

Linda Duppong named N.D. PA of the Year

Twenty years old, with barely a scuff on her newly polished white shoes, Linda Duppong was a registered nurse at Jacobson Memorial Hospital Care Center in Elgin on July 4, 1978. As the charge nurse, she had been listening to weather warnings during the evening shift. With the weather more ominous and a tornado warning looming, she ordered all patients be moved to the inside hallways, away from windows.

Then she encountered a Korean War veteran, a stubborn patient who refused to budge. The resulting argument between the two suddenly ended at a horrific sight outside the window.

“The next thing you know, we saw the tornado taking down the water tower. All I remember is watching that water,” Linda describes.

Then Linda remembers laying underneath the hospital bed, with the war veteran protecting the young nurse from flying glass.

That was the beginning of Linda Duppong’s career that has brought her across the paths of many memorable patients and doctors.

Recently, she was awarded for that career by being named the North Dakota Physician Assistant of the Year by the North Dakota Academy of Physician Assistants. The honor came during the NDAPA primary care conference in May after Linda was nominated by JMHCC’s Chief of Medical Staff Dr. Deepak Goyal.

“Linda Duppong is a thorough provider who is dedicated to patient care. We certainly appreciate her years of service and we are happy to celebrate with her in receiving this award. She is well-deserving,” says JMHCC CEO Theo Stoller. “Congratulations to her on this accomplishment.”

Linda’s eyes become teary as she talks about the humbling experience of being awarded the state’s top honor.

“I said, ‘You should never have done it, because now I have to be perfect and I can’t live up to that one.’ Then Dr. Goyal smiles and says, ‘Yes, Mrs. Duppong you’re at another level,’” she says.

A PA for 35 years, Linda became the 21st physician assistant in the state when she herself was only 21 years old.

Her career path started at JMHCC and circled back to JMHCC. Today, she serves the Glen Ullin Family Medical Clinic, one of two clinics affiliated with JMHCC. There, she offers care ranging from common colds to minor emergencies.

Linda’s career took her from Elgin as an RN to her first job as a PA in Mott in 1979. She also worked with Hettinger doctors, including Dr. Gerald Sailer and Dr. Robert Grossman, then worked in the obstetrics and family planning arena in Dickinson with Dr. Donald Schmid during the oil boom in 1982.

From 1985 to 1990, she worked with Dr. Laslo Kolta at a Dickinson clinic, where she learned some valuable lessons.

Dr. Kolta would say, “Linda, make sure you do no harm. You are here to serve”

“Twenty-five years later, I’m still thinking, ‘Linda, do no harm,’” she says. “It was an honor to work for him.”

As her career took her to Jamestown, then Mandan with Dr. Darwin Lange, then back to Beulah and Glen Ullin, she remembers those lessons.

“I had some really good mentors all along the way,” she says, naming the myriad of doctors with whom she has worked, including those in Elgin.

“It’s a privilege to serve others. What a gift,” she says.

In 2006, she returned to JMHCC and the Glen Ullin Family Medical Center, where she provides daily care, and daily prayers.

She prays for her patients every day, she says, sometimes taking a moment in the quiet darkness of the X-ray room to pray.

“Not a day goes by without praying for my patients or families. My work is God’s gift,” she says.

She also points to her current colleagues who nominated her for the PA of the Year honor, as inspirations.

“Do you know how many people are working out there and doing a really good job?” she asks.

“Dr. Goyal, I don’t think people understand how good he is. He has had some challenges that Bismarck doctors couldn’t figure out.” And she points to Stoller’s mantra of always providing good patient care.

She compares Dr. Goyal to other top mentors she’s had, who are not only intelligent, but have high values and standards. She also credits the team at the Glen Ullin Family Medical Clinic who help provide care there.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to serve others,” she says. “Thank you for sharing your lives with me.”