



Gerontological Nursing at Duke: Four Decades of Excellence

By Eleanor McConnell, RN, PhD, and George L. Maddox, PhD

Virginia Stone, RN, PhD, FAAN, laid the groundwork for the Duke School of Nursing's nationally acclaimed gerontological nursing program more than 40 years ago. She might have never dreamed of the far-reaching impact of her efforts.

A pioneering mentor

Stone joined the Duke faculty in 1966, promoting gerontological nursing as director of graduate studies in the School of Nursing and as a senior fellow in the Duke Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development. In 1968, she established the country's first graduate program to prepare gerontological nurse specialists. Four decades later, Duke's top-ten ranked gerontological nursing program continues to prepare advanced-practice nurses specializing in geriatrics. Stone was on the executive committee of the American Nurses Association Division on Geriatric Nursing Practice, which published the first set of Standards for Geriatric Nursing Practice in 1970.

Stone's scholarly work focused on applying the newly emerging science based in gerontology and geriatrics to improve patient care. Her now-classic paper, "Give the Older Person Time," (*AJN* 10, 1969) made key findings from the Duke Longitudinal Studies of Normal Aging more accessible to practicing nurses. She also wrote a seminal paper that traces nursing care of the aged from the 1900s. The paper emphasized the role of science in the development of the gerontological nursing specialty and the field's progression from an initial focus on custodial care to today's practice, which is based on scientific knowledge of the aging process and its effects on health and illness.

Honored throughout her career as a teacher, Stone ensured that her students engaged with interdisciplinary colleagues at the Duke Aging Center and participated in groundbreaking demonstration projects such as the establishment of the Older Americans Resources and Services (OARS) Clinic. She showcased ongoing scientific work from the Duke longitudinal studies by integrating guest lectures from senior investigators in nursing school courses. Her master's-level students studied the prevention of common geriatric syndromes such as pressure sores and electrolyte disturbance as a predisposing factor in delirium.



Virginia Stone, RN, PhD, FAAN

Students make critical contributions to elder care

Many of these students went on to make critical contributions to improvements in care of the elderly. One notable graduate from that era, Sister Marilyn Schwab, MSN, headed the Oregon Health Sciences University Teaching Nursing Home project at the Benedictine Center in Mt. Angel, Oregon, which pioneered innovative, evidence-based approaches to nursing in the long-term-care setting.



Carol Clarke Hogue, RN, PhD, FAAN

In 1987, two of Stone's students, Mary Ann Matteson, PhD, and Eleanor McConnell, PhD—later Duke faculty and senior fellows at the Aging Center—became founding editors of the textbook *Matteson & McConnell's Gerontological Nursing: Concepts and Practice*, now in its third edition.

Stone's pioneering work in gerontological nursing also inspired two other nurse

scientists who have made seminal contributions to the work of the Aging Center.

Carol Clarke Hogue, RN, PhD, FAAN, held joint faculty appointments in the Schools of Nursing and Medicine, and also served as a senior fellow in the Aging Center from 1973–1986. Hogue was one of the first nurse investigators associated with the Duke Longitudinal Studies of Aging. Her early research on factors related to social support and health in middle-aged adults led to work on injury and injury control, resulting in several important articles on the epidemiology of late-life injuries, including a highly influential paper on the epidemiology of injury in old age presented in 1980 at the 2nd NIH conference on the Epidemiology of Aging.

After moving to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Hogue helped develop gerontological nursing science through her work as associate dean for graduate studies from 1992–2000 and as associate director for research at the UNC Institute on Aging from 1997 until her retirement in 2002. In retirement, she has continued to serve Duke through her service on the external advisory board of Duke University School of Nursing's NIH-funded Exploratory Nursing Research Center on Trajectories of Aging and



Care (TRAC Center). The Duke/Carolina Visiting Professorship in Geriatric Nursing was established in 2004 to honor her contributions to both universities.

Elizabeth “Jody” Clipp, PhD, RN, FAAN, served as Duke University’s first Bessie Baker Distinguished Professor of Nursing until her untimely death in August 2007. She came to Duke in 1984 as a post-doctoral fellow in the Aging Center with associate center director Linda George, PhD, and rose rapidly through the faculty ranks as a member of the Department of Medicine. Clipp joined the School of Nursing faculty in 2001, also serving as associate director for research at the Durham Veterans Affairs Medical Center’s Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center.

Clipp led several innovative longitudinal studies, first studying health trajectories across the life course among veterans, and later examining trajectories of informal caregivers of individuals with dementia. Her work had significant impact on revisions of Veterans Administration policies on health care of the chronically ill. Her contributions to aging research also included highly regarded collaborative work on the development of health-promotion interventions for older adults with cancer, quality of life in individuals with terminal illness, and end-of-life care. Clipp published more than 100 research articles in refereed journals, as well as numerous book chapters and scientific reviews.

Clipp was valued for her talents in developing research potential in both individuals and institutions. She served as a mentor for scores of scientists in gerontology, nursing, medicine, public health, pharmacy, psychology, and sociology. In addition, she established two nationally recognized research centers at Duke: the Geriatric Interdisciplinary Research Center (funded by the John A. Hartford Foundation) and the NIH-supported TRAC Center. The scientific productivity of these centers laid a strong foundation for the establishment of Duke’s PhD Program in Nursing. This program—which emphasizes intensive mentored research in the interface between persons with chronic illness and their care environments, and provides rigorous training in longitudinal methodology and



Elizabeth “Jody” Clipp, PhD, RN, FAAN

analysis—will prepare a new generation of nurse-scientists to continue the Duke heritage of excellence and leadership in research and academics that Clipp exemplified.

Since 2001, Duke’s number of gerontological nursing faculty, as well as the impact made by their scientific work, has grown exponentially. Approximately one-third of School of Nursing faculty lead scholarly programs focused on elder care. Many are actively engaged in interdisciplinary aging research on topics such as informal caregiving, improving care processes and outcomes for the elderly in institutional long-term care, and improving trajectories of chronic-illness management in both acute care and community settings.

Duke’s School of Nursing faculty continues Virginia Stone’s tradition of integrating emerging science into courses that prepare registered nurses for roles as direct-care providers, advanced-practice clinicians, and nurse scientists, as evidenced by the recent establishment of The Duke Center of Excellence for Geriatric Nursing Education. And nursing faculty is fully engaged in the work of the Center for Aging, attracting new post-doctoral fellows, serving as research collaborators and mentors, and advancing inter-professional training in geriatrics for all levels of trainees.

To learn more about the Duke University School of Nursing, visit nursing.duke.edu. ■