

Profiles in Kidney Care – June 2008

Nicole Gorman, Providence Health Care The road to becoming a nurse practitioner

Providence Health Care's Nicole Gorman first encountered renal care during her undergraduate nursing degree. One of her instructors, a hemodialysis nurse, was looking for students to help with a literature review for a research project. Nicole signed on, met a kidney patient, and was pretty well hooked.

"I found renal care so interesting," says Nicole. "I loved the idea of working with the same patients over a long period of time and really developing a relationship."



Nurse practitioners, like Nicole Gorman, are a relatively new designation to BC that allows nurses to order tests and prescribe medications.

Twelve years later, Nicole is still in renal care – although her career has been anything but static. She started at Providence Health Care in 1998 as a staff nurse on the inpatient renal unit, left for a year's stint in inpatient renal at Guy's Hospital in London, England, and then returned to St. Paul's Hospital, working shifts on the inpatient unit as well as coordinating nephrology research projects. Next on her list was the four-month British Columbia Institute of Technology nephrology program – sponsored by Providence – which she says honed her skills with a good mix of classroom and hands-on learning. "Basically, I was still a staff nurse, but with a lot more nephrology expertise," laughs Nicole.

Most recently – and perhaps the highlight of her career – Nicole successfully completed the exams that qualify her as a nurse practitioner, a designation that's new to BC, but has been recognized in other parts of Canada and the U.S. for many years.

Nurse practitioner training is offered via Master degree programs in British Columbia at UBC, the University of Northern BC (UNBC), and the University of Victoria (UVic). The designation offers an expanded scope of practice, allowing a nurse practitioner to order tests and prescribe medications. "I have confidence that the interest in this role will grow in BC," says Nicole, who completed her degree over three years of part time studies at UVic. "It's especially relevant in rural areas, where there is a huge shortage of doctors."

Nicole was intrigued with the idea of nurse practitioner training when the new degree programs were announced a few years ago, but felt she needed to upgrade her clinical skills before enrolling. That goal led to a year-and-a-half working in Vancouver General Hospital's intensive care unit. Then, when a clinical nurse leader position opened up in the Providence renal program inpatient unit, Nicole filled it – and began her Master's studies a few months later.

"The Providence team was so accommodating," says Nicole. "I was able to work and study at the same time, only taking extended time off during the last few months of school."



Today, Nicole has a caseload of 20 dialysis patients she works with closely. Her formal education is finished for now, she says – but her studies have paid off immeasurably. “The nurse practitioner may have an expanded scope of practice, but it’s still about nursing, which demands a collaborative practice and a holistic approach to care,” she says. “That kind of approach is especially important in renal care.”