

# McArthur, Donna Behler



Dr. Donna McArthur was educated as a Family Nurse Practitioner (Family Nurse Clinician; later changed to FNP). She began her RN career, following graduation from a diploma school of nursing in the US Air Force where she worked for over 10 years in the ICU and as a Flight Nurse. Following her military career, she studied for the BSN where she developed her passion for community health. Following the completion of an MSN as Family Nurse Practitioner Dr McArthur held the roles of NP educator, and administrator within ambulatory health care settings in the United States and Saudi Arabia.

## Interview Abstract

During the interview Dr. McArthur recalls the opportunity she had to become a Flight Nurse and how that independent role ultimately lead her to her becoming an NP. She remembers this experience as her first taste of independent practice. Dr. McArthur admits to being clueless as to what an NP was let alone how to become one when she was completing her BSN at the University of Maryland School of Nursing in 1975. Her instructor asked if she had considered becoming an FNP because of her passion for the community health course she was taking.

Dr. McArthur remembers that very few providers let alone patients knew what NPs were since the role was so new. She states she began her FNP career with a joint appointment at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing and the Vanderbilt University Medical Center Occupational Health Clinic, which had an NP director. Dr. McArthur discusses leading the development and implementation of the DNP program at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing as one of her proudest accomplishments. She goes on to discuss the various roles she held both in the US and Saudi Arabia.

The interview concludes with changes she has seen in educational programs, the impact of technology and offers advice to new nurse practitioners. Dr. McArthur envisions NPs as the key providers of health care -particularly primary care – in the world.

## Biographical Sketch

Dr. McArthur has over 50 years of nursing experience, including 40 years as a Family Nurse Practitioner, NP educator, and administrator within ambulatory health care settings in the United States and Saudi Arabia. She currently holds adjunct clinical professor positions at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing and the University of Arizona College of Nursing and Department of Neurology. She was the DNP Program Director (2008-2012) at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing. Previously, Dr. McArthur was Director of the FNP Program at VUSN during which time she was awarded a Robert Wood Johnson grant to participate in a national program to develop a model for educating NP students in a managed-care setting. In recent years, Dr. McArthur's scholarship, practice, and community activities have focused on initiatives surrounding the healthcare of adults with ALS in addition to the education of nurses in advanced nursing practice. She completed a BSN at the University of Maryland School of Nursing in 1975 after having graduated from a diploma school in 1967. In 1977 Dr. McArthur attained an MSN at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing.

**Key Words**

Nurse Practitioners, Nurse Practitioner history, advanced practice nurses, ambulatory health, NP education, military nurse practitioners.

**Interview Transcript**

**Donna McArthur**

**Interview**

**AANP Oral History Project**

## Interview with Donna Behler McArthur

**Education: NP program year, graduate programs year:** 1977 Vanderbilt University School of Nursing, MSN, FNC (Family Nurse Clinician; later changed to FNP)

**Certifications;** APRN, FNP-BC

### Short Bio:

Dr. Donna McArthur has over 50 years' experience within nursing, including 40 years as a Family Nurse Practitioner, NP educator, and administrator within ambulatory health care settings in the United States and Saudi Arabia. She currently holds adjunct clinical professor positions at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing and the University of Arizona College of Nursing and Department of Neurology. She was DNP Program Director (2008-2012) at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing. Previously, Dr. McArthur was Director of the FNP Program at VUSN during which time she was awarded a Robert Wood Johnson grant to participate in a national program to develop a model for educating NP students in a managed-care setting. In recent years, Dr. McArthur's scholarship, practice, and community activities have focused on initiatives surrounding the healthcare of adults with ALS in addition to the education of nurses in advanced nursing practice.



### When did you become an NP? What was the motivation?

I became an NP in 1977. Admittedly, I was clueless as to what an NP was let alone how to be one. I was completing my BSN at the University of Maryland School of Nursing in 1975 having graduated from a Diploma school in 1967. I immersed myself in the community health course doing home visits, assessing families...My instructor asked me if I had considered becoming an FNP. In addition, I took an elective with an NP who had graduated from a Primex program. The rest is history.

**What experiences did you bring into the role?** Prior to becoming an NP I had been an RN for over 10 years which included being in the US Air Force (ICU and as a Flight Nurse). In the beginning of my career I had the opportunity to become a flight nurse. I felt this was the highest level of nursing in the Air Force. I went to the airbase in Alaska then to Japan and trained on a C141. This was my first taste of independent practice. At 33,000 feet with seriously wounded soldiers as team leader I needed to make decisions. The Viet Nam war was not popular, but the soldiers deserved the best care and support. We needed to give them a voice.

**Did you experience any challenges? How were they resolved?** The role was very new, and few providers let alone patients knew what we were. I enjoy new experiences and beginnings -less so status quo and endings- but at the same time wanted a "safe place". I began my FNP career with a joint appointment at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing and the Vanderbilt University Medical Center Occupational Health Clinic, which had an NP director. Specific challenges were largely related to sociopolitical agendas. Two examples occurred in the early 80s as I developed the role of an NP Director of a college student health service. The AIDS epidemic was coming to the forefront and I created one of the first policies for campus use working with the college president and student affairs. Educating the Board of Trust members was challenging and rewarding increasing the visibility of NPs as well as insuring

best practices in the care of all students. Likewise, addressing the provision of reproductive health care brought on interesting dialogues.

Later I had the opportunity to practice in Saudi Arabia for three 18-month tours. This was certainly a transcultural experience. With the assistance of an interpreter I started a women's health clinic for employees and their dependents. Over 60 nationalities were represented within the hospital with most of the Arabic-speaking women fearful of a premarital gyn exam. An important aspect of the position was to support and empower women.

Achieving buy-in from ethnically diverse providers was an education. The clinic -to my knowledge- continues to be well -received after almost 30 years.

**What was most challenging in your career/ most important ?** The most challenging and at the same time important piece was knowing what I did not know and where to find the answers. Collaboration for patient-centric care.

My career trajectory has included NP education. Leading the development and implementation of the DNP program at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing is one of my proudest accomplishments. Of note is that first lecture I gave as a newly graduated FNP and new faculty member. Having minimal education regarding pedagogy, I was on an uphill climb. That climb continued .

**Is there anything you would want to change?** Savor the process is an adage I repeat to students and I wish I had focused more on learning throughout my various educational pursuits rather than getting the degree, certification.

**What do you see as pivotal moments in the past years?** Changes in the educational process to include the DNP degree; the impact of technology. Certainly, expanding scope of practice throughout the US and globally is noteworthy.

**What advice would you give to new nurse practitioners?** NPs have the potential to change health globally, one cohort at a time. The journey from novice to expert is very rich; find mentors along the way.

**What do you see as the role of Nurse Practitioners in the next 25 years?** The key providers of health care -particularly primary care – in the world. Is this dreaming or what?

Nurse Practitioners continue to evolve. Currently I am part of national, state, and local organizations/teams to address the physical and psychosocial needs of people living ALS. It is important to advocate through the lens of a nurse practitioner. I like to call my activities and service to the ALS, homeless, and faith communities as "Preferment" in lieu of retirement. With our accumulated wisdom, NPs continue to improve the quality of lives within diverse populations while perceiving the world through individual lenses.

The interview was conducted in person in AZ and continued over phone and email communications in April 2019 by Barbara Sheer.

