WCN likes to highlight emerging leaders in nursing. If you know a nurse relatively new in their practice or working towards an advanced nursing degree impacting nursing with their leadership, let us know. Head over to wcnursing.org/in-the-spotlight/nominate-a-nurse/ and fill out the form to nominate an emerging nurse leader today!

In this issue of WCN News we sat down to talk with Rikki Peck, a motivated 2020 DNP graduate from the University of Washington specializing in population health with a certificate in international humanitarian response.

Rikki was born in Auburn, WA and lived in Federal Way until she was 13 before her family moved to the northern town of Anchorage, AK. After graduating from high school, Rikki left Alaska for Boise State University where she earned her BSN. Rikki then returned to Alaska where she started her nursing career as a relief nurse for the State of Alaska Department of Corrections. After her first year, she took some time off to travel before returning to work at a pediatric outpatient clinic.

**WCN:** You started your career as a nurse in a corrections facility. What was that like?

**Rikki Peck:** It was eye-opening for sure. Having my first experience as a working nurse at a corrections facility was interesting for me because I found myself in a nursing position where the primary focus wasn’t medicine or health. In general, people go to a doctor or clinic to get care, and that might not be their favorite thing to do, but the primary focus of their visit is still health, whereas, health is not the primary focus of the prison system.

**WCN:** As a nurse going into this environment to help people, what were some of your takeaways from the experience?

**Rikki Peck:** In the correctional facility, nursing care wasn’t the main focus. Part of my job was giving an assessment of people brought to the jail to find out if they were healthy enough to stay there.

**WCN:** What do you mean?

**Rikki Peck:** Often my patients were inebriated, on drugs, or perhaps needed access to a regular medication they were taking for a chronic condition. Or, their health care need could be something like needing stitches or some other type of medical attention. When you work in a hospital, people expect to see a nurse, but in jail, that is not why people are there. As a result, some of the patients are hesitant. And although this can happen in a hospital, too, in a corrections facility, you don’t have the same support of a larger medical team or hospital system.

However, as my very first nursing position, it was a tremendous learning experience. I appreciate that I had to learn to work very independently since I worked on my own a lot. I was also exposed to what care looked like when people are at their most vulnerable.

**WCN:** Your next experience was at a pediatric outpatient clinic. How did this compare to working at a corrections facility?

**Rikki Peck:** It was very different. I loved my job working at the pediatric clinic. It was Mon-Fri for the most part, and our team of employees felt like family. It was a very fun and positive work environment. My first two jobs were certainly night and day. At the outpatient clinic, I got to give away stickers, and giving vaccines was one of the harder things we did, which wasn’t too difficult. At first, what I liked least about the job was triage, but I even grew to enjoy that after a while.

Although my first two experiences were very different from each other, I’m grateful for each of them. I think each job helped round out my nursing career and fuel my passion for population health nursing.

**WCN:** Challenging circumstances can often be incredible opportunities for growth, but it is also important that they are balanced out with times of joy and fulfillment. What inspired you to go into nursing to begin with?

**Rikki Peck:** I wanted to help people, and I saw nursing as a practical way to help others. Other people’s bodily functions never upset me, things like blood or guts, so I knew I could handle that aspect of it. I enjoy working with people and so nursing felt like a good fit. When I was in high school and choosing my career, I was also
interested in international work, and nursing was a great venue for keeping that door open throughout my career. It was a good fit for me.

WNC: Is anyone else in your family a nurse?

Rikki Peck: No. I am the first nurse in my family. However, my family was and continues to be very supportive of me. I am also the first person in my immediate family to get a four-year degree and go to graduate school. Without support from my parents and extended family, I honestly don’t think I would be where I am today.

WNC: What are some of the challenges you have had to navigate becoming a nurse?

Rikki Peck: Some of the biggest challenges I’ve had center around strategic career moves. A lot of people graduate from nursing school expecting to work on a medical-surgical floor, but that was not the path I took. Finding just the right niche or specialty in nursing has been difficult for me. I don’t think I have totally found it yet but also acknowledge that this is an ongoing process. I am looking forward to focusing more on disaster preparedness and recovery and I am passionate about immigrant and refugee health, both here in America and abroad. My decision to go back to school was so I could continue to grow my knowledge and be a part of solutions that addressed health problems on a macro level instead of on a case-by-case or individual basis.

As nurses, we can positively impact people on an individual level or a larger population level. I think we can influence more than one patient at a time. We can influence a larger public through our compassion, our advocacy, and by being involved in policy creation and change, among other things.

WNC: Why do you think diversity is important in the nursing workforce?

Rikki Peck: Because we live in a world of diversity, it is important that our profession reflects that. I think it is important to have diverse care teams that understand our patients and can bring a deeper understanding and comfort to what a patient might be experiencing. A diverse nursing workforce, in my opinion, is a more competent workforce.

WNC: Thank you Rikki!

May 2020 Update: Rikki has accepted a job with Neighborhood House and will start work after graduation as a Community Health Nurse in Child Development. She’s looking forward to using the skills she obtained in the DNP program while maintaining her connection to pediatric health. Additionally, she has begun serving a two-year term as an at-large member for the Boise State Honors College Alumni Chapter.

While working at WCN during the winter quarter of 2020, Rikki produced a podcast on WCN sharing some information on who we are and the work we do. To listen to the podcast and learn more about WCN, please click [here](#).