

Tar Heel Footprints in Health Care

*A periodic feature that recognizes individuals whose efforts—
often unsung—enhance the health of North Carolinians*

Monica Parker, RN, MS, CDE



Monica Parker has dedicated her career to working with poor populations in rural North Carolina. In the early 1990s, Parker and East Carolina University joined forces with Religious Community Services in New Bern, North Carolina. A nursing assessment clinic was established and provided underserved individuals with health assessments, medication reviews, referrals, and other primary care needs. In 1994, a survey of patients found that many were uninsured and received most of their health care in emergency departments. Parker and others had found a great need in the community to address.

The MERCI Clinic, the creation of which is described by Parker's colleagues as her greatest achievement, was founded in 1996, in part, because of the survey. According to her colleague Elaine Scott, another reason for the creation of the MERCI Clinic was Parker's dedication to her students, particularly in terms of improving their learning experience. The clinic provides services to uninsured individuals in Craven, Jones, and Pamlico counties who have low incomes and are ineligible for Medicaid or other benefits. Martha Engelke, a colleague at East Carolina University, acknowledges Parker's hard work in creating the clinic and says she "is very quiet but committed and persistent in helping a lot of people without requiring a lot of recognition." Parker has a very good reputation at the clinic with her peers and her patients. Nancy Alexander, executive director of the MERCI Clinic, says, "As a faculty member, [Parker] is well versed. As a peer, she is very affirming, knowledgeable, and approachable. As a friend, she is genuine person and always willing to help."

Parker is also praised by her colleagues for her work in diabetes education. As a clinical diabetes educator, Parker has helped many patients manage their diabetes, especially those with limited resources to do so. Engelke describes her as "always active in working with people with diabetes and great at getting vendors to give resources for those not able to afford them."

Parker was inspired by her older sister to become a nurse. When Parker was 14 years old, she went to visit her sister, who was in nursing school, and accompanied her sister on some home visits. She realized that there is more to nursing outside of hospital and institutional settings and that she wanted to practice nursing in the community. Parker has since inspired many students to follow in her footsteps. Scott says that Parker has successfully conveyed "to hundreds of nursing students that health starts in the community."

Parker received a bachelor of science in nursing degree from Fitchburg State College and a master of science in nursing degree from Boston College. She has served as a coordinator for the special need medical shelters and as a member of the local committee of the American Association of Diabetes Educators.

Parker enjoys her new retirement by watching Formula One racing, the Boston Red Sox, and East Carolina University sports when she is not busy volunteering at the clinic. NCMJ

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