



Brief History Of Men In Nursing In North Carolina

By: **Phoebe Pollitt, RN**

Abstract

Before the 1950s, professional nursing was not welcoming to men. The American Nurses Association did not allow male membership for its first 40 years and the US Army Nurse Corps only began employing male nurses in 1955. Very few men were taught or practiced nursing in the United States or North Carolina before the 1970s. A 1906 report records one male student enrolled at the Fowle Hospital School of Nursing (HSON) in Washington and two at the Wilson Sanitarium SON in Wilson. Mountain Sanitarium SON in Fletcher also accepted male applicants in the early 1900s. Benn Harrison, a graduate of the Angel Brothers HSON in Franklin, was on the nursing registry in Macon County before 1929. The number of men perusing nursing careers increased when nursing education became available in community college and university settings in the 1960s.

Pollitt, P. (2017). "Brief History of Men in Nursing in North Carolina." *Tar Heel Nurse*, Fall 2017, 79(5): 16-16. 3/4p. Publisher version of record available at: <https://login.proxy006.nclive.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ccm&AN=125212515&site=eds-live&scope=site>

Brief History of Men in Nursing in North Carolina

By NCNA Member Phoebe Pollitt, RN; Nursing History Council Member

Before the 1950s, professional nursing was not welcoming to men. The American Nurses Association did not allow male membership for its first 40 years and the US Army Nurse Corps only began employing male nurses in 1955. Very few men were taught or practiced nursing in the United States or North Carolina before the 1970s.

A 1906 report records one male student enrolled at the Fowle Hospital School of Nursing (HSON) in Washington and two at the Wilson Sanitarium SON in Wilson. Mountain Sanitarium SON in Fletcher also accepted male applicants in the early 1900s. Benn Harrison, a graduate of the Angel Brothers HSON in Franklin, was on the nursing registry in Macon County before 1929. The number of men perusing nursing careers increased when nursing education became available in community college and university settings in the 1960s.

Two men graduated from Asheville's Memorial Mission Hospital School of Nursing in 1964. One, Billy Joe Rowell, RN, began his career at Dix Hospital, the state psychiatric hospital in Raleigh. He was quoted in the *Raleigh News and Observer*:

[Tranbarger] is an educator, clinician, historian, legislative advocate, leader, author, and trailblazer.

"When a person is sick and a nurse comes in to care for him, it makes no difference to the patient whether-or-not the nurse is a male or female."

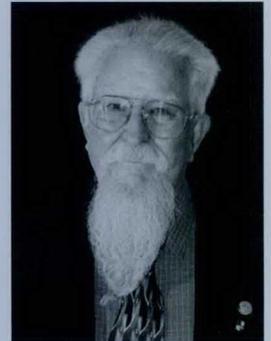
By 1975, 13 men had graduated in the nursing class at UNC-Chapel Hill.

In the early 1970s, male nurses began becoming involved in professional organizations and assuming leadership positions in hospitals across the state. Joe Caldwell was active in NCNA and served as Secretary from 1971-1973. In 1973, Gaylord Snyder assumed the position of Nursing Director at New Hanover Memorial Hospital in Wilmington. That same year, Eugene Smith was the Director of Nursing at Charlotte Memorial Hospital. Smith also served on both the NCNA's Board of Directors and the North Carolina Board of Nursing.

William Sink, an ADN graduate of Carolina Piedmont Community College became the Director of Nursing at

Hickory's Catawba Valley Hospital in 1970. Sam Beam, a 1967 graduate of Central Piedmont Community College's ADN program, became the first nurse elected to the North Carolina General Assembly in 1980.

The male nurse who has, perhaps, made the biggest impact on nursing in North Carolina is Past NCNA President and Hall of Fame member Russell Eugene Tranbarger. He is an educator, clinician, historian, legislative advocate, leader, author, and trailblazer. Tranbarger started breaking barriers for men early in his career as a student nurse. In 1958, he was elected president of the Student Nurse Association of Illinois, the first man to hold that office. After earning his MSN in Nursing Administration from UNC-Chapel Hill in 1970, Tranbarger became the Associate Director of Nursing at North Carolina Memorial Hospital. While there, he was appointed as an adjunct faculty member at the UNC School of Nursing, becoming the first male nursing faculty member in North Carolina.



Gene Tranbarger

Throughout his career, Tranbarger has been a leader in state and national nursing associations, holding a variety of offices in organizations including the American Nurses Association, the North Carolina Foundation for Nursing, the North Carolina Federation of Nursing Organizations, the American Academy of Nursing, and the American Association of Men in Nursing. He is the only man to serve as both President of the North Carolina Nurses Association and Chair the North Carolina Board of Nursing. In 2007, he coauthored *Men in Nursing*, the first book to focus on the history, challenges and opportunities for men in nursing.

Male nurses have made significant contributions to North Carolina nursing history and are invaluable to our collective professional future. ■

Are you interested in joining the Nursing History Council? We would love to have you! NCNA members are welcome to join any council they wish. To change your council status, simply update your Member Profile at ncnurses.org or email kristingoins@ncnurses.org.