

Nurse finds purpose in serving the underserved

Erin Williamson, nurse practitioner

By Terah Wilson StarNews Correspondent

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MedNorth offers nurse practitioner opportunity to help where he helps people who have no other health care options.

From a very young age Erin Williamson knew exactly what he wanted to do with his life.

“I wanted to be a nurse practitioner serving medically underserved people. Ideally, lower-income people who have limited access to health care,” Williamson said. “It is the dream job that I’ve had since I was 16. Mainly because growing up poor we got to learn what it was like to have limited access to good health care. You don’t know how that feels unless you are in that situation where you’re treated differently.”

Williamson is the seventh of eight kids. He has six older sisters and one younger brother. He loved growing up in a big family but quickly learned there were hardships that went along with it. His family’s income challenges made his access to quality health care difficult.

Williamson attended Laney High School where he took health occupations classes. He graduated with a Nursing Assistant certificate and went straight to work. Due to the hardships he faced as a child, getting a job right out of high school was very important to him. His first health care job was at Liberty Commons Nursing Center where he worked the midnight shift. He met his wife, Rachel, and continued to work there while she finished her college degree.

Williamson and his wife then moved to Greensboro where he attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, graduating in 2004 with a degree in nursing. After graduation, the couple moved back to Wilmington where Williamson took a position with New Hanover Regional Medical Center on the adult inpatient surgical floor. He held the job for five years while he worked on his master’s in nursing at UNCW.

Toward the end of his master's studies, Williamson had to choose a practice where he would complete the clinical part of his training. With careful consideration he chose MedNorth Health Center, which at the time was still called New Hanover Community Health Center.

MedNorth receives federal grant funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration to provide a full spectrum of primary and preventive health care services (including ancillary and enabling services) to medically underserved populations, in New Hanover and surrounding counties in Southeastern North Carolina. Patients receive services regardless of their ability to pay. Services are designed to cover prenatal, pediatric, adolescent, adult and geriatric life cycles.

Williamson knew this was the right place for him. "I liked the community health center because being downtown we get an interesting mix of homeless people, professors, other professionals that work downtown, and a lot of people who have no other place to go for healthcare," he said.

In 2009, when Williamson finished his master's, Williamson went to work at MedNorth. "I went straight from being a student to being a nurse practitioner," Williamson said. "I've been there ever since."

He splits his time between the downtown clinic and MedNorth's clinic at First Fruits Ministries, 2750 Vance St., on Thursdays. His favorite part of his job is providing the compassion and care that many lower-income people never get to experience.

"I love what I do because I get to serve other people and I get to stay up-to-date with newer technology, medicines, and research," he said. "Healthcare is always evolving so I get to stay on the cutting edge of things like that, but at the same time I get to sit down with somebody one-on-one and talk with them about how they can improve their health and improve their life."

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