

Tarheel Footprints in Health Care

Recognizing unusual and often unsung contributions of individual citizens who have made health care for North Carolinians more accessible and of higher quality

Merry-K. Moos Pioneer for Preconception Health



Often referred to as the “Pioneer for Preconception Health” by her colleagues, Merry-K. Moos has devoted a lifetime’s worth of work to improving preconception health and birth outcomes for women. She was one of the first individuals in health care to promote the concept of preconception health and continues to serve as a leader for this movement. Twenty years ago, while the rest of health care was focusing on improving birth outcomes for women during pregnancy, Ms. Moos was talking about the need to care for women across their reproductive lifespan. In 1989 she wrote, “Only casual attention has been given to the proposition that one of the best protections available against low birth weight and other poor pregnancy outcomes is to have a woman actively plan for pregnancy, enter pregnancy in good health with as few risk factors as possible, and be fully informed about her reproductive and general health.”¹

In the late 1980s Ms. Moos and Dr. Robert Cefalo co-authored the first clinical textbook to focus on preconception health care. She then coordinated several innovative projects in North Carolina to move activities forward that were aimed at improving women’s wellness. Twenty years later, due to her expertise and dedication to the preconception health movement, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Panel for Preconception Health selected Ms. Moos to develop a national preconception curriculum for health care providers and to co-create preconception care national guidelines. She has been an integral part of the national conversation on preconception health and her leadership has been important in creating strong guidelines and recommendations for women’s health during their reproductive years.

While Ms. Moos is a nationally recognized leader in preconception health, she is also a strong patient advocate and caring clinician. For many years, Ms. Moos ran the adolescent prenatal and parenting clinic at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, connecting teenagers with the resources they needed and providing them and their babies with good care and counsel. The attention, effort, and energy she put forth in working with teenagers was inspiring and helped to create special bonds with her patients.

When asked about Merry-K. Moos, her close colleague Sarah Verbiest says, “She has been a great mentor to many students. She has provided guidance to students in many capacities—from classroom projects to doctoral committees. When Merry-K. commits to working with a student she truly pledges her time and her expertise. Her praise is valuable because of her high standards and the fact that she never gives it falsely.” When asked to describe Ms. Moos as a collaborator, Verbiest says, “You always want her at your meetings! She’s excellent at framing issues and moving the conversation forward. She’s able to see many points of view and help synthesize them into a direction that all can embrace.”

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In addition to her work with patients and students, Ms. Moos provided training and support to public health and private clinics in North Carolina for over 20 years. Through her role as a perinatal outreach educator and trainer, Ms. Moos worked with clinicians to address a variety of issues to improve birth outcomes, and has also addressed many challenges from the health care system level to individual clinical practices.

Merry-K. Moos has a BSN from the University of Washington at Seattle, an FNP from the University of California at Los Angeles, and an MPH from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). A long-standing March of Dimes volunteer, she has nationally authored nursing modules, served on many committees, and locally provided support to programs such as the North Carolina Folic Acid Campaign. Last year she retired from her full-time position at UNC, where she worked for the past 30 years. During that time she held many positions within the university, including research professor in the Division of Maternal-Fetal Medicine, adjunct professor at the Gillings School of Global Public Health, and director of the Women's Health Information Center at UNC Hospitals. Even though she has transitioned out of a full-time role at UNC, she is still closely linked with many ideas and initiatives going on there. Since her retirement Ms. Moos has been doing national and international speaking on preconception health and remains a top opinion leader in this area. Her work for the preconception health of women clearly continues.

REFERENCE

- 1 Moos M-K. Preconception health promotion: a health education opportunity for all women. *Women and Health*. 1989;15(3):55-68.

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