



NEWSLETTER: June-July 2021

June 7, 2021-- Research & EBP Support Committee Awards 1st EBP Grant



Victoria Hornbeck, BSN, CNOR has been awarded the EBP grant for her project and approved poster entry for *ATP Testing in the Operating Room: From Metrics to Motivation*.

We encourage all who attend the AORN Global Surgical Conference and EXPO in person to visit the poster presentations and meet Victoria. Find out more about her project and outcomes. If you cannot attend in person, you can use the APP to view posters for continuing education following the

actual event. His leadership this year involved restructuring, and streamlining meetings, forms and agenda templates.

Mark your calendar-Register for this event coming June 30, 2021

- Learn about proposed bylaws changes that will be presented for a membership vote during Congress in August.
- Vote on certain AORN position statements
- Hear exciting details about education and networking planned for Expo

**AORN Virtual Town Hall and
Special Business Meeting**

Wednesday, June 30
5pm PT | 6pm MT | 7pm CT | 8pm ET

[REGISTER NOW](#)

Next Education Webinar: *How clean is an Anesthesia Machine?* / **June 23, 2021**/8pm (E), 7pm (C), 6pm (M), 5pm (P) **Speaker:** Dr. Murlikrishna Kannan.

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Spotlight on: Penny Smalley

Penny has been a member of AORN since 1983 and self-employed as the sole proprietor of Technology Concepts International since 1986. She is Secretary and Director of Education and Clinical Affairs for the International Council on Surgical Plume (ISCP), serving in this non-profit capacity since 2015. She is a newly elected member of the eChapter Board of Directors. You can google Penny Smalley laser and you'll be surprised. She has quite a story, so I hope you find this interview as inspiring as I do.

Original career plans took Penny on a path that she never could quite imagine. She journaled from an early age and being an only child, she was comfortable with using that outlet to practice and hone her writing skills. Her dream was to be a journalist, and she was accepted to Northwestern University to study journalism. Life circumstances prevented her from attending Northwestern, and instead she had to earn a living and took jobs like being a switchboard operator for Illinois Bell.

Along the way she answered an ad in the paper for "phlebotomists needed" for new mobile blood donation units in the Chicago area. At this time there was on the job training, and she completed the Red Cross training and became a phlebotomist. During her work with the Red Cross (her first foray into the healthcare setting) she watched the nurses, and she especially observed the nurse in charge. She wanted to be like that nurse. She wanted to be able to run a mobile unit, but to do so would mean she would have to be an RN.

Her husband took a job in Virginia and the family--now with 2 children and one on the way, moved to VA. She met her new OB/GYN who was very old-fashioned, and she wanted to be back on familiar ground when she delivered her 3rd baby. She wanted to take Lamaze classes and wanted to teach them, but once again, to teach Lamaze you had to be an RN.

That was the second time she was steered toward a career in nursing, and she enrolled and graduated from a hospital-based Diploma program. After graduation she wanted to work in women's health, specifically Labor & Delivery (L&D), nursery, etc. But the barrier that was most distressing to her was the hospital where she trained required her to complete one year of med/surg nursing before they would allow her to work in L & D.

Penny was tenacious and would not take "no" for an answer and continued to press until she got her chance to work L&D--and she worked the night shift. She loved it. About that time, L & D was moving more towards handling their own C-Sections and episiotomies, but they had no real protocols. Penny's manager asked her to go into the OR and train and set up protocols that would match OR to the labor areas. She was also asked to train the other staff which she did. She also became part of the team that went out into the field to stabilize high risk pregnant mothers and bring them back to the hospital. She worked closely with one particular MD which established trust and collaboration between medical staff and nursing and because he valued her work ethic, he

asked her to help him devise a new use of lasers within his practice. At that time there was no formal training for nursing or surgical staff. This set her on a path where she continues to influence and lead.

Since MD training was the only clinical training at the time, she started calling the laser companies to gain information and resources. She noticed safety gaps and asked many questions. Due to her repeated interest in laser technology in healthcare, she was invited to California and met with executives for a 3-day learning opportunity where she met with 3 other nurses serving on this “think tank” type of opportunity and these 4 nurses formed the basis for laser safety for the staff and patient. It also revealed the need for patient discharge instructions that had not been created prior to this opportunity. They formed the first formal laser training in the US travelling across the nation training and assisting hospitals to develop laser safety policies and protocols.

Two of the group were asked to participate in Grand Rounds type training and another interdisciplinary collaboration was formed.

In 1987 Penny went on an international speaking tour informing on the progress of safety standards on laser use in healthcare. This tour taught her how to use local, cultural, and regional practices to guide her presentations and incorporate practices that all could adapt for the safety of the patient and staff.

In 1988 the first laser standards were written for healthcare, and Penny was part of this history. Before the only standards on lasers came from military or industrial use. Penny was tasked with translating military lingo into language that healthcare providers understood.



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Due to the frequency of her travels, Penny developed a friendship with flight crews and especially one United Pilot who introduced Penny to Crew Resource Management which Penny felt translated very easily into healthcare team safety--specifically OR teams. The idea that staff safety first = patient safety, challenges staffing needs today.

Penny was also concerned that laser safety training was equipment based and nurses needed a more scientific approach to provide the physics behind how lasers work, so she provided many presentations and provided the first laser training course for AORN, which for many years was offered as a pre-conference class at the annual AORN Expo (then Congress). She developed the 1st Laser Toolbox for AORN, which now is offered in an online education format, ***Laser Safety for Perioperative Nurses Certificate Program Laser Safety for Perioperative Nurses Certificate Program is designed to give perioperative personnel a foundation in laser biophysics, tissue interaction, and laser safety in a medical environment.***

CE Amount: 3.0 CE Exp Date:3/31/2023

She was also the first RN to address the Dept of Labor (OSHA) advocating on the risks associated with laser plume. She served on task forces and committees globally to present documented evidence of the associated risks.

Passionate about nurses and OR team member’s awareness of the difference between smoke and plume continues to drive her efforts today. And her work has benefited her home state of Illinois with SB 1908 passing

both houses 5/26/2021. You can view it on www.ilga.gov search SB1908 and check out the timeline from introduction to passing both houses. 3 months. Impressive!

A strong sense of leadership has been a strong thread in this interview, and as she looked back at the qualities and influences of leaders she admired, she listed several people, the nurse from the Red Cross, her Grandfather, and a high school English teacher. Teamwork, organization, imagination, positive attitude, respect for others/culture/contributions/community, tenacity, belief that all will be OK, and not to give up on dreams (even those that are delayed) were definite attributes she values. Her dream of being a journalist? She has written book chapters, published articles in peer-reviewed journals, has used her writing skills to write and update laser safety standards worldwide.

When asked how eChapter could be invaluable to members, she feels we must find out what members want and use our goals established after the needs survey to make some strides to meet those needs. Penny's international contacts convey that their membership in AORN is to gain resources that are not readily accessible to them. They go to AORN, not necessarily chapter sites for guidance resources and tools. But eChapter activities are more about community rather than corporate, so to make connections and join interests in topics that are relevant is the best step forward.

Many nurses are entering the phase toward retirement, and many are starting to feel marginalized, shut out and somewhat disrespected as their contributions to the profession have been somewhat pushed to the side. We need to explore different ways to use experiences to preserve the history of the OR nursing profession and use those experiences to complement issues faced in current times. It might be helpful to offer skills upgrades to more senior nurses in our chapter to eliminate the embarrassment of not being as fast with technology as others. It is overwhelming to belong to such a fast-moving workforce.

Career succession is also something that is touchy and one that needs to be addressed before the experience leaves the profession. She feels nursing has not approached this topic very successfully.

Penny feels a mentor program should be considered in limited areas to partner experts with those seeking additional coaching or critique, be it polishing up your presentation and slides to writing a new journal article.

I truly enjoyed interviewing this exemplary, resilient nurse who sets a high bar for the profession of nurses and fulfills her ongoing dreams by pairing her passion for laser safety, evacuation of laser and surgical plume, to using her writing skills to keep all of us updated on the latest standards in laser safety-worldwide.



Thank you, Penny, for your work on keeping patients safe, and following your circuitous path to where you are today! Still getting things done!



Board Members: Susan Guerra, Penny Smalley, Wendy Perera, Becky Davis, Michael Garufi

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