



Wendy Thon

Introduction

Wendy Thon, MSN, FNP-C, FAANP originally from Chicago was educated in Colorado and then moved to Alaska, where she resides with her family. She has held clinical positions in private practice, worked with the Alaska Board of Nursing on passing prescriptive drug regulation, and insurance coverage for advanced practice nurses. She has held leadership positions on the state and national levels. On the national level was an American Academy (Association) of Nurse Practitioners board member in the early years of the organization. She was actively involved in developing the certification examination and was a commissioner for the AANP Certification Program. She was appointed to the Nurse Practitioner position for the Alaska State Board of Nursing by Governor Bill Walker for 2016-2020 term.

Abstract

Ms Thon describes managing the balance between family, clinical work, and being involved in state and national leadership positions. She discusses her position as a Fellow being part of a group some with of PhD's and the development of the certification program. . She cautions new nurse practitioners who accept positions in pain management with little experience. She is very concerned with the opioid crises and reminds nurse practitioners that just because they can prescribe doesn't mean they need to prescribe. They need to be mindful that there are times when they are not the best provider for the patient, and it is more prudent to refer. She feels the Affordable Care Act was a pivotal moment in history and is grateful for the opportunity to see changes in the expansion of nurse practitioner practice.

Short Bio

Wendy Thon, MSN, FNP-C, FAANP currently holds a clinical position within a private practice group. She worked closely with the Alaska Board of Nursing on passing prescriptive drug regulations and controlled substance prescriptive privileges for NPs, as well as legislation related to insurance coverage for NPs. As the Maternal Child Health Coordinator for the State of Alaska, Ms. Thon wrote regulations for direct entry midwives and regulations for payments for low-income pregnant women outside the Medicaid reimbursement schedule. Ms. Thon has held many positions in the Alaska Nurse Practitioner Association from President, Vice President, Secretary and Conference Coordinator for four years. Ms. Thon has been a board member on the American Academy (Association) for several terms and was on the American Academy of Nurse Practitioner Certification Program from conception until 2013. She was appointed to the Nurse Practitioner position for the Alaska State Board of Nursing by Governor Bill Walker for 2016-2020 term.

Keywords

Advanced practice nurse, nurse practitioner, Alaska healthcare, leadership.

Transcript

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AANP Oral History Project

Celebration of Charter Fellow

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Introduction:

Wendy was a charter member of FAANP. Having worked together as board members of AANP, we shared some of those early experiences. In the early days the board meetings were at Jan Towers farm, where we crammed around the table being lucky to have committed members traveling to Pennsylvania from Alaska for a weekend. During conferences we arrived early, had board meetings, put together conference materials, and often presented and acted as moderators during the meetings. After the conference many of us stayed to participate in test construction and item writing. Since funding was limited we shared rooms and became good friends as well as colleagues. Wendy said she was so fortunate to meet so many wonderful, dedicated and inspiring women and men through her experience.

BLS: How did you feel when you were notified that you were selected as a Charter Fellow?

WT: I was very honored by my selection into the first group of FAANP inductees. With a young family and difficulty spreading out my time with family, private practice and professional obligations, I had to choose in which professional organizations I could continue to participate. I chose the AANPCP and for 23 years was on the board for the AANPCP. I remain very proud of my contribution to the AANPCP and AANP. I am now on the AK BON and finding a different way to impact NP practice and nursing in Alaska.

I was fortunate to meet so many wonderful, dedicated and inspiring women. It was intimidating being with so many PhDs and east coast connections, but we westerners are an independent lot and wanted to make an impact. I was grateful to have been selected for my clinical expertise.

BLS: In 2000 you were selected as a charter fellow what has changed since then?

WT: Our profession is changing fast with so many avenues for Nurse Practitioners to expand their practices. There is more mobility for NPs among states in which to practice, and tele-health that will expand our reach to patients. I think the growth of NPs in the US and abroad is exciting, for providing health care to more and more communities.

BLS: What do you see are the pivotal moments in the past years?

WT: My caution for NP practice is the opioid epidemic. I have seen more and more NPs who are finishing their initial programs signing on to pain management programs/clinics and even those NPs who have had many years' experience. There are many NPs who have taken courses on pain management, but I have seen few who knew how to titrate patients off their meds or to even titrate before surgery. The developing NP "pill mill" practices, mean we are not immune to deleterious practice. In the Journal of Nursing Regulation, vol 8, issue 2, July 2017, in TN, 35 of the top 50 opioid prescribers were NPs. After much education and enforcement of regulations, that figure dropped 20% by 2015, but it is a sobering statistic. Now that I am on a state Board of Nursing, I am temporarily in regulation mode.

The other pivotal moment for health care was the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). I have been waiting for this to occur since I was a Junior in nursing school and President Nixon proposed a plan for universal health care. I guess if you live long enough you will see change.

BLS: How have you been able to impact the nurse practitioner movement?

WT: I have had the privilege to mentor NP students in my practice over the years. I have also had the opportunity to be involved in the NP movement in Alaska since 1984 when our NP act was passed. Those early years we were defining our practices, gaining independence, acquiring prescriptive privileges and insurance reimbursement.

I have worked at the state level in program management and written regulations for direct entry midwifery practice and the regulations for the beginning of the expanded Medicaid program for pregnant women. I have held every position in the Alaska NP Association. I advanced to AANP state Representative, to region 10 Representative and on to the Secretary of the AANP Board for 2 years. I joined the Jan Tower vision quest for the certification program and it was a high-speed train ride for many years. I feel that I have been very lucky to be in the right place at the right time and I so appreciate the many experiences I have had through the Academy and my association with the many NPs I have met over the years. While I was not among the first NPs to start practicing, I have been able to participate in the development of this profession from near the beginning and it's been an incredible experience.

BLS: Is there anything you would change if you had it to do over again?

WT: I would change nothing. I have been blessed. My journey to being an NP started in the winter of 1979 when I was in Chicago snowed in, without a car for 6 weeks because it was buried in snow. I made a commitment to go to graduate school in a temperate climate and haven't looked back since.

BLS: What advice would you give to yourself in 2000.

WT: To keep moving and learning; be open to ideas and people.

BLS: How would you like to be remembered?

WT: I want to be remembered as someone who helped others and did no harm.

BLS: What are your hopes for the fellowship?

WT: I hope that it continues to honor and award NPs for outstanding practice and contributions.

BLS: What advice would you give to new nurse practitioners?

WT: Just because you can do something or prescribe something doesn't mean you should.

Learn to say no – not only to bosses and higher ups, but also to patients.

And remember, sometimes you are not the best provider for a particular patient; you need to know when to refer on.

BLS: What do you see in the future?

WT: I hope to see NPs run for political office at the local, statewide and national levels. We are the best spokes- people for our profession and advocates for health care.