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Care for the elderly: Professor emerita passes on her devotion and expertise



Jessie Mantle

You could say that Jessie Mantle has come full circle. Born in Chemainus, she visited and lived in places as close by as Vancouver and as far away as South Africa, before finally settling back in Victoria.

But her world travels pale in comparison to her vocation. In a 2006 book called Geriatric Nursing: Growth of a Specialty, Jessie was hailed as “one of the pioneers of ... geriatric nursing ... in Canada.”

“My interest in aging probably began with my parents,” Jessie says. “I was the only child of older parents – my mother being 42 when I was born. I grew up being comfortable with older people and was amazed to find that others were uncomfortable around them or considered them ‘has-beens.’”

In 1950 she received her diploma in nursing from Victoria’s Royal Jubilee Hospital School. After 10 years, she sought further education at McGill where she graduated with her baccalaureate degree in nursing in 1966. Over the next 10 years, she received a certificate in psychiatric nursing in Boston, scooped up training in public health nursing and a master’s degree in nursing in San Francisco, and ended up in Seattle doing post-degree work in gerontological nursing.

As soon as she had her first diploma, Jessie started working as a nurse, advancing up the ranks to head nurse at St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver, where she later taught anatomy and physiology. Teaching quickly

became her focus. At the University of Western Ontario, she developed learning tools for students, chaired the graduate program and was the keynote speaker of the first Ontario gerontological nursing conference.

In 1981, Jessie accepted a unique joint appointment: she became both a professor of nursing at UVic and a clinical nurse specialist at the Juan de Fuca Hospitals. Fifty percent of her time was spent at each institution. Over the next 13 years she taught registered nurses at UVic, developed one of the distance learning programs for the School of Nursing, and established courses in gerontological nursing. At Juan de Fuca Hospitals she led a team that established a wide-ranging set of clinical programs and committees to improve patient care. The clinical nurse specialist position at Juan de Fuca Hospitals was so successful it became permanent.

Jessie retired in 1995, but that didn’t slow her down. She co-authored a book, developed a parish nursing project, and helped coordinate a night shelter for street youth. Along with a colleague, she created a document for seniors called a Personal Health Record and taught people how to use it to maintain an ongoing accurate story of their health and illness events. Seniors take the Record with them when they visit health care professionals and travel. “I love helping people find out that they have a major role to play on their personal health care team,” Jessie says.

Her dream is “to see the practice of gerontological nursing continue to develop through connections with faculty and students in academia.” In that spirit, she established the Jessie Mantle Fellowship in Nursing, which helps students enrolled in the graduate programs in nursing; specifically those who wish to place an emphasis on improving the care and lives of the elderly, and strengthening the relationships amongst service agencies, researchers and academics. She will add to the fellowship through a gift in her Will.

Erin Donald is already making a difference with that fellowship. As a doctoral student researching palliative care, she is grateful to be able to focus on her studies and “make a meaningful contribution to maintaining quality of life in the elderly population through research and education.” Through her research, Erin helps to bring Jessie’s work to the next generation. Now that really is full circle!



Erin Donald