

2014 Nurse.com
NURSING EXCELLENCE
GEM AWARDS
Giving Excellence Meaning



MEET THE REGIONAL WINNERS

Winner profiles by Robin Farmer • Photos by DeBalko Photography

Nurse.com prides itself in recognizing the accomplishments of nurses of excellence at its **GEM** (Giving Excellence Meaning) award programs. Held in various cities throughout the United States, these celebrations honor exceptional nurses from all specialties and practice settings, and each culminates in the naming of six regional winners in six different categories. The regional winners move on to compete in the GEM national nurse of the year program.

"Our nursing excellence GEM Awards program shines brightly once again as we salute our 2014 regional winners," said Eileen Williamson, RN, MSN, senior vice president and chief nurse executive. "Nominated and selected by

their colleagues, they truly epitomize nursing at its best. We are honored to present them with our prestigious GEM awards and privileged to recognize them publicly for their many contributions to nursing and healthcare." This year's regional GEM program was held at the Hilton Philadelphia City Avenue on May 13.

Nurse.com is pleased to introduce you to the 2014 Nurse.com GEM regional award winners.



Spread the word about your regional winners on Twitter! Join in the ongoing conversation by mentioning **@Nurse_com** and **#GEMawards**.

HOW ARE WINNERS CHOSEN?

1 NOMINATE

Nurses submit nominations of nurses and their professional roles and contributions, including examples that demonstrate the nominees' excellence in one of six categories.

2 SELECT

Finalist nominations are blinded and sent to a panel of judges comprised of nurse leaders. Each winner is determined by the ratings of those blinded nominations.

3 HONOR

The six regional winners are celebrated at the GEM Awards and will move on to the national phase of the Nurse.com Nursing Excellence Awards Program.

4 NATIONAL NURSE OF THE YEAR

In the latter part of the year, Nurse.com will honor a national Nurse of the Year in each of the six categories. Who will they be? Read about the Nurse of the Year winners at Nurse.com/NursingExcellence.

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For more on the GEM Awards program, visit Nurse.com/Nursing-Excellence.

2014 Philadelphia Tri-State *Winners*



Marian Nowak



Veronica Whyte



Michael Coveney



Jamille Nagtalon-Ramos



JoAnne Reifsnyder



Denise Scott



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JoAnne Reifsnyder, RN



"You have to find humor in things and funny things to say to patients. And they remember you by it, and they remember what you taught them."

Denise Scott, RN

ADVANCING & LEADING THE PROFESSION

JoAnne Reifsnyder, RN, PhD

Senior vice president, clinical operations, and CNO
Genesis HealthCare, Kennett Square, Pa.

Reifsnyder said she was "completely stunned" when she learned she had been named the regional winner of the Nursing Excellence GEM Award in the category of Advancing and Leading the Profession.

"I was thrilled by the number of nurses in attendance and the devotion of each nominee to nursing," she said. "I felt so proud to be one of them."

Described by her nominator as a "passionate leader, teacher and change agent whose goal is to develop sustainable care approaches that are truly person-centered," Reifsnyder is responsible for the delivery of quality clinical care for older adults in more than 400 facilities and is accountable for achieving positive outcomes in strategic clinical excellence goals.

Realizing there are nurses she will never meet because of the size of the company, she created a blog in 2012 for colleagues to share ideas and experiences, recognize efforts and foster support.

"It's been incredibly valuable to me as a tool for understanding what the key points are out in the field," she said. "The blog gives me one more way to hear about what's happening out there."

A nurse for 35 years, Reifsnyder has held teaching and consulting roles and done policy work around chronic illness management and end-of-life-care issues. She has served as president of the Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association and sits on two other national hospice association boards.

Much work remains for palliative care, she said. "Most people will stand on my shoulders and will be pushing for many decades to come, but I feel most fulfilled by my involvement in that cause and the progress that we have seen."

Reifsnyder initially rejected the idea of nursing as a career.

"Like most young headstrong teens, I would always say that I knew I didn't want to be a nurse or teacher. My mother is a nurse and my father was a college professor — and so of course I became both," she said, with a chuckle.

Reifsnyder heard the calling at 16 when her mother asked her to help out at a small private nursing home where she was the director of nursing.

"This was a long time ago in the days before you needed to be certified," she said. "I went in and helped as best I could, and I think from that point on I never wanted to do anything else."

CLINICAL NURSING, INPATIENT

Denise Scott, RN-BC, CRRN, WCC

Staff nurse, Main Line Health, Bryn Mawr Rehabilitation Hospital, Malvern, Pa.

Scott had the Oscars on her mind when she attended the Philadelphia/Tri-State Nursing Excellence GEM Awards banquet on May 13.

"You know, when you watch the Oscars and they announce the names and they go right away to the losers to make sure they are being gracious? So I thought, 'I will have to sit here and smile and clap.' And then they said my name, I was so shocked," said Scott, who won the regional Nursing Excellence GEM award in the Clinical Nursing, Inpatient category.

Scott, who has worked at the acute rehabilitation hospital for 22 years, should not have been surprised. Her nominator said Scott has "created a positive reputation by being self-motivated in the thirst for knowledge and experience, an innovator in clinical practice, and a mentor for new nurses and students."

Scott cares for patients after orthopedic surgery, spinal cord injury, amputee surgery, and those in a deconditioned state from a neuromuscular disorder. She assists with providing timely skin and wound assessments for patients on admission, which plays a direct role in their treatment plan.

Scott, a motivated lifelong learner, became a certified pain management nurse to help patients stay comfortable during intense therapy for recovery. "There is no reason to have pain when you live in this country," she said.

A nurse since 1985, she credited her dedication to excellence to working the first 10 years of her career at Lankenau Medical Center in Wynnewood, Pa. "That hospital had a high standard of care. I always say Lankenau made me a nurse."

Scott had not planned to work in the spinal cord unit, but there is no place she'd rather be.

"These are the people who come into my hospital and they leave a whole lot better because we do a great job with them. You can't cut corners with people who walked out of their homes one day and leave the hospital in a wheelchair. You have to give them the absolute best opportunities they can have, because we expect them to go on with their lives when we discharge them."

She goes about her duties with her trademark levity, which patients appreciate.

"You have to find humor in things and funny things to say to patients," she said. "And they remember you by it and they remember what you taught them."



"If you told me when I moved here over 20 years ago that I would be here being able to live my dream and being able to work in a job that I love so much, surrounded by people who want to make an impact in the world, I would not have believed you."

Jamille Nagtalon-Ramos, RN



"It is my goal is to bridge gaps between patients and ambulatory care by creating programs that engage and empower patients and their healthcare."

Veronica Whyte, RN

EDUCATION & MENTORSHIP

Jamille Nagtalon-Ramos, RN, MSN, CRNP, WHNP-BC, IBCLC

Associate director, Women's Health Nurse Practitioner Program/Women's health nurse practitioner, University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing/Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Nagtalon-Ramos said she didn't expect to be selected as the regional winner of the Nursing Excellence GEM Award in the Education and Mentoring category.

"I was very nervous going in, mainly because I had my daughter with me and my mentor and mom," she said. "I didn't want them to be nervous about it, too. So when they announced my name, it was the most amazing thing to see them jump for glory and be so happy."

The first NP to be incorporated into the obstetrics inpatient teams at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Nagtalon-Ramos serves as secretary of the executive board of directors for the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health. Thirteen years into her profession, she has earned a reputation as a dedicated clinician and hard-working educator.

Her responsibilities require Nagtalon-Ramos to recruit and admit students, orient and mentor new faculty, advise undergrad and grad students, develop curriculum and incorporate simulation in teaching. Her students have created videos about the WHNP role and smartphone apps to help patients with questions about breastfeeding and to assist providers working with women experiencing miscarriage.

Of all of her accomplishments, Nagtalon-Ramos is most proud of her book, "Best Evidence-Based Practices: Maternal Newborn Nursing." It was published last year after she'd worked on it for five years while working full time and being a mom.

"I'm proud of that book because it took a long time. Not only that, my editor believed in me when I did not believe in myself."

Driven and focused, she honed her resolve after relocating to the U.S. at age 15 from the Philippines. Her grandmother is a pioneering nurse in the Philippines and her mom has been a nurse for 30 years.

"I recently said to my mentor, 'If you told me when I moved here over 20 years ago that I would be here being able to live my dream and being able to work in a job that I love so much, surrounded by people who want to make an impact in the world, I would not have believed you.'"

HOME, COMMUNITY & AMBULATORY CARE

Veronica Whyte, RN, BSN

Population health manager, Kennedy Health Alliance, Stratford, N.J.

Whyte said she was "overwhelmed with joy and honor" when she was chosen for the Nursing Excellence GEM Award in the category of Home, Community and Ambulatory Care.

"It is my goal is to bridge gaps between patients and ambulatory care by creating programs that engage and empower patients and their healthcare," she said in her acceptance speech. "And that's really where I am in developing programs that do just that."

Whyte was among the first employees hired to help build the organization, a network of primary care specialists formed in 2010 that has grown from one to more than 50 physicians.

Whyte works with Kennedy Health Alliance's growing team of providers to develop processes aimed at improving patient outcomes and access to care. She also is credited with being a tremendous asset in community outreach and for improving healthcare decision-making for seniors with her outreach program.

Her nominator described Whyte as a leader beyond her clinical settings, with outstanding organizational and motivational skills.

Whyte credited her accomplishments to an executive leadership team that showed confidence and support in her. "This team has faith in me to do good things for patients and they share my passion, which allows me to be free with my creativity for patient centeredness," she said.

A nurse for 18 years, all of them with Kennedy Health, she started on the med/surg unit as a new nurse. Whyte, who earned her BSN five years ago, said she inherited her drive from her mother. "I was raised by a single mom and it was just the two of us. Mom always worked three jobs in order for us to have."

In 2013, she completed the Duke Population Care Coordinator Program. As a result, the leadership team created her current position last May. Since then, she has developed the RN roles within the primary care offices of the Kennedy Health Alliance.

"I developed the RN roles to be care coordinators, population managers, preventive care identifiers and risk managers," she said. "The nurses are working under my direction to develop our population health teams."



"I always try to think differently. One of the things about nursing is I feel passionate about it, and when I feel strongly, I do feel like I have to speak out."

Michael Coveney, RN



"When I see there is a need, I just try to meet it, that's just my personality."

Marian Nowak, RN

PATIENT & STAFF MANAGEMENT

Michael Coveney, RN, MSN

Director of nursing resource department,
Hahnemann University Hospital, Philadelphia

"I was shocked considering all of the other candidates and all the great things that were listed in their nomination letters," **Coveney** said after he was selected as a Nursing Excellence GEM Award winner in the Patient and Staff Management category. "It really took me by surprise and I felt overwhelmingly honored by being selected."

He credits his accomplishments during his 14-year career to out-of-the-box thinking and a willingness to speak his mind, which have been lifelong traits.

"I always try to think differently," he said. "One of the things about nursing is I feel passionate about it, and when I feel strongly, I do feel like I have to speak out."

Coveney oversees 12 employees in the nursing resource office, 33 per diem RNs and 56 ancillary staff. He also is responsible for five RNs in direct admissions and 18 RNs in the clinical decision unit.

One of his proudest accomplishments was leading the multidisciplinary falls reduction and prevention committee and reducing the hospital-wide fall rate, which dropped by 28% in one year. Coveney credits the progress in that area to a collaborative effort of staff from many departments. The team created strategies that included more bed alarms for inpatient units and post-fall investigations.

Coveney also is recognized for the innovative staff orientation process he implemented as director of the interventional cardiology unit, which he presented at the ANCC National Magnet Conference.

As director of nursing, he enjoys gaining a global perspective and becoming more involved with hospital operations. He said teamwork helps him strive for excellence.

"I enjoy seeing results from actions and strategies put in place to create improvements, and knowing it was done with a team of great people and for the benefit of patients," he said.

In his spare time, Coveney continues to help others as a volunteer, raising money for the American Heart Association and The Mazzoni Center, a healthcare clinic serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in the Philadelphia Tri-State region. He also has sewed special pillowcases for ConKerr Cancer, a volunteer organization whose mission is to provide smiles to children with life-changing illnesses.

Coveney's interest in nursing was shaped by his grandmother, a nurse, and as a teen when he volunteered at a hospital and "saw the great impact nursing had on people."

VOLUNTEERISM & SERVICE

Marian Nowak, RN, DNP, FCN, CSN

Assistant professor of community health nursing,
Rutgers University School of Nursing, Camden, N.J.

Nowak admits she didn't expect to be named the regional winner of a Nursing Excellence GEM award in the category of Volunteerism and Service.

"I did prepare a speech, but I was quite surprised to receive that, for sure," said Nowak, whose desire to help others took root as a child growing up with a civic-minded mother.

"Helping other people was just something we always did in our family. I guess nursing called me," said Nowak, whose illustrious 39-year career has focused on helping disadvantaged populations.

Her nominator noted that Nowak "continues to advocate for those most disenfranchised, and continues to volunteer countless hours serving those less fortunate. Most notably are the very successful service programs she has developed for teenagers, disaster victims, members of her faith community, and in her role mentoring student nurses."

A disaster response nurse, faith community nurse and a full-time assistant professor of community health nursing, Nowak said one of her most rewarding accomplishments was the development of a new method to help nurses remember proper field triage techniques during disaster and mass causality events. Another highlight was developing a teen pregnancy program in a rural community that helped reduce teen pregnancies dramatically.

An expert in school health services, Nowak developed the first school-wide drug education program.

"When I see there is a need, I just try to meet it, that's just my personality," said Nowak, who wanted to be a nurse since she volunteered as a candy striper at age 14.

Credited with many innovative service projects, she developed the nation's first student nurse public health emergency preparedness certificate program in cooperation with the Philadelphia Department of Health, Division of Bioterrorism and Disaster Management.

Her passion for community health and volunteerism is infectious. Her students consistently engage in community service that is 70 to 90 clinical days in addition to their normal curriculum expectations.

"I invited them to attend, for example, Department of Health Bioterrorism Drill, Red Cross training, migrant outreach and faith community nursing," she said. "It's not pressure, it's an invitation to experience other roles of nursing and they love it." •