Published in final edited form as:

J Gerontol Nurs. 2014 October ; 40(10): 7–9. doi:10.3928/00989134-20140830-01.

The 2013 Doris Schwartz Gerontological Nursing Research

Award:

Eileen M. Sullivan-Marx PhD, CRNP, RN, FAAN

Graham J. McDougall Jr., PhD, RN, FAAN, FGSA

Dr. McDougall is Professor, Martha Lucinda Luker Saxon Endowed Chair in Rural Health Nursing, Capstone College of Nursing, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

When recently asked what advice she would give students to prepare them to be successful after graduation, Dr. Sullivan-Marx replied, “I would tell them to dream big and stay open to possibilities.” This sounds simple perhaps, but if we assume she followed her own advice regarding her career and contributions to nursing and health care, we had all better listen.

Dr. Sullivan-Marx began her nursing career in the 1970s, a time when much debate surrounded the role of nurse practitioners (NPs), and as she puts it, “no one ever died of old age.” As a nurse in the Indian Health Service in the Southwest United States, Dr. Sullivan-Marx developed a life-long appreciation of the need for cultural competency in any setting. She worked for 8 years in hospital-based and community nursing, and although she had several practice interests, a special interest in older adults led her to study life satisfaction among older women in a health facility for her master’s thesis at the University of Rochester School of Nursing. She began a career as a primary care NP in 1980.

In the 1980s, her big dreams and openness to possibilities were readily apparent, as she worked in support of several policy issues to improve the care of older adults, including the Nursing Home Reform Act, which was part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1987, which allowed NPs to bill in rural areas and also defined physical/chemical restraint. These policy interests dovetailed with her research, as she studied the life satisfaction outcomes of a geropsychiatric support group for Veterans and the functional outcomes of a nurse intervention for hospitalized older adults at risk for delirium. She also continued in her NP role in several settings, including a continuing care retirement community, U.S. Veterans Affairs, the Foerderer Program in Geriatrics, and a rural private practice.

In the 1990s, Dr. Sullivan-Marx once described her work in policy, research, and practice as “models, mandates, and Medicare.” This decade saw her working for physician payment reform, and she was instrumental in establishing the inclusion of NP surveys in relative

Address correspondence to Graham J. McDougall, Jr., PhD, RN, FAAN, FGSA, Professor, Martha Lucinda Luker Saxon Endowed Chair in Rural Health Nursing, Capstone College of Nursing, The University of Alabama, 650 University Boulevard East, Box 870358, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0358; gjmcdougall@ua.edu.

The author has disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.

value units. She was also a representative for the American Nurses Association in the Resource-Based Relative Value Scale Update Committee from 1992 to 2003.

Dr. Sullivan-Marx continued work on the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, which allowed NPs to bill Medicare regardless of setting and geography. She examined physical restraint use in nursing homes and reasons why physical restraints were still being used after policy mandates, education, and consultation interventions. She continued to consult and educate on NP billing for the Penn Nursing Consultation Service and worked as project manager for the Collaborative Assessment and Rehabilitation for Elders (CARE) Program.

With the new decade and ongoing evolution of nursing issues in the 2000s, Dr. Sullivan-Marx took advantage of an important opportunity to advance her work in policy with a Health and Aging Policy Fellowship. She stated:

I am always fascinated and intrigued by the interplay of patients' needs and societal response; thus, my work on care of frail older adults in the context of nursing organization and advanced practice nursing is a fulfilling scientific endeavor (Penn Nursing Science, n.d., sidebar).

She continued NP policy work at state levels and was part of the Pennsylvania Commission on Senior Care. Her research examined the outcomes of physical restraint in the context of decreased hospital staffing for older adults. She also studied the benefits of exercise for community-dwelling older adults and outcomes of a nurse-led Program for All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE). Dreaming big again, she grew a PACE academic nursing practice and as a policy fellow proposed scaling the PACE program nationally.

The list of Dr. Sullivan-Marx's key publications related to her payment policy line of research includes the seminal paper, "Comparison of Nurse Practitioner and Family Physician Relative Work Values" (Sullivan-Marx & Maislin, 2000), as well as two articles that appeared in *Policy, Politics & Nursing Practice* (Hanrahan & Sullivan-Marx, 2005; Sullivan-Marx, 2008).

Dr. Sullivan-Marx is a senior editor of *Nurse Practitioners: Evolution and Future of Advanced Practice* (2010), now in its fifth edition and the foremost text describing the evolution of the NP role in the United States and globally. She is also senior author of *Leadership and Management Skills for LongTerm Care* (2008), a text based on her series of projects, funded by the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, to improve the quality of long-term care.

A POLICY WONK EXTRAORDINAIRE

A *policy wonk* is defined as "a person who studies or develops strategies and policies, especially one who has a keen interest in and aptitude for technical details and often talks a lot about that subject" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). Dr. Sullivan-Marx and I have been colleagues for many years. We were nominated as American Academy of Nursing Edge Runners in 2006. I believe she deserves the complimentary title *policy wonk* for her extraordinary skill in developing strategies and policies.

As chairwoman of the Pennsylvania Senior Care and Services Study Commission, Dr. Sullivan-Marx advocated for less restrictive care for older adults in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. She played a pivotal role in helping Pennsylvania lawmakers understand the critical importance of Pennsylvania's Senior Care and Services Study Commission charge to project future needs for care and services for the state's older adults through 2025.

Dr. Sullivan-Marx's policy working was not limited to the Commission. In 2008, she chaired the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Commission on Senior Care Services. She also initiated an integrated practice and community mission that included the University of Pennsylvania's PACE and Living Independence for the Elderly (LIFE) programs, the Healthy in Philadelphia Initiative, Penn Nursing Consultation Service, the Penn Council of Nurses, and the Center for Professional Development. Dr. Sullivan-Marx also became section editor of the Public Policy column in the *Journal of Gerontological Nursing* in 2013.

Dr. Sullivan-Marx is passionate about older adults maintaining their independence, providing quality care in the home, and integrating mental and physical care through integrative planning. The policy implications of Dr. Sullivan-Marx's research and practice have been a major aspect of her efforts over the years.

As we move through the second decade of our century, and as Dr. Sullivan-Marx leads as dean of New York University's College of Nursing ("A Warm Welcome," 2012) and in other national roles, she is keenly aware of the changes in our country and the world, stating:

How nurses discover better ways of providing quality of care and support for older adults is critically important and challenging in the context of an ever-changing supply of nurses throughout the globe.

She recognizes the importance of technologies in health care, which enable nurses to make good decisions at the right time for patient safety and quality of care, and she is committed to making a difference through collaboration with health care staff in underserved populations and the developing world.

Dr. Sullivan-Marx's presentation during the 2013 Doris Schwartz Nurse Researcher Award ceremony at the annual scientific meeting of the Gerontological Society of America reiterated her view that the goal of leadership focused on positive and often unintended change must include the three components of policy, practice, and research (SullivanMarx, 2013).

We in the nursing profession, specifically gerontological nurses, are indeed fortunate to have Dr. Sullivan-Marx still dreaming big and staying open to possibilities.

Biography

© Reprinted with permission from NYU College of Nursing

REFERENCES

- A warm welcome to SullivanMarx Eileen M., Dean (2012, Autumn). NYU Nursing Magazine Retrieved from <https://nursing.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/NYUCNMagazine-Fall2012.pdf>
- Balanced Budget Act of 1997, H.R 2015 (105th).
- Hanrahan NP, & Sullivan-Marx EM (2005). Practice patterns and potential solutions to the shortage of providers of older adult mental health services. *Policy, Politics & Nurse Practice*, 6, 236–245.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (n.d.). Wonk Retrieved from <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/wonk>
- Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1987, Pub. L. 200–203, 101 Stat. 1330 (1987).
- Penn Nursing Science. (n.d.). Eileen Sullivan-Marx, PhD, CRNP, RN, FAAN [Web page] Retrieved from <http://www.nursing.upenn.edu/faculty/profile.asp?pid=162>
- Sullivan-Marx EM (2008). Lessons learned from advanced practice nursing payment. *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice*, 9, 121126. doi:10.1177/1527154408318098
- Sullivan-Marx EM (2013, 11). Feeling better: Forty years of caring for older adults. Presented at the annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, New Orleans, Louisiana.
- Sullivan-Marx EM, & Maislin G (2000). Comparison of nurse practitioner and family physician relative work values. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 32, 71–76. [PubMed: 10819741]