



The Breakthrough to Nursing[®] column presents ideas and perspectives about the importance of cultural diversity in nursing.

By Kenya Haney, Director of Breakthrough to Nursing[®]



(Left) Dr. Robert Piedmont. (Right) Dr. Piedmont with NSNA Presidents, past and present: (left to right) Carol Fetters Andersen (1991-1992), Jenna Sanders (2008-2009), and Florence Huey (1968-1969)

A Living Legend

Robert V. Piemonte, EdD, RN, CAE, FAAN, has been renowned in the nursing community for many years, playing a vital role in leadership and association management. In addition to positions held in nursing education and nursing service administration, Dr. Piemonte served as Executive Director of NSNA from 1985 – 1996. Recently, he was recognized by the American Academy of Nursing as a 2008 Living Legend honoree.

How long have you been a nurse? What was it like for a man entering the profession when you started?

I have been a nurse for 43 years. When I entered the profession as a nursing student in 1962, men numbered fewer than 3% of the profession. Most of us gravitated to psychiatry because there was a greater acceptance for us in that specialty. I chose to move in another direction.

When I entered graduate school I chose a major in the supervision of medical-surgical nursing. At the time, the faculty member registering me asked if I did not intend to have psychiatry nursing major. When I asked why, she replied, “That’s what all of the men do.” I stayed the course with my original choice of major and have never regretted it.

Over the years have you seen any change in attitude toward men entering the profession?

Over the years the profession has changed significantly. The percentage of men has more than doubled. Although it isn’t nearly where we would like it to be, the members continue to increase. The technology is astounding. A room on a medical-surgical unit looks more like the ICU of forty years ago. The number of medications has

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quadrupled and nurses have to have an increased understanding in order to keep pace. It is much more complex now than it was when I entered nursing. However, both women and men are rising to the challenge as we see nursing outcomes improve the quality of care.

What do you think is the biggest barrier that men now entering the nursing profession face?

The biggest barrier that men now entering the profession face is the fear that some, but certainly not all, women nurses have. That men will take over. Historically, men will have the better jobs with better pay simply because of their gender. This notion can be overcome if men reassure their female counterparts that they too are interested in the care and nurture of patients. They must convince those who oppose men entering the profession that their goals are the same. Both men and women will have the better positions with higher pay if they continue to educate themselves. Lifelong learning is the answer to parity.

What was your greatest reward in nursing?

My greatest reward in nursing has been my ability to offer leadership to students and novices in nursing. Mentoring others is the greatest gift we can have. I have seen individuals grow in stature and position within the profession and I am proud that I may have played some small part in their success.

What advice would you give to men entering the profession?

My advice to men entering the profession is to keep an open mind. The opportunities are limitless. I know of no other occupation that offers so many different paths to employment opportunities. Always remember that patients come first. That is the reason for our being, no matter what path we follow. It is the most satisfying career that anyone can have. ©