



Brief History Of School Nursing In North Carolina

By: **Dr. Phoebe Pollitt, RN**

Abstract

Within a decade of Lina Rogers Struthers becoming the first school nurse in the United States in 1902 in New York City, Percy Powers of Winston-Salem became the first school nurse in North Carolina. In 1911, the Wayside Workers of the Home Moravian Church, hired nurse Powers to do health inspection and follow-up work among the school children of East and West Salem schools. She measured height and weight, and screened for vision, dental problems, swollen tonsils and adenoids, and malnutrition. She also taught students and parents basic sanitation, nutrition and hygiene to prevent and control the spread of disease. On May 1, 1915, the NC State Board of Health organized the Medical Inspection of School Unit. Surveys of North Carolina school children revealed that 80% needed dental treatment, 10% had diseased throats, 5% had defective vision and/or hearing, and numerous others suffered from tuberculosis, malaria, hookworm, and malnutrition. The alarming results moved the state legislature to fund six full-time nurses to travel across the state and provide screening and follow-up services at three-year intervals for all students under the seventh grade, regardless of race.

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Brief History of School Nursing in North Carolina

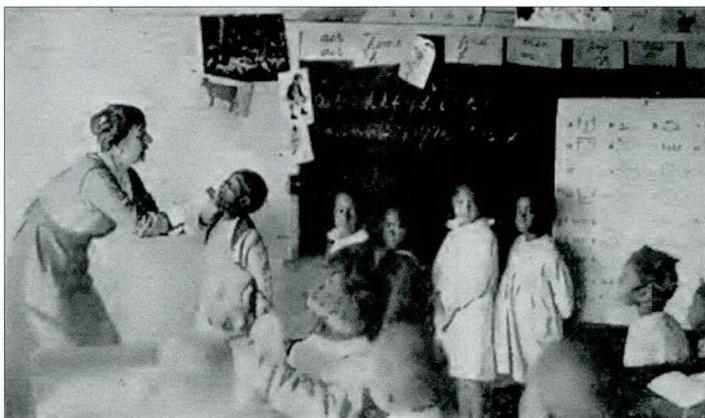
By Dr. Phoebe Pollitt, RN; Nursing History Council Member

Within a decade of Lina Rogers Struthers becoming the first school nurse in the United States in 1902 in New York City, Percy Powers of Winston-Salem became the first school nurse in North Carolina. In 1911, the Wayside Workers of the Home Moravian Church, hired nurse Powers to do health inspection and follow-up work among the school children of East and West Salem schools.

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Each of the first six school nurses served for over 18 years. They were Birdie Dunn, Cleone Hobbs, HP Guffy, Flora Ray, Cora Beam, and Katherine Livingston. Some cities and towns hired additional school nurses to better meet local needs. Dr. George Cooper of the state Board of Health noted the state school nurses "have taught the benefits of good health to the people of every community in NC. They have traveled on foot, horseback, on rafts, by boat, tram, ox cart, anyway to reach the 'forgotten child.'"



A school nurse from Cleveland County, North Carolina, gives a vision screening. Photo courtesy of North Carolina Nursing History (NCNH) at Appalachian State University.

By the late 1920s, nurses employed by the State Board of Health, city and county health departments, and church and civic organizations provided North Carolina schools and children with the basics of school nursing services. However, due to the financial crisis of the Great Depression in the 1930s, school nurses and their services were greatly curtailed.

It took nearly half a century for school nursing to become a specialty practice area. In the 1970s, the US Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Act which gave every child from age 3 to 21 the right to a free appropriate public education. In order to meet the physical needs of children with a wide variety of physical abilities, many North Carolina School systems hired full or part time nurses.

The North Carolina School Nurse Association formed in 1992. Collaborating with NCNA, the organizations have brought about legislative and administrative advances:

- **1993** NC State Board of Education adopts policy requiring all newly hired school nurses to be nationally certified within three years of being hired.
- **1995** NC State Board of Education adopts the "Special Health Care Services" policy, requiring local school districts to make RNs available for assessment, care planning, and on-going evaluation of students with special health care needs.
- **2003** NC General Assembly requests NC State Board of Education to conduct a formal study of school health needs. It recommends expansion of school nursing services to reach a 1:750 best-practice goal by the year 2014.
- **2004** NC General Assembly provides funds for 65 time-limited nurse positions over a two year period and 80 permanent school nurse positions.
- **2005-2007** \$5,000,000 is appropriated for 50 new permanent school nurse positions.
- **2018** NC General Assembly's Program Evaluation Division releases study showing a greater need for school nurses across the state; cost for meeting current standards is estimated to be \$79-million. ■

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