

On the Front Line: Public Health Nurses

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Ronald Reagan once said, “Some people wonder all their lives if they’ve made a difference. The Marines don’t have that problem.” He was rightfully extolling the virtues of this elite, small group of the armed forces. Marines have a specific mission. They have a purpose, and then at all costs, and without any fanfare, labor to make sure the objective is met!

While nowhere on the same scale of sacrifice as the Marines, Public Health Nurses are also an elite corps of the nursing profession. They, like the Marines, are small in size. Their area of expertise cannot be overlooked or minimized, and they too make a difference.

Public Health Nurses have the distinction of melding the values and philosophies of nursing and of public health together in an incredible and powerful force in the community. They work at all levels of intervention with individuals, families, communities, and even systems to promote the health of the community and the entire population.

This type of “warfare” is different than that of the Marines, who “are forward deployed to respond swiftly and aggressively in times of crisis.” Public Health Nurses work to prevent the crisis, to get ahead of the game, to not only respond to the person who fell into the river, but to go up stream and work with the individual, the community, and the system to prevent anyone else from falling into the river.

Public Health Nurses are agents of change in their communities. They provide leadership and ground their work in science. They are respected conveners, collaborators, and advocates. They are skilled at bringing people together to make change happen in their communities.

They are on the front lines; visiting parents of newborns and guiding them as they assume their role as a loving and nurturing parent. They bring clinics together to discuss strategies to improve immunization rates in their communities to assure children are protected against communicable diseases. A Public Health Nurse will lead a group of citizens who are concerned about mental health and want to change the service paradigm. They monitor disease trends and where needed, create a response plan. And, they are in the Emergency Operations Center, with the rest of the response community, getting ready to tackle a disease outbreak event.

It is by design that the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has developed its Culture of Health Framework and identified Public Health Nurses as key to leading change in their communities using this structure as the basis for improving health.

It will take Public Health Nurses working in the community to make policy, system, and environmental changes happen to move the dial on the health of Americans.

Henry Ford said it best: “If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.” Just as the Army wouldn’t go into a battle with out the Marines, we cannot go into this fight without Public Health Nurses; we need their “combat “skills to move us toward a better tomorrow. ■



Douglas County Commissioner Bev Bales Named AARP "50 Over 50" Award Winner

Douglas County Commissioner Bev Bales was chosen by AARP as one of the first “50 Over 50” Minnesotans for “Community Building.”



The list of Over 50 winners includes explorer Ann Bancroft, Famous Dave's Dave Anderson, and 91 year old Fran Heitzman, founder of Bridging which provides furniture and more for homeless and others in poverty.

There were over 300 Nominations from where the 50 finalists were chosen. Bales received seven nominations commending her tireless dedication to efforts in the community. She has been a county commissioner for 16 years, and has contributed to improvements for senior citizen centers, veteran's programs, food shelves and the meals on wheels program. She started Douglas County's "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon" program which helps families of deployed military, making the county one of the first certified in the state. She also led the county to a first-place victory in the National Association of Counties (NACo) "Change a Light" energy efficiency contest, getting 1000 LED bulbs for residents.

Bev has a gift of making people feel special, nominating and recognizing residents for their contributions. She has also won lots of fame for her 40 years as the "birthday lady." In 1974 she began making daily calls to KXRA, an Alexandria- based radio station to report residents' birthdays and anniversaries. Her list ballooned over 1300 names before she ended the tradition last year.

"There is this sense that as you get older, you're in decline and your best days are behind you," said Chris Farrell, who served on the selection committee. He is the author of *Unretirement*, which chronicles the evolution of retirement in the United States. The list celebrates the state's most accomplished inspiring leaders over 50.

"It's very humbling and gratifying," said Bales of the recognition. "I know a lot of people who do a lot of wonderful things."

AARP will present the Awards in October in Minneapolis. ■



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