



## Eloise "Patty" Rawlings Lewis: Scholar, Practitioner, Leader, Trailblazer

By: **Phoebe Pollitt, RN**

### Abstract

Eloise Patricia Lewis, RN, PhD, was one of North Carolina's most influential nurses. Some of her contributions to nursing include being the founding dean of the UNC-Greensboro School of Nursing, President of the North Carolina Nurse Association (1967-1969), President of the NC League for Nursing, member of the NC Board of Nursing, and an NCNA Hall of Fame inductee. She gained recognition on a national level as one of 36 Charter Fellows in the American Academy of Nurses, serving as president of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (1978-1980) and was the first editor of the *Journal of Professional Nursing*. Over her long career she received many honors and awards, including the 1976 Max O Gardner UNC system-wide award for excellence in teaching; the Peter Keys Award, the highest state-wide honor for leadership in Hospice; and the Founders Award, the highest honor bestowed by Sigma Theta Tau.

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# Eloise “Patty” Rawlings Lewis: Scholar, Practitioner, Leader, Trailblazer

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

Eloise Patricia Lewis, RN, PhD, was one of North Carolina’s most influential nurses. Some of her contributions to nursing include being the founding dean of the UNC-Greensboro School of Nursing, President of the North Carolina Nurse Association (1967-1969), President of the NC League for Nursing, member of the NC Board of Nursing, and an NCNA Hall of Fame inductee. She gained recognition on a national level as one of 36 Charter Fellows in the American Academy of Nurses, serving as president of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (1978-1980) and was the first editor of the Journal of Professional Nursing. Over her long career she received many honors and awards, including the 1976 Max O Gardner UNC system-wide award for excellence in teaching; the Peter Keys Award, the highest state-wide honor for leadership in Hospice; and the Founders Award, the highest honor bestowed by Sigma Theta Tau.

Born in Pageland, South Carolina, in 1920, Lewis was drawn to nursing and education from a young age. She successfully combined her interests throughout her career. After graduating from the Vanderbilt University Hospital School of Nursing with a BSN in 1941, she joined the faculty of the Women’s Medical College School of Nursing in Philadelphia and then the faculty at Johns Hopkins University. In 1945, Lewis enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps and served at Valley Forge General Hospital near Philadelphia. After the war, Lewis was both on the faculty and a graduate student at University of Pennsylvania, earning her MS in Education in 1951. She came to NC in 1953 as a professor and later director of graduate programs at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Nursing. In 1963, she earned a PhD in Education from Duke University.

In 1966 Lewis became the founding dean of the new BSN program at UNC-G. Under her leadership, the school graduated thousands of nurses, earned national accreditation, added an MSN program, and began a new chapter of Sigma Theta Tau. The program flourished, becoming one of the premier nursing schools in NC.

In the community, Lewis was a leader in expanding hospice services while creating hospice nursing as a specialty area of practice. Lewis helped develop the first inpatient hospice unit in NC, the first grief counseling center attached to a hospice, the first pediatric-focused grief counseling center and the first AIDS-focused hospice residence in NC.

Perhaps Lewis’s greatest contribution to nursing in North Carolina was chairing the committee that led to the successful revision of the Nurse Practice Act (NPA) in 1981. She, Ernestine Small, Audrey Booth, Frances Miller, and Eugene Tranbarger led the effort to rewrite the NPA and then persuade their elected state representatives to enact the proposed new NPA into law. Important changes in the new NPA included (1) definitions of the scopes of practice for RNs and LPNs, (2) the repeal of the statute that allowed unlicensed persons to perform any function as long as it was performed under the supervision of a physician, dentist or RN (3) election of the majority of the members of the Board of Nursing (BON)

by nurses across the state, and (4) term limits for BON members. In addition, new graduates were limited to failing the NCLEX three times before they were required to have educational remediation. Finally, for the first time, employers were required to verify a nurses' license before the nurse could begin work. As would be expected, the NC Medical Society and many hospital administrators fought the passage of the new NPA. The leadership team established the Federation of Nursing Organizations, composed of the leaders of all the specialty nursing organizations in the state; that group, alongside thousands of individual nurses, "spoke with one voice" to the legislature and were victorious in passing the new NPA on May 12, (Florence Nightingale's birthday) 1981.

Eloise "Patty" Rawlings Lewis, who passed away in 1999, was a scholar, educator, community activist, and nursing trailblazer.