

Ahh, the memories...my wonderful ride at NHRMC.

When I began working at New Hanover Memorial Hospital on April 27, 1981, it was very different. There was only one building with 7 floors, with the 7th floor being a locked psychological unit. What is now the Medical Mall next to the hospital was a retail shopping center with a doctor's office, dentist's office, uniform shop, pharmacy, Bible bookstore, and the section that is now Radiology was a pool room named the Recovery Room.

There were 1,248 employees, and smoking was allowed anywhere inside and outside the building. There were no computers, so medical records and all written communication was done by hand or on electric typewriters, printed and delivered to the recipients.

Female employees were not allowed to wear pants and had to wear dresses no shorter than 2 inches above the knee and stockings. Shoes for both women and men had to be totally closed in - no open toe or heel.

Lunches in the cafeteria were themed with Thursdays being Soul Food Day, and Fridays always serving fried fish. I can't remember the other days. There was also a separate sandwich bar next to the cafeteria, and a couple of years after I started, Hardee's took over the sandwich section and was open 24/7.

Coming from 9 years as a paralegal, my first role here was a secretary in Administration. Just three months after I started, I transferred into Public Relations, which was a two-person department. I began doing the monthly newsletter, Hospital Heartbeat; became the hospital's photographer; was the media coordinator; and arranged special events and educational programs. Those included a monthly presentation in the auditorium called The Good Life, weekly spots on radio and TV, monthly cooking demonstrations on WECT, Babies Day (an annual event inviting families of children who had been born here within the previous five years), the annual NICU reunion, and led tours of the hospital for schools and community groups.

In the mid-1990's, I transferred to the Wellness Services Department, which offered an annual physical fitness and health assessment to hospital employees. In that program, employees earned an annual bonus based on their level of fitness – up to \$40 per pay period. Through a grant, this program also partnered with a number of organizations in the community as well as City of Wilmington, New Hanover County, Wrightsville Beach and Carolina Beach to provide the fitness/health assessments and classes. In this role, I was a fitness trainer doing the physical fitness assessments and teaching workout regimens, and also taught smoking cessation and stress management classes.

Since that program ended in late 1999, I have returned to the now very different world of Public Relations and Outreach. For a while, I continued to do the newsletter, but on a computer, and I focused more on outreach activities.

In 2003, while still in PR, I began managing the patient approval process for the NHRMC Foundation's Pink Ribbon Program as well as driving the Care Van, the mammogram bus. Each month I drove this 42-foot RV-like vehicle to various locations in New Hanover, Brunswick, Pender, Duplin, Onslow and Columbus counties to provide the underserved women in those counties the chance to get a screening

mammogram close to home. In 2009, as the hospital was transitioning to 3-D mammography, the bus broke down. Assessments determined that having a bus was not fiscally feasible and the patients served by the bus now had access to NHRMC imaging centers closer to their homes, so a voucher program was created. Vouchers were provided to all sites in the counties that had been served by the bus, and the women could then make appointments that best fit their schedule.

In the mid-2000's, I worked with Pediatrics and Camp Lejeune staff to coordinate Camp Special Time, a quarterly sleepover experience for special needs kids of military personnel to allow respite time for their parents.

In 2009, I worked with Kathy Rawlings, a medication assistance nurse in the Pharmacy, to launch the medication take-back events in response to learning that drugs in the water systems and groundwater were affecting people and wildlife throughout the country. Initially, we held the events twice a year at The Medical Mall, collaborating with the DEA and Wilmington Police Dept. Now, the events are still held twice a year but at multiple locations in New Hanover and surrounding counties.

Also in 2009, there was growing recognition of heart disease in women, and the NHRMC Foundation created the Red Dress Project. I worked with the Lab and Cardiac Rehab to create a cardiac risk assessment program. We purchased portable machines that tested full lipid panel and glucose from a fingerstick and provided results in under 10 minutes, and we developed questions for a risk assessment. When the team went out, the full assessment included the written assessment as well as tests for lipid panel, glucose, blood pressure, weight and BMI. Not only did we offer these assessments at health fairs and other community events, we also partnered with various organizations to provide these on a regular basis to their employees. Now, we continue to provide the basic screenings at community events, but without the written risk assessment.

And throughout the years in Public Relations, I coordinated NHRMC's presence at health fairs and health education events at organizations throughout Southeastern NC.

While it has long been the largest employer in New Hanover County and the regional referral center for Southeastern NC, NHRMC has continued to grow, both physically, now having locations in many of our surrounding counties, and in the services it provides. And throughout this growth, it has continued to focus on the quality of care it provides as well as supporting work/life balance for its employees. I cannot adequately express how proud I am to have been part of this growth.

As a native Wilmingtonian, I know the disparities and injustices that have existed throughout its history. In doing outreach, I have been into all areas of our region and worked with the many different populations – first, to build trust and establish relationships, and then to provide the information about choices and services to help improve their health.

Throughout my years at NHRMC, I have enjoyed and appreciated the support from the leaders, my supervisors and coworkers for the opportunities to learn and grow, which has supported my primary passion – helping my community to learn how to be as healthy as it can be.

Thank you.