A Day in the Lives of Tuong-Vi Ho and Dawn P. Murphy, Nurse Practitioners

This column will highlight nurses with interesting career paths or roles. Consider sharing your life story with your colleagues who may be thinking about a new career direction. Contact Editor Joyce P. Griffin-Sobel, RN, PhD, AOCN®, APRN-BC, at CJONeditor@jsobel.com.

Every nurse in an advanced practice role adds his or her own imprint. This month, we will look at two nurse practitioners (NPs) who have carved out very unique positions.

Tuong-Vi Ho’s Path to Her Current Position

Tuong-Vi Ho (Vi), RN, MSN, FNP, is an NP in the Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. Vi is from Vietnam. As a young woman, she worked at an orphanage in Saigon run by Seventh Day Adventists while the country was under siege. The church offered her the opportunity to be evacuated, and she was airlifted out of Vietnam three days before Saigon fell to the Communists. Vi was 21 years old when she arrived in Loma Linda, CA, with one change of clothes, her birth certificate, and very little money.

She settled in Texas because the climate was so similar to that of Vietnam. Vi then began her lifelong pursuit of education, obtaining licensed vocational nursing certification and getting an associate’s degree in nursing. At the University of Texas Health Sciences Center in Houston, Vi received her bachelor’s degree in nursing, followed by her master’s degree as a clinical nurse specialist in oncology. She subsequently completed postmaster’s certificates as a geriatric NP, adult NP, and family NP. Currently, Vi is a doctoral student at Texas Women’s University with a focus on prevention and early detection of breast and cervical cancer in Vietnamese American women.

Vi has worked at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center for more than 20 years. She is devoted to the institution, which earned her loyalty from the beginning when the director of nursing took care of Vi’s baby while she interviewed for a position.

Development of the Role

The role of an NP in the Department of Internal Medicine was unknown to the hospital until Vi worked with physicians in the emergency center to demonstrate to them how an NP could benefit the department. Ultimately, she succeeded in creating a position for herself, which was followed by the addition of other NP roles within the department, such as in the fatigue clinic and inpatient rotations.

A Typical Day

Vi makes rounds on hospital patients every morning when on the inpatient service. She also sees patients who come into the Neutropenic Fever Clinic in the emergency center to demonstrate to them how an NP could benefit the department. Ultimately, she succeeded in creating a position for herself, which was followed by the addition of other NP roles within the department, such as in the fatigue clinic and inpatient rotations.

Challenges and Rewards

Vi finds patient education to be the most rewarding aspect of her role, knowing she is making a difference in each patient’s life. She loves the variety in her position and never quite knows what to expect. Caring for her dying patients is her greatest challenge, and she finds that her spiritual beliefs, based on Eastern philosophy, help her greatly.

Dawn P. Murphy’s Path to Her Current Position

Dawn Murphy, RN, CRNP, OCN®, is a float NP in the oncology clinics at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania (HUP) in Philadelphia. Dawn has been an NP since 2003, when she graduated from Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, PA, with her master’s degree in nursing with a specialty in oncology. She has many years of nursing experience in oncology, critical care, and home infusion.

Development of the Role

The role of the float NP is a new one at HUP. Many of the 16 APNs in hematology and oncology had difficulty scheduling vacation time or going to a conference without someone to cover for them in their absence. The float NP role was created to allow coverage and involved a great deal of trial and error. Because the APNs have highly specialized practices, the float NP has to be flexible enough to cover all specialties. Dawn had to determine what was...
reasonable and safe for her to cover, and she was able to develop and expand the role as time progressed.

A Typical Day

Depending on the day, Dawn works with patients and physicians in the clinic she is covering and in her own clinic assignment. She must be able to step into the shoes of the NP she is covering and often juggles her own practice with the needs of the absent NP. She attends regular interdepartmental tumor conferences and in-service classes and is in the process of updating the role description of APNs at HUP.

Challenges and Rewards

Dawn loves her job. Physicians and other APNs have complimented her on how well she handles the variety of the role. The position is successful in part because of the support she receives from her physician and APN colleagues, particularly as the role has evolved. Many patients now know her, which she enjoys because one of her challenges was not being able to develop relationships with patients. Having an anxious patient relax on seeing her familiar face can make her day. Moving from one practice to another requires sophisticated organizational skills. She feels she could not manage without her trusty Palm Pilot® (PalmOne, Inc., Milpitas, CA). There have also been challenges developing the role in terms of relationships with her colleagues and balancing her time.

Advice to Those Considering Similar Roles

Both of these talented, creative women bring a good deal of general nursing and oncology experiences to their roles, which they recommend to others. Flexibility, well-developed interpersonal skills, and a belief in yourself and your abilities are essential to roles similar to these.