

## Spotlight on Excellence

# Spotlight on Excellence: Pediatric Nursing Salutes Exemplary Clinical Practice

Nominee: *Deb Ryan Michalak*

We begin this issue with a new forum called "Spotlight on Excellence." The editorial board of *Pediatric Nursing* wishes to introduce the readers to exemplary nurses who model pediatric advocacy at its finest. Our first selection is Chicago's own Deb Ryan Michalak.

Nominee: **Deb Ryan Michalak, RN**

Nominated by: **Anita Catlin**, Editor, Pediatric Ethics, Issues, & Commentary

**D**eb Ryan Michalak is the Director of Nursing at Misericordia South Home for Children in Chicago, Illinois. Misericordia is one of the few skilled nursing facilities in the nation accepting newborns. Babies are admitted with complex medical needs due to prematurity, drug exposure, or congenital anomaly. Deb also serves as the nursing consultant to Misericordia North in Chicago, which is a residential facility for 450 children and adults with developmental disabilities. The Misericordia facilities are owned by the religious Sisters of Mercy in conjunction with the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago.

With a core staff of 40 nurses and a daily reimbursement of only \$140.00 a day per child, Deb cares for 128 residents, 100 of whom are nonambulatory. She manages 13 children with trachs, 60 suctioning treatments per day, 45 nebulizer treatments, 80 with feeding tubes, and several with peritoneal dialysis. Their ages range from a few days old to children who have grown up in the facility.

In this old Chicago brownstone building, Deb is in constant motion, running up and down stairs; managing staff; responding to medical emergencies; and answering the phones, pages, and beepers. She checks in with the children, ruffling a head of hair; greets parents; chats with auxiliary and volunteer staff; holds interviews with new families; and talks to the administrator, all at a flying pace.

Deb is a clinical expert. She is the team leader during a code, makes decisions to transfer to acute care, starts IVs, and regulates respiratory and dialysis equipment. She consults on nutrition and respiratory needs for all 650 children. She knows each child – plays with, holds, and comforts – as she discusses rare diagnoses, recent legislative action, physical assessment, and perils of prenatal drug exposure. She juggles this as she writes grants and interacts with the State of Illinois Department of Health Services trying to obtain additional payment for more complex services for a given child.

The Spotlight on Excellence column introduces *Pediatric Nursing* readers to exemplary nurses who model pediatric advocacy at its finest. If you wish to submit the name of a pediatric nurse to be highlighted in this column, please contact Veronica D. Feeg, PhD, RN, FAAN, Editor, at [rfeeg@gmu.edu](mailto:rfeeg@gmu.edu), or c/o *Pediatric Nursing*, East Holly Avenue/Box 56, Pitman, NJ 08071-0056; (856) 256-2300.

Any day might include hopping in the car and driving out to visit a child in the surrounding tertiary hospitals. She is at the bedside of any of her critically ill children, lending support, comforting families, and consulting with physicians on the treatment plan. She also visits children at outlying facilities whose families would like to transfer in to her, but alas, the waiting list is in the hundreds. She is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Deb is renown for her expertise in the area of chronically ill children. She has coordinated two regional conferences on developmental disability. She speaks at ethics conferences representing advocacy for the disabled. She exhibits excellent communication skills in her close work with the physicians who manage the care by telephone consultation. She is a succinct communicator who can represent the children's needs to the public, the medical community, and the "number crunchers." She helps represent Misericordia to the city of Chicago in fund raising efforts.

Deb's role with parents is quite intense. She often meets with parents who after years of caring for a child at home can no longer continue. As the child becomes too heavy to lift and as the parents age, alternative placement is sought. Deb is there for them as she skillfully has them tell their story – the traumatic birth, the heartache of unmet developmental milestones, the questions, the guilt. Deb comforts, consoles, and assures parents that this will be a safe place for their child and honors them for doing so well in their caregiving role. Family members are welcome at Misericordia and into Deb's office at any time.

Deb also tracks down family members for the abandoned babies and children exposed to drugs, inviting them to visit and form relationships with their children who have been removed from their custody. She searches to find at least a grandparent to be with a critically ill or dying child. Deb's own husband and young children are frequent visitors to the facility in the family-centered model of care, as many of the children have no other family.

Under Deb's stewardship, Misericordia is run with an interdisciplinary approach. Meetings regarding a child's needs include nurses; physicians; visiting students; physical, occupational, and speech therapists; teachers; dieticians; and administrators. Deb serves as a role model for the many students who come through the facility, including advanced practice nurses, undergraduate and practical nursing students, medical residents, student teachers, and occupational and physical therapy students.

Many come to Misericordia to observe how children with these special needs are cared for, and what might have been a sterile educational experience turns into an unforgettable life transition. Deb Ryan Michalak exemplifies nurse advocacy and

*continued on page 106*



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tially dangerous shortage of nurses in the United States.

The grant from the Helene Fuld Health Trust comes at a time of growth for the coalition. Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow has recently added five new members, making the coalition 24 organizations strong. The new member organizations are the Academy of Medical Surgical Nurses, American Psychiatric Nurses Association, Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association, National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses, and the National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing. These new members will join the existing members in helping Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow attract people to the nursing profession and promote public understanding of nursing's contributions to meeting the critical need for quality health care.

Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow members are:

1. Academy of Medical Surgical Nurses
2. American Association of Colleges of Nursing
3. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses/AACN Certification Corp.
4. American Association of Nurse Anesthetists
5. American College of Nurse Practitioners
6. American Hospital Association
7. American Nurses Association
8. American Organization of Nurse Executives
9. American Psychiatric Nurses Association
10. American Red Cross
11. Arthritis Foundation
12. Association of periOperative Registered Nurses
13. Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
14. Emergency Nurses Association
15. Honor Society of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau International
16. Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association
17. National Association of Neonatal Nurses
18. National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses
19. National Association of School Nurses
20. National League for Nursing
21. National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing
22. National Student Nurses' Association
23. Oncology Nursing Society
24. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow can be found on the Internet at <http://www.nursesource.org>. Information on making contributions to the coalition is available on the Web site.

### Spotlight on Excellence

*continued from page 107*

tenaciousness to meet the needs of what might be considered society's forgotten children. Whether it is with state offices, city bureaucracy, an acute care facility, or in the Catholic health system, Deb is there quietly making recommendations to better the lives of children and families. No higher compliment can be paid her than this: When the mayor of the city had an ill family member with special needs, only Deb Ryan Michalak would do. So, after a full day at Misericordia and stopping home to put her own children to bed and greet her husband, she went to the mayor's home for the night shift. And she continued to do this several times a week until her patient peacefully died. Chicago – Catholic – Children – Deb Ryan Michalak. These words exemplify excellence in clinical practice. The Editorial Board of *Pediatric Nursing* is delighted to offer Deb to you as their first "Nurse in the Spotlight."