

# BREAKTHROUGH TO NURSING

## A Past Breakthrough Chairperson Looks Back

by Sal Esparza

I had the pleasure of being on the NSNA Board of Directors in 1976-1977 as the Breakthrough to Nursing Chairperson, and it was an exciting time for me personally and professionally. I had recently graduated from an associate degree program and was in the process of transferring into a BSN program. I had been active in the California Nursing Students Association, and being involved on the board at a national level was indeed inspirational. It opened my mind to new possibilities, ideas, and experiences. I met so many wonderful people and developed friendships that are with me to this day.

The mid 70's was, as you might imagine, quite an interesting time to be a student, and NSNA was a microcosm of the times. College students were at the pinnacle of political activism, and those passions were demonstrated at the annual conferences. By the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 Richard Nixon had resigned from the presidency. We believed in the theory that an action is right when it brings about the most good to the most people, and this awakening was evident in the push for diversity and equality in many NSNA policies and goals. Breakthrough to Nursing was an offshoot of that

thinking, and was successful with the added help of federal funding from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), now known as Health and Human Services.

I was honored to serve on the board with the first black NSNA president, the late Cleo Doster, and being male and of Mexican cultural descent myself, our board began to reflect diversity in the population. Minorities and men had until then been grossly underrepresented in the NSNA membership, and in nursing.

There was a severe nursing shortage, and hospital recruiters packed the annual and regional conferences. Hospitals spared no expense to recruit graduating student nurses, and vendor sponsorship was generous. Other than the minority issues mentioned above, other issues we were struggling with included: too much "charting/paperwork" and not enough bedside time; providing nursing care to ethnic people of color; the care of medically indigent patients; entry into practice and the push for the BSN as the basis.

Some people, both students and mentors, stand out for me personally and professionally. People like Sheila

Burke, Mary Foley, Pam Cipriano, Helen Archer, Mary Ann Tuft, Phyllis Paxton, Marie Branch, Hector Gonzalez, Ildura Murillo-Rhode, Cleo Doster, and most of all, Kit Barnes. These people will forever be imbedded in my mind and influenced me in ways they may never know.

My thanks and gratitude to NSNA for the positive and lasting leadership values you have instilled in me. I directly attribute the experiences and accomplishments in my career to NSNA. ☺

**Sal Esparza, RN, BSN, MSHA, CHE,** in addition to serving as Breakthrough to Nursing Chair in 1976-77, has held several leadership positions for health care organizations in California, most recently as the associate administrator and chief nursing officer for Midway Hospital Medical Center in Los Angeles. He obtained his BSN and MSHA at California State University, and has been adjunct faculty for the Health Administration Program, where he has lectured on topics such as organizational leadership, managed care and health care finance. He has guest lectured for a variety of health care organizations, most recently for the health bureau in Guangzhou, China. He has received the award for Outstanding Alumni of the Year from California State University for his role as alumni/faculty.