

## A Passion for Justice

Francine Boulosa, MPAS, PA-C

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By Eric Schuman, PA-C

While on a shopping trip with her mother, only ten years old, Francine Boulosa found herself bored. She felt like she'd had enough of shopping, so she walked out of the store, thinking she was headed home. "I was a bad girl," she explains. Attractive and blond, and appearing four years older than her age, she missed a turn and found herself walking five miles through the most dangerous part of the Bronx, New York. Leered at, propositioned, and not understanding the risk she had taken, she was lucky to make it home safely. "I did something rebellious and found myself incredibly vulnerable. From that frightening experience, I learned that when you are scared, you lose your ability to problem solve." **Photo: Francine at The Steens, photography by Eric Schuman**

Francine attributes her core value of compassion for others to the Catholic Church she attended in the Bronx. "It was an underpinning to everything that other people really mattered." At 13, inspired by Michael Harrington's book, *The Other America*, she realized that powerful ideas about the human condition often come from books. Thus, it was no surprise when she became an R.N., and later enrolled in VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), where she was instrumental in launching a community sewing cooperative for poor black women in northern Florida. While there she learned about the Child Health Associate Physician Assistant Program at the University of Colorado – emphasizing service to disadvantaged, at risk and medically underserved populations.



Hired in 1979 as a pediatric physician assistant at Kaiser Permanente in Salem, she frequently found herself with a patient panel reflecting the highest numbers of OHP/ Medicaid patients in the region. "I think my work with the poor in Florida made me realize that something as seemingly trivial as a stolen purse can take a disadvantaged person years to recover from. For someone with limited income, no personal transportation, and a lack of assertiveness, it can be overwhelming and seem hopeless. I've learned not to make assumptions that something I might perceive as easy is necessarily easy for

someone else."

Francine treasures the trust she develops with families and has served as the primary care provider for as many as 3 generations of children. She can be found in the nursery at Salem Hospital 4-5 mornings a week, evaluating and discharging up to 300 Kaiser

newborns a year.

Francine is well known for going to extraordinary lengths to help families in need. She decries her lack of time to perform volunteer work, but makes up for it with personal involvement with families in distress. She cites the example of a 19-month-old patient diagnosed with a potentially fatal renal carcinoma whose parents were burdened with the realities of sustaining their employment while ferrying their daughter to radiation and chemotherapy. “I told the parents I would do anything they needed – shop for food, watch the other kids or scrub the floors.” (She did all three.) After the child went into remission, her 30-year-old mother was diagnosed with a devastating cancer which had already metastasized.

Once again, Francine spends days off supporting the family through a second crisis. “I’m happy to have made them part of my extended family. It may sound trite, but you really receive much more back than you give. It has truly enriched me to be there for them, and my commitment will continue as long as I’m able to sustain it.”

Asked about significant changes in pediatrics during the 35 years of her career, Francine cites the evolving need for primary care pediatricians, PAs and nurse practitioners to treat psychiatric disorders such as autism, major depression, anxiety and attention deficit disorder. To that end, she enrolled in a yearlong mental health fellowship program through Arizona State University she is completing this spring. In 2002 she enrolled in the University of Nebraska School Of Medicine’s Master’s program for PAs, and did groundbreaking research which predicted the consequences of the obesity epidemic among children and teens. Her findings were incorporated into initiatives Kaiser Permanente rolled out in years that followed, including training teams of pediatricians and family practice providers how to counsel families regarding obesity, and developing computer tools, which have resulted in a systematic approach by pediatric providers to prevent diabetes in children.

Francine’s career has taken some interesting turns. In 1991-92 she served as Health Policy Fellow for the American Academy of Physician Assistants, working in then Rep. Ron Wyden’s office on Capitol Hill. She was involved in efforts, which resulted in granting the state of Oregon a waiver to launch the Oregon Health Plan. As a staff member, she met with constituents, answered correspondence, prepared for hearings and press events. **Photo: “Westy”**



As an adjunct faculty member at the OHSU Physician Assistant Program, in 2008

Francine was named “Preceptor of the Year” for a second time. She was named Oregon Physician Assistant of the Year in 2000 and has lectured on pediatric topics at the Oregon Society of Physician Assistants annual conference, and recently at a medical meeting in Alaska on the topic of neonatal jaundice.

Francine treasures her relationships with PA students and enjoys serving as a mentor to young people, but it was truly a surprise when her youngest daughter Anna decided to pursue a career in medicine after completing an undergraduate degree in social sciences. Torn between medical school and PA school, she finally decided on PA studies and was admitted to OHSU (to a class of 38 among 900+ applicants) and the University of Colorado PA program where her mother matriculated in 1973 – both at the age of 24! Despite her mother’s disappointment, Anna chose Colorado, where she begins a 3-year program

Asked what sustenance she receives and what nurtures her soul, there isn’t a moment’s hesitation as she cites outdoor pursuits like hiking, camping and kayaking –visiting places like The Steens, Borax Hot Springs in eastern Oregon and Green Lakes in the 3 Sisters wilderness. Her pride and joy (“Westy”) is a recently purchased 1986 Westfalia Camper. “I live frugally so I can support my children and their growing families. My vacations are inexpensive, but the joy I feel in the wilds of the Northwest is priceless.” Although she tore an ACL 30 years ago and has 2 blown meniscuses on the same knee, she basks in completing at least one 10 mile, 1500 foot elevation gain hike in the Cascade mountains each year. Asked why she didn’t have the ACL repaired, she explained, “After the orthopod drained the fluid, I could walk without pain. I was on the surgery schedule, but you have to understand that for my patients, deciding when to start rice cereal is a big decision, and I felt a little like that about surgery, so I never had it done. “

An avid reader, her current favorite author is Tony Judt, whom she calls “the new Michael Harrington.” “Judt articulates the importance of society existing for community, and he believes what’s good for society and community is good for the person. The imbalance I see around me is people believe what’s good for them is what matters instead of what’s good for someone else.” She shares her love of books with women at a monthly book club she founded in 2001.



Asked to comment about the unique relationship between PAs and their supervising physicians, Francine cites the importance for PAs “... to maintain our roots, connected to physicians who anchor the care we provide. I’ve always benefited from a strong relationship with a supervising physician. I can ask his help and input at any time.

That's extremely important to me, and his knowing I will never hesitate to ask is very important to him. "When I mentioned earlier that frightening situations (like being lost in the Bronx) cloud the ability to reason, it makes me think of difficult and challenging cases in my practice. Those are the times the relationship with my supervisor is most important. Sometimes I think PAs have it easier than physicians because we have that relationship built into the framework of our profession. I wonder if physicians find it as easy as PAs to find help when they need it. **Photo: Francine Bullosa and daughter Anna Christenson**

"I'm sometimes disturbed by trends I see when PAs are used to provide episodic care rather than continuity of care. Many of us are capable of and want enduring relationships with our patients as well as the physicians who are our collaborative partners."

Francine Bullosa's 35 years in practice serve as a model for any young person choosing medicine as a career. Not everyone has the commitment and courage to follow their heart. In Francine's case, it was the only real choice.