

## **Rural Nurse Leaders: Who Are They? What Have They Done? Saying Goodbye To One And Moving On To Honor Others**

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“Leader,” such a simple word and such a complex concept. “A person who leads” is the definition found online at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/leader>. As you may remember from those socialization courses in Nursing, leaders use various types of power which may be “legitimate”, “referent”, “expert” etc. A true leader goes beyond those rather static definitions; they may at times have used various types of power or none that is recognizable until after their time of leadership has past. They may not even see themselves as leaders yet those in the profession recognize their influence, especially over time as the boundaries of knowledge and the profession change. I believe that one true definition of a leader is that they are the ones that push the boundaries of professional practice, research and / or roles. Meleis (1997) noted, visionary members of the discipline also change the domain of knowledge as they posit new or alter theoretical boundaries. They may bring knowledge from other areas or go beyond the current roles, research, and practice of the discipline. These visionary tactics may not always be looked upon in a favorable manner as they are emerging, but when they “lead” to new and often broader boundaries, roles and expectations, eventually the profession “catches up” enough with the leader that we get a vision, even if it is fleeting, of what they see for the future.

I believe rural nursing has had many of these visionaries, who have led this “specialty” to not only make rural nursing what it is today, but they are continuing to see “beyond” what most of us see to what we can be tomorrow and in the future. The purpose of this column is two-fold:

- 1) To recognize one Rural Nurse Leader as she retires from her current role but moves forward and as she, “temporarily” leaves the Rural Nurse Organization (RNO) leadership structure to literally take on a new mission in life.
- 2) To launch, what I hope, is a new column in the *Online Journal of Rural Nursing and Health Care*, entitled *Rural Nurse Leader*.

The idea for the new column emerged from conversations with Professor Emeritus Deana L. Molinari PhD, RN, CNE. Deana has been a nurse for about 46 years, moving from a diploma in nursing in 1966 to completion of her PhD in 2003. As with many nurses she furthered her education while simultaneously working at one or more professional positions over the years. Not to mention her other life roles that included being a mother to a rather large family, active in her church and community. As with many successful women, she balanced multiple roles with seeming ease but of course, more effort than meets the eye.

Deana became part of the RNO in the early 90’s when it was housed in Spokane and created by northwest nurses who wanted more opportunities for professional development. She was part of the creative team and worked on the original issues for the *Online Journal of Rural Nursing and Health Care* along with Dr. Jeri Dunkin first Editor-In-Chief of this journal.

Deana is one of those leaders whose vision goes beyond what most of us “see.” She pushes the boundaries of our profession and certainly has pushed the boundaries of rural nursing through her commitment to several rural health care professional organizations, particularly the RNO.

Dr. Molinari has developed and ran nurse residencies to help nurses gain both technical and professional skills, in a supportive environment, as they transition from formal education into practices, particularly in the rural health care arena. She has had two Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), grants funded for Northwest Rural Residency programs and these are models

for the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the *Future of Nursing* report (Committee on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing & Medicine, 2011). Her scholarship has been focused on assisting students with the development of critical thinking skills and various issues around online education and learning, which is touted as one tool for improving not only the quality and accessibility of education to rural nurses but also to improve the health care to rural populations. An area of focus for Deana as president of the RNO has been to move the organization to the development of competencies for rural nursing and someday a way to credential professionals specifically for rural nursing. Another passion for Deana is the need to support rural nursing research. She oversaw the development of a research fund, which allowed the organization to give the first \$500 research grant in October 2011. There are now guidelines in place for applying for and reviewing the grant application. It is also possible to make a donation to support the Rural Nurse Research Grant fund. If you are interested in doing so, please contact Karla Jordan, RNO office manager at [rno@bama.ua.edu](mailto:rno@bama.ua.edu)

Every once in a while I think I see a glimpse of what Dr. Molinari envisions for rural nursing and hope she will find a way to continue to enlighten the rest of us even if in the future it is to be from afar. She writes that as health care is changing,

“Rural health care providers are positioned to lead the inter professional, collaborative, and community skills needed in the new system. Study of health will be organized differently. A deep understanding of a body system will not be sufficient for most health providers. New skills to support patients in home, to navigate the health system, and to facilitate self-care will be required of all nurses. Nurses will perform more case management and supplement the care given by families. Patients and caregivers will lead health teams. Providers will aid patients to prevent crises and provide rehabilitate at home. The goal is to cut hospital care by 80%. The change may take time ... but the fundamental thinking and philosophy of change is already well underway.”

Now that she has “officially” retired as a community Health CNS in Oregon and from her position at Idaho State University in the summer, she is envisioning new opportunities and is headed off on a new adventure. She notes that she and her husband are preparing to go on a mission for the Church of Latter-Day Saints. They have not yet been told what they will be doing or exactly where in the world they will be working but are brushing up on their Italian, although they may be on their way to other parts of the world such as Africa or South America. They are preparing for some family events, cleaning and packing and helping their adult children with disabilities to transition to their adult living status. Deana writes “Honestly, we are not interesting people. We are just people trying to live useful lives...” I would agree they are leading useful lives but believe that Deana Molinari is one of the most interesting people I have had the pleasure to work with in the past few years, and is a true Rural Nurse Leader.

If you have a rural nurse leader you would like to recognize please contact me at [psfahs@binghamton.edu](mailto:psfahs@binghamton.edu) about writing a column on the work of that individual. I hope you will all wish Deana Molinari well on her future life adventures and think about others you have known who have led or are currently leaders in rural nursing.

### References

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