

Subject: Best Practice Nursing Care in Population Health/Primary Health Care

Profile: Judy Conrad, RN
Family Practice Nurse, Shelburne Medical Associates, Shelburne, NS

Title Suggestion: **A Lifeline to Care**

Whether she's at the post office or running errands in the mall, Judy Conrad, a registered nurse in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, meets appreciative patients everywhere. You might say it's because she lives and works in a small town, however, it's more likely a result of her commitment to patient advocacy.

As the only family practice nurse working with three physicians and two support staff in a busy clinic (Shelburne Medical Associates), Judy's practice is very diverse. From assessing patients and conducting 'well baby checks', to administering PAP tests and breast exams, to teaching breast self-examinations, attending to dressings, checking blood pressure checks, or reviewing diagnostic tests, Judy is involved in all stages of managing and monitoring patient care.

"I often tell people that everyone needs a lifeline and that I'm theirs," says Judy. "I'm the one that patients see at the very beginning ... when they get their diagnosis. And whether it's high blood pressure, diabetes or cancer, they soon learn that I have the ability to expedite tests and consultations, and that I am there for them."

Judy spends a lot of time on the phone — sometimes determining who needs to see a doctor or go to the out-patient department, at other times giving advice on topics such as parenting and first-aid. She works in consultation with the clinic physicians, as well as with other healthcare professionals such as pharmacists, VON nurses and staff at other doctors' offices.

Delivering the best care possible is at the forefront of Judy's practice. While the standards and code of ethics set by her profession are the foundations of her practice, she also stays current on issues affecting her practice by regularly consulting with her peers and researching topics in current publications and on the Internet.

"If a patient calls with a health related question, I do whatever I can to find the answer," she says. For instance, when changes were recently made to the immunization schedules, Judy studied the issue then posted notices in the clinic and talked with parents. However, how does she know she's delivering the best care possible?

"Results are a large part of it," says Judy. "Is a wound getting better . . . is a patient satisfied? When I give advice, I always ask: 'Are you comfortable with this?' Or, I'll ask them to call me back to let me know how things are going."

Of course, having over 35 years of nursing experience also helps. After graduating from the former Sydney City Hospital School of Nursing, Judy practised in neurosurgery at the Victoria General Hospital. From there, she moved to the hospital's neuro ICU and became involved in the Canadian Association of Neuroscience Nurses (CANN). Family ties then took her to Shelburne, where she became a staff nurse and, later, an evening supervisor at the Roseway Hospital.

Through her work with CANN, as well as by serving as a local representative for the Registered Nurses' Association of Nova Scotia (now known as the College of Registered Nurses), Judy says she gained a stronger understanding of the work of these nursing organizations and the significance of her profession's by-laws, code of ethics and standards of practice. She maintains that all her experiences prepared her for her current role, which she has developed over the past 21 years. In particular, Judy loves the independence of her position and the people she meets.

"I get very close to my patients," says Judy. "I'm now immunizing the children of children I immunized years ago. I was even in the case room when some of them were born!"

Of course, she knows this cycle of life will continue and with it so will the need for family practice nurses. "Spring is coming," she says, "and the gardening season is upon us, so I've posted notices in our examination rooms ... 'Get your tetanus shot here ... just ask the nurse!'"