

## 100 Years of Professional Nursing in North Carolina

### Mary Lewis Wyche: Implementor of Dreams

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As founder of both the North Carolina Nurses Association and the North Carolina Board of Nursing, Mary Lewis Wyche has been heralded as the pioneer and leading force in organized nursing in the state. And perhaps because of having a shared “ancestor” and a common background and vision, the close ties between the two organizations have survived for 100 years.

Miss Wyche was born February 26, 1858, near Henderson in Vance County. She had six sisters and several brothers. She attended Henderson College and, while a student, taught in the primary department of that school. After graduating, she moved to Chapel Hill where she established a home for her younger brothers while they attended the University of North Carolina. While in Chapel Hill, she taught school part time and also kept boarders. Her strong belief in education led her to make small loans to a number of young students who might not have otherwise been able to enter college.

By the time Miss Wyche’s brothers no longer needed her assistance, most of her sisters were married. Although she had arrived at an age when she could have been designated an “old maid,” she was just beginning her own life as a professional woman. Initially, she had thought she wanted to become a physician, but then decided on a nursing career. She graduated from Philadelphia General Hospital in 1894 at the age of 36.

Upon her return to North Carolina, she was appointed superintendent of nurses at Rex Hospital in Raleigh. She served as head-nurse, matron, and bookkeeper, and received \$25 a month with room and board. As soon as she was situated, she organized the

Rex Hospital Training School for Nurses. There were five students in the initial class and four of them graduated.

Miss Wyche realized the great need for higher standards for nursing in North Carolina. She attended a meeting of the International Council of Nurses in Buffalo, New York, and listened to discussions on legislation and registration. She returned home to form a state nurses association. Her first attempt was to organize the Raleigh Nurses Association in 1901. She sent postcards to Raleigh nurses with this request: “Please meet me at the office of Dr. A. W. Knox at four o’clock p.m. Wednesday, October 10, 1901.”

Not one single nurse showed up, but this did not stop Miss Wyche. Two weeks later, a second postcard went out to her fellow nurses. This notice read: “There will be another important meeting of the Raleigh Nurses Association at 4 o’clock p.m. Wednesday, October 24, 1901.”

Curiosity took the place of indifference. The ruse worked. Every nurse heeded the second notice. Miss Wyche, after confessing the trick she had played in order to bring them together, presented her plans for the organization and asked their opinions.

The following year, with the help of the Raleigh Nurses Association, she set out to organize the state nurses association. Questionnaires were sent to every nurse in the state whose address could be secured. The response was favorable, so plans were made for these nurses to meet in Raleigh during Fair Week when railroads offered special rates. Fourteen nurses met with the Raleigh Nurses Association in the

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*Mary Lewis Wyche*

Olivia Raney Library on October 28, 1902, and the North Carolina State Nurses Association was formed.

Miss Wyche's next step was to have a law enacted for the registration of nurses. This was her plan for raising standards and assuring better education in theory and skill in practice so that the public would have confidence in the registered nurse. It was accomplished through the NC State Nurses Association. This law, signed by governor Charles Aycock on March 3, 1903, made North Carolina the first state to establish registration of nurses.

Josephine Burton, of Craven County, was registered on June 4, 1903, becoming the first registered nurse in the country. In addition, another 85 women were licensed "without examination" in 1903. One of these nurses, Annie Lowe Rutherford, who graduated from Freedmen's Hospital School of Nursing, became the first African-American nurse to be licensed in the United States. Qualified individuals could be licensed "without examination" through 1909. After that year, all registered nurses were required to pass a licensing examination.

The original Board of Nurse Examiners was composed of two physicians appointed by the North Carolina Medical Society and three registered nurses appointed by the North Carolina State Nurses Association. Twenty years later, the law was changed so that the North Carolina Hospital Association could appoint one of the physician members. Eventually, the governor of North Carolina made all the appoint-

ments. In 1981, in perhaps one of the most significant revisions of the Nursing Practice Act, North Carolina became (and remains) the only state to elect its nurse members to the Board of Nursing.

Miss Wyche was made honorary president of the NC State Nurses Association for life in 1907. She served six years on the North Carolina Board of Examiners for Trained Nurses. She alternated her years in the nursing profession between private duty nursing and hospital nursing. She retired in 1925 after serving as superintendent of nurses at Watts Hospital in Durham for 10 years and Sarah Elizabeth Hospital in Henderson for two years. She compiled a history of nursing in North Carolina that was published in 1938, two years after her death.

For almost half a century, the Association and the Board either shared office space or had offices adjacent to each other. Although separated geographically, the close philosophical relationship continues today. In recent years, the two organizations have worked closely to help secure passage of legislation to protect the title of "nurse," to require all health care providers to have credentials on their name badges, and to enter into a multi-state compact that allows North Carolina nurses to practice in other compact states without securing a license in those states.

During the next century, may North Carolina continue to see these two organizations working collaboratively to assure quality nursing care for the citizens of the state.

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## *License Portability*

# Australian Mutual Recognition Registration System for Medical Practitioners

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*Mr Wilde*

Australia is made up of six independent States and has two Territories: South Australia; Western Australia; Tasmania; Victoria; New South Wales; Queensland; the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory.

Each of these independent bodies has a Medical Board or Council that is responsible for registration and disciplining of the medical profession in its geographic area.

All have separate Medical Acts that contain distinct differences as well as some similarities.

Before the advent of Mutual Recognition (MR),

these differences included the recognition of different basic and specialist qualifications for the purposes of registration. This led to the difficult situation where a practitioner could be eligible to be registered in one jurisdiction but ineligible to be registered and work in another.

Attempts to rectify this situation occupied annual joint meetings of Presidents and Registrars of the Medical Boards and Councils for many years, and whilst some progress was made, significant difficulties and differences remained.

When the Australian Medical Council (AMC) was formed (in 1984) as a joint initiative of the Commonwealth, State, and Territory Governments and the eight State and Territory Medical Boards, one of its main tasks was to give advice and make recom-