

Tar Heel Footprints in Health Care

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

Carolyn Sexton, RN, MPH



Throughout her career in public health, Carolyn Sexton has contributed considerably to maternal and child health in North Carolina. After receiving her BSN at Duke University's School of Nursing, Sexton received her MPH in Health Policy and Administration from the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health, while working at the North Carolina Division of Medical Assistance (DMA). As the prevention services unit program manager, Sexton served as the first state coordinator for the Baby Love program, a care management model that successfully addressed high infant mortality rates by improving access to early prenatal care and the community resources required to have a healthy baby. This work was done in close collaboration with the North Carolina Division of Public Health (DPH), and the North Carolina Office of Rural Health and Community Care.

Dennis Williams, the senior policy and program advisor at DPH, who worked with Sexton at DMA praised her continued work, "Carolyn provides a great example of what public service is all about. Through her selfless dedication, tireless advocacy, perseverance, and work ethic, she has consistently and effectively contributed to improving the health and well-being of fellow North Carolinians."

Sexton subsequently continued to work in a collaborative capacity as a public health nursing consultant at DPH, where she led statewide outreach for North Carolina's Child Health Insurance Programs, contributed to the annual review/development of DMA's Health Check Policy and provided technical assistance to school-based/linked health centers statewide. With the support of a large group of stakeholders in the primary care community, Sexton developed an Adolescent Health Check Screening that outlined a package of preventive clinical services appropriate for youth ages 11-20 receiving routine preventive care.

Among the proposed services were an annual comprehensive physical exam and health history, visual and hearing risk assessments, dental screenings, nutrition assessments, immunizations, and developmental, psychosocial/behavioral and alcohol/drug use assessments. Family planning and other additional services were also identified for female adolescents. The adolescent services guidelines were based on the 2008 Bright Futures, 3rd Edition and other national evidence-based practice resources.

Following a recommendation from the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Adolescent Health Task Force that DMA should cover and improve annual high-quality well-visits for adolescents, Sexton worked in partnership with DMA to draft a new adolescent well-visit policy. Though the entire package as originally envisioned was not adopted due to fiscal restraints, with DMA's support, aspects of the package were implemented incrementally, strengthening the foundation for improved adolescent well-child care in North Carolina. In 2009, Sexton received the North Carolina Pediatric Society's Good for Kids Award in recognition of her admirable work to improve the quality of life of adolescents across the state.

Sexton described her work on the adolescent health package as a "very exciting project because of the consensus of opinion at the national level (Bright Futures) and the passion of North Carolina adolescent health advocates. I truly loved being a part of this work and the opportunity to lead this project." She is now working as a project manager for Care Coordination for Children (CC4C), a program administered as a partnership between Community Care of North Carolina, DPH, and DMA, which provides at-risk population management for children birth to 5 years of age. **NCMJ**

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Anne M. Williams, North Carolina Institute of Medicine, 630 Davis Dr, Ste 100, Morrisville, NC 27560 (anne_williams@nciom.org).

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