

Encouraging words lead to caring career

GWENDOLYN RIGGINS, RN, MSN



MICHAEL WILHELM

Gwen Riggins, RN, MSN, of Kaiser Permanente has found that nursing offers a blend of science, relationships and opportunity.

Q: How did you decide to become a nurse?

A: This is the serendipitous nature of things, and what I believe God puts in your path.

My great grandmother was in a rehabilitation center at Emanuel Hospital. I would come up to see her, and one of the nurses said, "You know, you would make a great nurse. You have such a great manner and you really have a warm heart." She encouraged me to get my baccalaureate in nursing because it would open so many doors.

Even after all these years, I remember how she pulled me aside and spoke to me in such an inspiring way about nursing.

Q: How was the training involved in your master's degree in nursing different from your bachelor's?

A: It gave me a different outlook and courage to try some different areas of nursing. The spark for me was the curriculum development course. I realized I might really like teaching. And as a nurse, you do a lot of teaching all the time — with patients, families, coworkers, subordinates.

Q: If young people ask your opinion of a nursing career, what do you say?

A: Nursing is all about building relationships with people, and if you have a passion for that, and a passion for caring for

Who: Nursing team leader, internal medicine department; age 51

Where: Kaiser Permanente Interstate Medical Office East

Years in position: 2

Years in nursing: 26

Previously: Adjunct nursing faculty, Clackamas Community College; nursing informatics (integrating nursing skills, information management and computer science), HIV/AIDS care, in-patient care and health promotion, all with Kaiser

Permanent; psychiatric nursing in the U.S. Air Force (served in Desert Storm); drug and alcohol rehab nurse; bachelor's degree in nursing from University of Washington and master's degree from University of Phoenix

Lives: Northeast Portland

Enjoys in free time: Being with her 16-year-old son; singing in the choir at Irvington Covenant Church; working out daily ("It's a good stress reducer — I try to thrive," she says with a laugh) on an elliptical trainer; riding her bike in nice weather

people in a holistic sense, then you can learn all of the science about nursing. I *always* say, "Go for it. Absolutely."

Q: How is holistic health — connecting body, mind, spirit and lifestyle — part of nursing?

A: I can say to a patient, "You need to quit smoking, get out there and exercise, and lose 20 pounds, and I guarantee, your cholesterol and diabetes and blood pressure will be so much better." But the problem for this person may be they are depressed, or have drug and alcohol problems, or are in an abusive relationship or don't have a job.

Nursing does have the training, philosophy and values of figuring out what brings that patient in front of you. You can't come with a prepackaged inter-

vention: "Here's what I have for you."

Q: Who is one patient you think about often.

A: I always remember an HIV patient who had basically lost his eyesight and had several opportunistic infections, but he would come into the immune deficiency clinic with a smile on his face. A smile. And at one point he said to one of the nurses, "Betsy, this is a great day, this is a great day to be alive."

And we thought, "This guy, is he for real?" But as he got worse over time, he continued to have such a love of life. To me, he was just this incredible light. He taught me you never know what life is going to bring you. And that truly, you always have a choice about what your outlook is going to be.

— Janet Filipis