

Cultivating Curiosity

Kelsey Moroz

We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths. — Walt Disney



Leslie Painter Wilson, MS, RN, CWOCN became interested in ostomies as a young teenager in the early 1970s when her grandfather was diagnosed with colon cancer. He lived with an ostomy for 2 years before he died. “There was little conversation about his condition and what happened to him,” Leslie says “But it sparked my curiosity.”

Leslie’s curiosity led her to nursing. She started her career in 1977 as a LPN. While working, she pursued her RN degree, graduating from Mercy Hospital’s diploma program (Altoona, PA) in 1983 and earning a BSN and eventually a Master in Science in Nursing from Indiana University of Pennsylvania (Indiana, PA).

With a continued desire to expand her knowledge and a lingering curiosity about her late grandfather’s condition, Leslie began working with the ostomy team at Altoona Hospital (Altoona, PA) in 1986. “Annetta Walter, RN, CETN was retiring, and after spending a day with her I applied for the position and was accepted,” Leslie says. Six months in to the new job, Leslie attended the Harrisburg Hospital (Harrisburg, PA) Enterostomal Therapy course and became a certified Enterostomal Therapy Nurse, or CETN, in 1987. This certification later became known as a certified wound, ostomy, and incontinence nurse (CWOCN), which expanded the role for the CETN to WOCN. “Since achieving my certification, I have been caring for people with ostomies and complicated wounds and have been an advocate for continence,” Leslie says.

The inspiration she received from Annetta motivated her to become more involved in care. “Annetta’s encouragement and her previous commitment to the field, caring for ostomy patients, fostered my involvement with the United Ostomy Associations of America (UOAA) as part of my career path. Since that time, helping patients learn about and cope with their ostomies has been an important part of my nursing career.”

Leslie is currently the vice president of the local UOAA. In her opinion, one of her most important roles is patient advocate; being involved with support groups provides her a setting in which she is able to relay information to help persons struggling with new ostomies, as well persons who have

learned to live and cope with ostomies. For the past 28 years, attending local, regional, and national WOCN conferences; networking with colleagues; reading journals; and maintaining her CWOCN have provided continued opportunities for learning and skill refinement.

One colleague from whom Leslie has learned a great deal is Nancy Faller, RN, PhD, ET. As Leslie points out, when she first became a CETN the focus was mostly on ostomy care; when the specialty expanded she was expected to become knowledgeable in the continence care arena. Leslie credits Dr. Faller’s “exuberant enthusiasm” with fostering her own desire to learn more about continence. “Over the years, her compassionate presentations were embedded with an overwhelming amount of knowledge and interest in continence care,” Leslie says. “Dr. Faller remains an essential resource in my life-long learning.”

Leslie currently works with the Home Nursing Agency (HNA) Healthcare (Altoona, PA), a position she has held for the last 10 years. She credits the HNA administration for how far her position has evolved. Her responsibilities include, but are not limited to, problem-solving complex ostomy and wound care; chart audits; and collaboration with product suppliers, nursing supervisors, and physicians. In addition, educating new and seasoned employees regarding ostomy care, collaborating with and mentoring nurses about the care of ostomies in the home care setting, direct patient care, and phone consultations are important pieces in providing essential care. In addition, encounters with the dietitian, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and other health care providers help provide holistic recovery for an ostomate.

Three Ps have been Leslie’s motto for years: Persistence and patience will prevail. “If you don’t get it right the first time around, don’t give up in your pursuit for the best solution,” she says. And while there’s no doubt that persistence and patience will help any nurse prevail, curiosity — the desire to seek new answers and open new doors — is what keeps good clinicians moving toward a more constantly challenging and fulfilling scope of practice. ■

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