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McGonigal, Wendy interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

WENDY MCGONIGAL

JULY 2, 2003

DONNA MILES CURRY: Okay, today is July the second and this is the oral history project for the College of Nursing and Health and today is part of the sub-project where we are focusing on the history of the FNP program. We're interviewing Wendy McGonigal. Do you have the name, the word sheet? I'll do that. And with us besides Wendy is myself, Donna Miles Curry and Kim Kirby will be the primary interviewer for today. So we'll let you go ahead, Kim.

KIM KIRBY: Why don't you tell me about your personal background and how you came to Wright State University.

WENDY MCGONIGAL: Okay. I graduated in 1969 from Ohio State with a BS in medical technology. From there I went to the University of Minnesota and was there for twenty-five years as a medical technologist. I was also supervisor of an outpatient laboratory. After twenty-five years of being at the University of Minnesota I decided that I wanted to go back and get a masters degree. So I went to the medical technology office and I said, "I'd like to get a masters degree." And they said to me, "Wendy, what in the world would you use it for?" I go oh, okay. (Laughs) Okay, well if you don't think there's any benefit to doing that I won't do that. So then they said, so I thought about I had this two-year block of time, I want to do something different. What can I do? So I thought about my job in the outpatient lab and you don't know about laboratories but we had contact with patients. And I thought about it, I love patient contact and I'm really good at it. So maybe I should think about being a nurse. So I went over to the nursing program at the University of Minnesota and I said to them "You know I've got this two years. Could I get a BSN in two years?" And they looked and said, "Oh, you've got

all the med, you've met all the sciences. You could get your bachelors in two years." So, okay great. I said, "I'm really interested in getting a masters eventually." "We'd love to have you get a masters and we'd love to have you get a PhD." Well you know first things first. So then I went and I got my bachelors at University of Minnesota in 1991. And it was the best job. It was the best decision for me at that point. And then I went because I did a critical care rotation in my BSN program and did it on a NICU, a neonatal intensive care unit and found I loved it. Got a job at Minneapolis Children's on the NICU. Worked there for two years then I grew up in Columbus, my sister's here at Wright State, my dad was eighty some years old. I had just recently got divorced, my daughter wanted to go to the University of Cincinnati to go to school. So you know why not pay in state instead of out of state tuition. Why not move home? This is probably the perfect time to move home. So I moved down to Dayton, got a job at Miami Valley Hospital on their NICU. Worked there for three years and then I thought, then I was thinking about going to graduate school at Wright State. And so then I thought initially I would go into the education track. That was where I was going to go and I got a letter from Margaret Clark Graham and I got a letter from the university, College of Nursing and Health. I'm not sure it was called that back then but anyway.

DMC: School of Nursing.

WM: Yeah, School of Nursing. And I got, and they said we've got this brand new program that we are starting up and it's going to be a formal nurse practitioner program. We know that you've applied and I had applied and been accepted to the College of Nursing's [sic] masters program. We're looking to see if there might be people interested in this family nurse practitioner. Well I thought about it and I thought about it and I thought about it and I thought maybe that would, although I'd only done neonatal nursing and that's an entity unto itself,

completely different from any kind of nursing. And so I said well maybe, I can do this. That would be fun. So they asked me to write you know a little blurb about what was my most interesting nursing experience and I did that. And low and behold I was notified that I could participate. They called me and said, "Do you want the part time track or the full time track?" I said, "How long will it take with a part time track?" "Well it can take how ever long you want to do, maybe four years, whatever. You could do it while you work." And I said "What if I do it the short way?" They said "Two years." I said, "I'll do the full time." And so that's what I did and I was accepted.

KK: Cool.

WM: We heard, this is what we heard. That there were about two hundred applicants for that first class and nine of us made it. I think there were supposed to be ten positions but one person never came but it ended up having nine of us in that initial class.

KK: What else do you remember about the early years at Wright State while you were here?

WM: Um, when I first started here (Laughs) we were the guinea pigs. You know we tried; everything if it didn't work right it was because we were the guinea pigs and then we gave at the end of every quarter I mean pages and pages of what we were to do. But you know they did listen to us because you know. The first quarter I was here I took nineteen hours. I worked twenty hours in the research lab and twenty hours at the hospital. And I figured if I could do that, if I could get through that quarter I could do anything I darn well pleased. And I did. It was the hardest quarter I ever had but I made it and I figured well if I can do that I can do anything. It was, we didn't start our rotations the first quarter, which was a good thing with the nineteen credit hours that I had. But when we started going it was always a problem to find sites for us initially because doctors

had no idea what nurse practitioners, here in Ohio they had no idea what nurse practitioners were. I had come from a state where you didn't see a physician until you saw the nurse practitioner first. So this was, I mean I had no idea. I thought everybody was just like Minnesota. I had no idea before there was a difference between Minnesota and Ohio. Well I quickly learned and the physicians didn't have a clue what we could do, how we could do anything. So my first rotation I did a rotation with a DO, an internal medicine doc. And I just followed him around. I just followed him around for the whole quarter. For my adult education that's what I did. And I went down to the Valley for my women's health rotation and actually did it with Donna Delgado. I'm not saying her name right but she's from Minnesota. (Laughs) She was a nurse midwife up in Minnesota when I was there. I didn't know it but I knew of this nurse midwifery program. And went up and she let me do everything. I mean just go to it and that was the best quarter I ever had. The other two quarters I spent with a physician. I just trailed him around and then I did my, what do you call it?

DMC: Practicum.

WM: Practicum, yes. I went out to Canal Winchester, which was quite a drive to go out to Canal Winchester, and they had no clue what to do with me and there was another nurse practitioner doing a practicum there from Ohio State. I don't know, I don't remember what her track was but she was from Ohio State. The two of us just looked at each other. Well this isn't going to help but all we did was just follow them around again. Now I think they've changed that since, they don't allow that to happen I don't think anymore. But it's because they had trouble finding sites. They didn't know what to do with us. That kind of thing. So when I first, when I graduated in March of '96 we started in September of '94 and graduated in March of '96. In that time I graduated, when I started in an internal medicine office up in Springfield and thank

goodness there was a doctor there, Dr. Blackburn and he works now at Yellow Springs clinic. He took me under his wing and taught me absolutely everything I needed to know. I had no idea how to do office nursing. I had no concept. I didn't know what cerumen was, didn't know how to get it out of ears. I didn't know anything but he said Wendy you've got a really good basic background. And my years as a med tech certainly helped. I ran their lab for a while you know that kind of thing. He took me under his wing, and he told me everything. He taught me what to prescribe. If I hadn't had him I might have gotten out of it, out of nurse practitioner. So it's been the best thing I've ever done. This was the best choice for me and then when I got the job here, this is the best job I've ever had. This is absolutely the best job. I have more autonomy in this job than I've ever had in any other job I've ever been in and I have a great collaborating physician right now, Gordon Wahlboro. You know when I call him and I say "Bert and I saw something strange today." He says, "If you don't know what it is I don't know what it is." (Laughs) You know? That's the kind of relationship because he's only here four hours a week. Otherwise I can get a hold of him throughout the day by paging him and he'll call me within five minutes but I'm pretty much what's here. But the literature says in a college health setting, nurse practitioners can handle eighty-five to ninety-three percent of what walks through our doors. We're finding that percentage is a little bit higher than that.

KK: Great. Have you had any challenges (Laughs) at Wright State fulfilling your role here?

WM: Less so here than in other places where I've worked. At least everybody knows — pretty much what a nurse practitioner is. I do have some challenges with parents. Parents still don't know what a nurse practitioner is and why don't you have a physician there all the time. So some of that, you know I have a great deal; I get a great deal of respect from the people

around on campus. That's not the problem. It's just parents who don't know yet what a nurse practitioner is. Somebody, oh she's just a nurse. She gave my daughter a medication or something like that. They'll call and say. Well don't you have physicians there and aren't you open till midnight? No we don't have a physician and we're not open till midnight. That kind of thing.

DMC: The next question we're going to ask you is what were you trying to accomplish while at Wright State. Would you like to talk, I think you kind of addressed it. Is there anything more related to when you were a student in the FNP program?

WM: Um.

DMC: You probably actually answered some of that already.

WM: Yeah. I tried to, I knew I had to work as a GA, did that and then had to work at the Valley too. I worked every weekend at the Valley and then trying to do my school work and trying to get as much out of it as I possibly could. I was a little bit older than some of the other kids in the class although there was still one older than me. So I felt really good. (Laughs) And we were, by and large, because although I probably was, no, there was one with less nursing experience. Just a little bit less than I did, but the rest of them came with years of nursing experience. So I kind of felt like the new kid on the block even though I was older than a lot of them.

KK: Can you describe your interactions with administrators, colleagues, students while you were at Wright State?

WM: We, because there were only nine of us, we're all very, very, very good friends and we still keep in contact with each other. We felt like we suffered together and we gained together, you know it was a wonderful group of gals. They were all top-notch gals. So that was fine and Margaret was I mean Margaret is what I want to be. (Laughs) I try to emulate Margaret

in every aspect. She's such a good teacher. She's not a good test giver. (Laughs) But she will admit to that herself She's such a good advocate for nurse practitioners and she always understood your problems. I'd go in "Oh, I'm just not getting this or this was a terrible week for me. I had a trouble at my site or whatever." She was always very understanding, very professional when she came and very supportive of what we were going through and how we were trying to get through. I mean, Margaret's my hero. So, she was wonderful. The dean was also was; the dean at that time was Jean ---

DMC: Swart.

WM: Swart and she was also helpful. I had her for one class. She was on my thesis committee, and I had some problems toward the end. I had some health problems and she helped me through that. So, everybody that I had was extremely supportive of what was going on and very proud of what we were trying to do.

DMC: What did you end up doing your thesis on?

WM: The role of the nurse practitioner in managed care.

DMC: Oh, excellent.

WM: Uh-huh.

KK: Our next question is describe your interactions with the wider WSU campus community but I think- -

WM: Right now?

KK: Yeah.

WM: Right now, oh I'm on various committees; any health related committee they call me. I'm on a SARS committee. I was on getting AED in all the buildings I was on that committee. I have a core relationship with Dan Burts who's over in campus housing. You know

I'm on the student affairs committee. I see that as a role to be available and be a liaison for other campus departments that need some help. I just went over and did a protecting yourself from the sun for a grounds crew. So you know that kind of thing I'm willing to go and do that. I went out to Meadowdale High School this spring and talked to the kids about sexually transmitted diseases. That was fun. (Laughs)

DMC: Was it from April on?

WM: Huh?

DMC: Was it in April or?

WM: Yeah, it must have been April or May.

DMC: I had a student there I just wondered if she got to hear you.

WM: Uh-huh.

KK: Any relationships with the community institutions like the hospitals or different agencies besides what you do at Wright State?

WM: Women's, I have a relationship with a facility in Kettering that does abortion and we work together when I have a student who requests that.

KK: Uh-huh. Okay. How are things now with the FNP?

WM: I think they're better. I still think that docs, you know in many of my practices docs have no clue what to do with me. You know I've done everything but um, a lot of it not related to being a nurse practitioner.

KK: Right. The next question we're to ask you is how you feel your experiences at Wright State has affected your career.

DMC: You just answered half of our questions without us even asking them.

WM: Wright State University has an excellent graduate program. People at least in the

area know that graduates from Wright State University Graduate Nursing Program are going to be pretty top-notch. And that, every single one of them I've met and I hire some of them to come and work here. I mean they can walk in and take over. They're very exceptional candidates. You know they're great people. I know that they've got but it has a lot of love to do. I'm real impressed. I'm glad to be one of them.

KK: Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you would like to talk about?

WM: Um, no. One, although I was eligible to get my prescriptive authority initially when I graduated I never got it in any of my places until I came here as the director of the nurse practitioner school and it is, I mean as director of the Student Health Services. It wasn't a detriment not to have it but it's such a joy to have it now. It's freed up so many things and made it so much easier to practice with it. So you know it's been a hard battle won you know but it certainly is worth it. It's certainly worth it to the students who come here and I don't have to run and get a doctor's signature every time or I don't have to call the doctor and say look I'm going to call this in especially when I'm here by myself.

KK: What year did you get your prescriptive authority?

WM: When I came here 2000, May of 2000.

KK: So had worked for almost four years?

WM: Four years without it. Yep. It was possible but it's sure a lot easier with it.

DMC: So you could have been part of like the pilot project?

WM: I was pilot project.

DMC: You were pilot project but you didn't do a prescriptive piece.

WM: Right. I could have done it up in my internal medicine in Springfield because Clark County was, at that point I don't know it may still be, an underserved population.

DMC: Exactly.

WM: Then I went from there down to Dayton and worked in the pain management clinic but that was here and I would have lost it because there was nothing, I would have no use for it there.

DMC: So if someone was asking you about the early years of the family nurse practitioner program at Wright State is there any other special stories, occurrences, special memories that you have of those years when you were in that first graduating class?

WM: Um, I remember with fondness Dr. Classen's lectures. He's a kind, gentle man and you could tell that and he was very..., he allowed us to ask questions and that kind of thing. I liked him very much and I just thought, even though my practicums weren't all that great, I learned lots in my class work in the classroom setting. That was worth it, I didn't feel like I was out not know anything. You know I said that I did but in actuality when push came to shove I mean I know that because I'd gotten it in class work. I'm trying to remember, one of the gals, eight of us graduated in March of '96. One of us graduated in December because she had to and she was so great. She already had a job. She had everything ready to go for her when she got done. She was so great and she had a telegraphic I mean she could- -

DMC: Photographic.

WM: Photographic memory. So she took the boards before we did and she remembered about a hundred questions came out and wrote to all of us which was a big you know she didn't have all the answers but at least she had the questions there. So at least you had a clue of what you were going to be studying for. She lived in Mansfield and she would come and stay in my house so that she could stay there rather than drive back and forth to Mansfield all the time. So she did that a bunch of times. It was just such a good group of people and we all suffered

together and we all had joy together.

DMC: Great. Anything else?

WM: Nothing else that I can remember. I'm too old to.

DMC: As soon as we turn it off I know you'll think of something.

WM: I know.

DMC: Great. Well thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW