. Ventura says the agency had great foresight in planning such a reorganization. "The VNA has been flexible enough to meet the changing needs of the community as well as the government and reimbursement system. It's reorganization has served as a prototype for other agencies across the country. The VNA is a hallmark care organization in the delivery of quality home health care. It is on the cutting edge of the field."

Ventura's involvement in the nursing profession does not stop here. She is a manuscript reviewer for several national medical journals, including "Journal of Nursing Quality Assurance" and "Military Medicine." She also represents the V.A. system on national task forces, such as the National Research Council, and is one of only two nurses on the Institute of Medicine National Academy of Science.

Back in Buffalo, Ventura is an Associate Professor at SUNYAB and works with graduate students as a member of the thesis committee. 