

## **S. Franklin woman to head country's largest nurse practitioner organization**

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As a longtime nurse practitioner, Dr. Joyce Knestrick has spent most of her career providing medical care to many people both in rural and inner city areas who are underserved by primary medical care.

In her current assignment, she works in Wheeling, W.Va., addressing the medical needs of the working poor.

"They're a special group of people," Knestrick said of her patients, describing them as very hardworking, but without access to affordable medical services for themselves or their families.

"I am their primary care provider," she said.

Knestrick, of South Franklin Township, will soon find her days even busier.

On June 25, she took the helm as the new president of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, which with 77,000 members, is the largest professional membership organization representing nurse practitioners of all specialties in the U.S.

While the membership number is impressive, Knestrick now heads an organization that represents the interests of more than 234,000 NPs licensed in the United States.

Knestrick brings 20 years of experience as a family NP serving predominantly low-income and underserved populations in urban areas as well as rural Appalachia. She has held clinical roles as a family nurse practitioner, a nurse manager and a registered nurse in critical care, medical surgical, pediatric and long-term care settings.

In addition to her clinical work, she has extensive teaching experience at the bachelor, masters and doctorate levels and has been a pioneer in organizational leadership and distance education for NPs.

She currently is teaching an online course for Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

"AANP has always empowered NPs to serve patients everywhere through not only practice but also education, research, advocacy and leadership," Knestrick said. "I look forward to working with our members nationwide to champion patient access to high-quality, affordable, NP-provided health care."

During a telephone interview with the Observer-Reporter, the Canonsburg native and graduate of Canon-McMillan High School, emphasized that NPs not only provide basic care in a variety of settings, including doctor's offices, urgent care centers, clinics and hospitals, they also care for patients with acute and chronic conditions.

They're also helping to enhance health-care services in remote areas, adding telemedicine to their medical tool kits.

She acknowledged that nurse practitioners have grown in numbers as demand for health-care services has grown.

In the past decade, the number of nurse practitioners has more than doubled, from about 85,000 in 2005 to more than 234,000 today.

Knestrick, who holds a Ph.D. in nursing, said many people may have a misconception about the level of training and education that NPs have.

While all are registered nurses, they also complete more than six years of academic and clinical training, and all hold either a masters degree or a Ph.D. in nursing.

“We really try to partner with our patients” to achieve the best outcomes, she said, adding that NPs also provide cost-effective care for their patients.

And their presence continues to grow across the health-care spectrum in the U.S. She noted that in 2016, there were more than 1 billion visits to nurse practitioners in the United States.

A nurse practitioner can perform physical assessments and prescribe medicine, but depending upon which state in which he or she practices, the prescriptions may be written only under the supervision of a physician.

“I think we need to modernize the nurse practitioner,” Knestrick said. “We want patients to have full access to nurse practitioners and remove barriers” to quality health-care services.

A bill of which state Sen. Camera Bartolotta (R-Carroll) is the prime sponsor, would remove unnecessary state regulations that currently prevent nurse practitioners from treating patients to the full extent of their education and training.

Senate Bill 25 would modernize the Professional Nursing Law to permit qualified advanced practice registered nurses to practice in their field of speciality independent of a physician after they fulfill a three-year, 3,600-hour collaboration agreement with a doctor.

In presenting the bill in February, Bartolotta pointed out that expanding practice authority for nurse practitioners would help improve the availability of health-care services across the commonwealth, especially in rural and underserved areas. She noted that 35 percent of Pennsylvanians live in an area or population group with inadequate primary care access.

Several statewide and national advocacy organizations have voiced their support for full practice authority for nurses, including the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania, the National Academy of Medicine, AARP and the National Governors’ Association.

Twenty-one states and Washington, D.C., have already adopted full practice authority for APRNs.

Knestrick said she began as an NP in 1998, treating children and families on Medicaid in a family outreach center on North Main Street in Washington that was operated by Washington Hospital.

Knestrick is the second person from the area to serve as president of AANP. Dr. Mona M. Counts of Greene County served as president from 2006 to 2008.

Knestrick earned a Ph.D. in nursing at Duquesne University, a master’s degree in nursing with a focus on primary care from West Virginia University, a BSN from Wheeling College, an ADN from Community College of Allegheny County and a B.S. in chemistry from Point Park College. She was active in McGuffey School District as an elected official for 12 years where she served as president of the board for nine years.