American Medical Informatics Association Nursing Informatics History project

Purpose

The overall purpose of the Nursing Informatics History Project is to document and preserve the history of nursing informatics.

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- **κaren Martin Interview**

Interviewer: Alright, Karen start with your name, your educational background, your title.

Karen Martin: My name is Karen Martin; I'm from Omaha, Nebraska. My degrees are from—diploma degree from Methodist in Peoria, Illinois, Methodist Hospital of Nursing, a Bachelors Degree from University of Iowa, and a Masters in Community Health from University of Nebraska. I have been a Healthcare Consultant since 1993, prior to that for 16 years I was in charge of research at the VNA of Omaha, and my experience has been primarily in community health.

Interviewer: First the basics, how would you describe nursing informatics?

Karen Martin: I see nursing informatics as a circle, a very important circle, but within a much bigger circle. And that is information management. I see us in nursing informatics as being very important but in a much bigger picture related to all these other folks that are involved in the field.

Interviewer: You mentioned this a little bit, but please briefly describe your career in nursing that led up to your involvement in nursing informatics.

Karen Martin: I was a staff nurse and then a director of a homecare public health agency. But truly my entry into informatics has to do with the opportunity, the unbelievable opportunity in 1978 to become employed at the VNA of Omaha. The agency had already had one federally funded research project and I began with research project number two.

Interviewer: Now Karen, did you have an "aha" moment when you realized the value of informatics, how did you come to understand the value of informatics?

Karen Martin: Again, I had this opportunity to begin working at the VNA of Omaha.

Interviewer: When did you come to understand the value of informatics? So you say "I understood the value of informatics…"

Karen Martin: I really began to understand the value of informatics, um, as I began employed at the VNA of Omaha in 1978. But it took awhile for me to really get on board. We had a visionary leader DeLanne Simmons, who totally understood informatics and for me even today sitting here with you and thinking about this it's just almost gives me shivers to think that in 1978 she was as data driven as she was and totally understood that the future for healthcare not just nurses, but for the disciplines at the VNA of Omaha was in informatics and that each practitioner would not be having data entry done by a data entry clerk or support staff but data entry was going to be done by individual practitioners. We just chuckled at her and said "if you say so, Donnie!" and then went on about the research projects.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself an informatics nurse and when did this first happen?

Karen Martin: I do not consider myself an informatics nurse perse, you know my title is healthcare consultant and I really, um, that's so comfortable for me. I see myself as a champion or a cheerleader who has this wonderful privilege of working with practice sites nationally and internationally of working with educators and schools of nursing and now even some other schools beyond nursing, and then very importantly working with vendors. So if I wanted to pick any one word other than healthcare consultant, I would pick partner because I really feel this tremendous partnership with all of these wonderful people that I have the privilege of working with.

Interviewer: Let's talk about your personal aspirations and your accomplishments. What overall vision guided your work?

Karen Martin: I do not have the opportunity or privilege of saying that in 1978 or even at a year before I was forward thinking enough to have an exact career planned. What in fact what happened for me was this opportunity in '78 which I thought would last a couple years. Here it is many years later and I have gotten to continue on this journey, windows opened, doors opened and I just have had, been at the right place at the right time and been able because of being part of a team. The team initially was a team at the VNA of Omaha as the Omaha system has evolved the team has become a board, we have a

wonderful set of board members, and we have these wonderful vendors that were working together, so again, my career has simply evolved thanks to all of these people.

Interviewer: Speaking of these people, who were some of the people, you mentioned one already, but who were some of the people you collaborated with to accomplish your vision and your goals.

Karen Martin: People that have been very important to me, um, Donnie Simmons I mentioned previously, Nancy Scheet was another person at the VNA, our test sites were very important. Then as I fast forward a little bit—thinking about *Pat Schwirian's* conferences at Ohio State introduced me and began my real national networking with other people in informatics. Then fast forward to Omaha System users. I can think of specific directors and leaders in agencies along the way, the vendors, each vendor group has been very important. Harriet Werley was a very important person for me. She was so open, so supportive, such a good mentor. Helped me learn that it's 'data are' not 'data is'. Just over the years, now I have a number of international friends and again I just really can't under estimate the value of networking.

Interviewer: Beautiful. Aside from or even including your personal accomplishments what do you see as the significant events that have shaped the field of nursing informatics?

Karen Martin: There are so many events. As I think back in some ways…oops.

Interviewer: There are so many events that have shaped the field of nursing informatics…

Karen Martin: Oh, OK, excuse me [laughing], now? OK.

There are so many events that have shaped the field of nursing informatics, many of which I think are just related to time and place. Um, I think about software developments, I think about hardware developments, those have certainly impacted nursing informatics. The whole global, the movement of communication from you know, I, I mean I remember long before word processing was useful and, and now we have instant e-mail that instant communication. Um, going from airmail to instant communication, all of

these things have just unbelievably influenced the field of nursing informatics. And again, I think that nurses realize, especially in informatics how much they are a part of this bigger area. Nurses in some other of our sub-disciplines I think feel more isolated, more siloed. But I think in informatics we really see ourselves as part of a team.

Interviewer: This is the question I think you'll want to re-shape a little bit. But, what were the important questions addressed by research related to nursing informatics?

Karen Martin: With research for me personally, the VNA of Omaha research, our four research projects, the first three funded by the division of nursing DHHS and the fourth funded by NINR-an R 01, have been extremely important in my life and certainly the development of the Omaha System without that funding could have never happened. Since then, and I'm not even sure of which years, but increasingly we have Omaha System Research funded by various groups its becoming more sophisticated, um, the um, projects are more varied, more diverse. It's just really wonderful to watch that research flourishing and we're trying very hard to connect people in practice and in education and in research so that these wonderful Omaha System data that are being collected at point-of-care are in fact being transformed into research nationally and internationally.

Is that at all OK for what you're wanting?

Interviewer: That's beautiful.

Karen Martin: Alright.

Interviewer: Karen, when you think back to your first involvement in informatics, what were some of the earliest events that you recall?

Karen Martin: Some very early events that were important for me personally, um, I attended the ANA Outcomes Management Conference in probably 1979 in Fort Mitchell, Kentucky—that was an "aha" type of moment. Harriett Werley and Norma Lang's Minimum Dataset Conference in 1985 introduced me to more "aha" moments and a number of people that in many instances have become friends since that event. Our Omaha System Conferences

starting in 2001 each one has been a very special event and the amount of increasing use, accuracy and consistency of Omaha System use has just been so evident at those conferences.

Karen Martin: I'm definitely going to take a look at it.

Interviewer: Alright, um, along the line of, back to your first involvement in some of the earliest events you recall—was there anything happening in the social and political environment that either helped or constrained the development of the field?

Karen Martin: When I consider 1978, Donnie had the vision, the rest of us were very involved, but the number of other people in the country were extremely few who even considered informatics as an area that they wanted to go into. So there was a lot, I mean we felt in certain ways that we were pioneers and we were taking the bumps and the bruises and hitting the dents in the road. But at the same time um, there were people who were at least minimally supportive. Over the years, that type of support has of course just flourished. And now people say "Wow we should have started doing things with automation starting moving towards systemization much earlier." But it is definitely changed and you know at this point in time who can say informatics is not here—it is, it's happened yesterday.

Interviewer: Now, you talked about this a little bit—how's the field evolved are you surprised at how the field has developed?

Karen Martin: Some days when I think about how the field has developed I think 'Wow has it moved slowly' because in the 70's I heard everyone would be automated by the 80's. In the 80's I heard everyone would be automated by the 90's, now we have 2014 as the automation date. So in a certain way, it's slow but simultaneously when I think you know it has been speedy, the change is phenomenal and as I go have the privilege of visiting these Omaha System users on site the comfort level with automation, the ability to just see it as part of their role and the excitement, the real excitement that they have about the data that's useful for themselves as individual practitioners and then the aggregate data that these homecare, public health, um nurse manage centers, whoever they are, are using to

improve practice and that is just so important for me personally because again from the beginning my goal was—what can we do collectively to improve the quality of practice. And I can just see that happening now even more than at any point earlier. Which enthuses me about the future because I am convinced informatics will continue to have an important role in improving the quality of care.

Interviewer: Karen, are their lessons learned that you would like to pass on?

Karen Martin: When I consider lessons learned for me personally, um, I think the idea of having goals of having, um, networks to contact people, people and places, um, have been what has really been the most satisfying for me personally. So I just encourage anyone and everyone who I talk to about career development to work and do things that they really enjoy. Um, without that enjoyment, without that personal satisfaction, I don't think people rise to their level of, of accomplishment and so I think it's very important to enjoy and then secondly to enjoy working with people, um, that you know are comfortable for them and that stimulate them and help them grow and thrive.

Interviewer: Karen, where do you think the field is going and what opportunities or road blocks lay ahead?

Karen Martin: The field is just open. Um, I hope that many, many of our nurse colleagues become informaticians. I hope they really involve themselves in some practice sites as they're doing that before they try and lead informatics teams or informatics projects. But if they do that and if we continue to have an increasing number of nurses at the tables with the software vendors employed by software vendors in the service settings leading the, either implementation teams or the updating and the analysis process, etc. that's really where nursing is going to be able to shine.

Interviewer: Do you have anything to say about the limitation of the field for nursing practice?

Karen Martin: There are always road blocks, um, at any point in time. Limitations are just a part of life. I always try and think about it's just a little hurdle and how high and how hard do you have to go to get over the hurdle. And just get on with it and move along. I think about

some of our pioneers in other areas. I mean Harriett Werley, good grief, think about the limitations that other people told her, the attitude of "can-do" is critical if you've got an attitude of "can-do", well you know, OK it's just another challenge and you have to be creative and figure out how to go beyond it.

Interviewer: Karen, why do we call this field Nursing Informatics? What do nurses bring to the party?

Karen Martin: Nurses of course, because I am a nurse are very special people and as a group we have a niche that we really can't be replaced by. But at the same time we have to realize we're one of the team. And again, informatics much more than my career prior to informatics has introduced me to the greater team. I came from community, I continue to be largely involved in community, although not just community, but I think those of us in community have always had some sense of the individual, the family, the community as our client and therefore have a relatively easy way of working with this interdisciplinary group, and that very definitely is where we must go.

Interviewer: Now this question wasn't on the list, but knowing your background you are a member of the Academy of Nursing, and you're a member because you're a leader. Can you project what it was that allowed you to become a member of the Academy? What's your thing, this might be your time where you can talk more about the Omaha System or even look at your notes and see if there's anything that…

Interviewer: You are a member of the American Academy of Nursing and there's not that many people that are a member of that Academy. What was your contribution to nursing that allowed you to become a member of the Academy of Nursing?

Karen Martin: I had the privilege of joining the American Academy of Nursing in 1988, and so for me next year will be my 20th anniversary. This is a very special group for me. I became a member in part because of that networking that I mentioned. Harriett Werley and Norma Lang were my sponsors and I met them through some of the opportunities, the meetings, the, um, Norma Lang was on our advisory committee. So I met these individuals through a variety of ways. They like I, and maybe more than I shared the vision um, as Donnie shared, about the future of informatics, and they very definitely supported not just the

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Omaha System, but various nursing terminologies and the idea that um, the Omaha System was one of those that was going to help nursing and the other disciplines move into the future. Another advantage for me and the Academy and all of the related areas, the Omaha System exists in the public domain and that has been very important for us to be able to work together with people from various areas.

Is that at all what you had in mind?

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add? Oh, do please tell us again Donnie's full name, I think you mentioned it along the way, but if you would just restate your colleague who's been influential in your career.

Karen Martin: OK. DeLanne Simmons was the CEO at the VNA of Omaha who very definitely had the vision, um, about the Omaha System. Nancy Scheet was a member of the research team and extremely important in developing that vision also. And then of course the staff, um, I cannot say enough about the staff at the VNA of Omaha during those 16 years that I led the research teams that contributed to the total process.

Interviewer: I want you to restate your full name again please.

Karen Martin: OK, my name is Karen Martin, I am a Healthcare Consultant, my educational background, I have a diploma from Methodist in Peoria, Illinois, Bachelors Degree from the University of Iowa, a Master in Community Health from University of Nebraska. I was employed at the Visiting Nurse Association of Omaha for 16 years in charge of research and since that time in 1993 I have been an Independent Healthcare Consultant. Is that better?

Interviewer: Yes, you have a cute presence and its fun to watch and to see…

[End of Interview]