

Don Hunt, PhD., RN

Don Hunt was born and raised in the foothills of the Smokey Mountains in Western North Carolina. His personal life goal was twofold. One, he wanted to be able to make a positive difference in people's lives, and two, he wanted to be able to live where he chose and be able to secure employment there. With this focus in mind, he chose nursing as a career. He attended the University of North Carolina at Asheville and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from Western Carolina University in 1980.

Don believes that opportunities are provided, however, success depends on what you do with them. In the spring of 1980, one of those opportunities came and Don and his wife Teresa, also a BSN prepared nurse, relocated to north central Arkansas. Don went to the largest hospital in the area, to seek employment, only to be told that this hospital had no need for male nurses. With that "surprise" ringing in his ears, he then went to another town to another hospital. Fortunately, this hospital was more open minded and Don was offered a position on the nursing staff. Progressive nursing education was slow in that part of Arkansas, at that time, and Don found himself to be one of the three BSN prepared nurses in the building. Don secured a position as a Primary Care Nurse on a medical surgical unit and a 20 plus year relationship with this hospital began.

Unlike many professions, one of the beauties, of the nursing profession, is that a nurse can perform in so many different roles yet remain within the profession that boredom, with work, is rarely a concern. Don's career path provided opportunities for him to obtain experience in med surg, CCU, ICU, surgery, PACU, ED, nursing supervision, health promotion, and leadership. As he moved into leadership roles, the varied clinical experiences, he had achieved, provided a broad

and solid platform for expanding into the leader role. Don continued to progress, as a leader, and he assisted this hospital to grow from a 100-bed county hospital to a 300-bed regional referral center.

In 2008, Don was provided the opportunity to relocate to East Texas as the Chief Nursing Officer for the University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler. He accepted that opportunity and a 14-year relationship began. Interestingly, Don's grandmother was a nurse and a CNO, his mother was a nurse and a CNO, and now Don was a third-generation nurse and CNO. While in the CNO position, Don has supported many growth opportunities. He has partnered with the healthcare team in their achievement of many awards including back-to-back Leapfrog Top Hospital awards, consecutive Outstanding Patient Experience awards, and significant awards involving quality and safety to include recognition in Becker's Hospital Review for providing an environment with reductions in hospital acquired conditions. When COVID hit, Don's team put together the first COVID vaccine clinic in North Texas.

While in north Arkansas, Don had enrolled in a master's degree program at Arkansas State University. He had placed that degree on hold when he moved to Texas and took on a new role. In 2012, wanting to continue his education, he asked for an appointment with the Dean of the College of Nursing, at UT Tyler, to explore continuing his master's degree. The Dean shared that UT Tyler, as well as having master's degree options, also had a BSN to PhD program available. Don jumped at this opportunity and enrolled in the part time track of the BSN to PhD program. One of his personal goals had been to achieve a PhD and share the knowledge learned with others. In 2019, he graduated from UT Tyler with a PhD in Nursing.

Don has always been a strong advocate for students and has encouraged and supported his staff and peers to continue their education. He has continued his relationship with UT Tyler in mentoring numerous students and serving on the School of Nursing Advisory Board for Clinical Partners. In early 2022, he retired from clinical practice. However, he continues to look forward to opportunities to support, encourage, and interact with students.