

Making History

Wyoming
Public Health Nursing
1936-2011

In 1912, Congress established the Children's Bureau to promote child health. The goals were to decrease infant and maternal mortality, to develop statistical reporting on child health status, and to establish the school lunch program.

The Maternity and Infant Care Act of 1921 provided federal government grants to states to improve maternal child health delivery. Wyoming immediately followed suit by passing W.S. 35-4-401, an act "for the promotion of the welfare and hygiene of maternity and infancy, and for other purposes".

In 1930, the State Health Department in Cheyenne was made up of a Health Officer, a graduate nurse and a registrar of vital statistics.

Title V of the Social Security Act in 1935 gave more attention to the needs of children creating three separate services.

1. Maternal and Child Health Services,
2. Crippled Children's Services,
3. Child Welfare Services.



Title V also earmarked funds for training, and nurses from Wyoming were sent to the University of California for a semester's training in Public Health. Upon their return, these nurses were assigned to start Wyoming Public Health services.

These counties were:

- Fremont (February 1938 and continuous)
- Goshen (February 1938 – April 1940, unsure when it reopened)
- Lincoln (December 1936 in Star Valley, September 1938 in Kemmerer)
- Platte - In the 70s
- Uinta (February 1937 and continuous)
- Big Horn (December 1936 – October 1938, reopened in February 1939)
- Hot Springs (February 1937 – September 1938, reopened in February 1939)
- Sheridan (May 1937 – April 1938, reopened in August 1939)
- Washakie (February 1937 – September 1938, reopened in February 1939)
- Converse (May 1937 – December 1939. Reopened August 1940)
- Albany (January 1, 1940 and continuous)
- Park (January 1940 and continuous)
- Sublette (June 1940 and continuous)

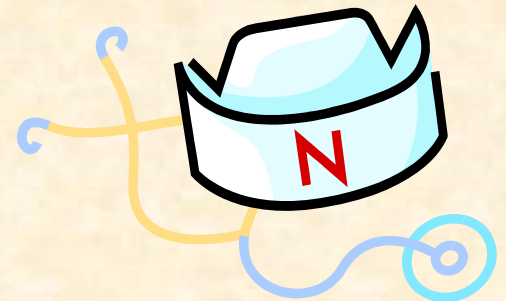
Scarcity of nurses was named for the reason for lapse in services



At the close of 1940, the personnel of this division consisted of the Director and thirteen public health nurses.

The Public Health Nursing Service in Wyoming began to provide home health services under Medicare and Medicaid in 1965 as part of the Medicare Act of 1965. This changed the nature of public health nursing as it provided a large source of revenue.

In 1967, there was the equivalent of 9.75 Home Health Aides working for the Nursing Service. The fraction comes as a result of the fact that many of the Aides worked part-time for the counties. Also, there was an emphasis during this time to hire “professional registered nurses” as opposed to public health nurses; the former were supposed to be providing the direct care for the home health services.



Albany County

Albany County public health service was started January 1, 1940, and has been continuous.

1959 – the Albany County diabetes detection program was the most extensive medical survey of its kind ever attempted on a voluntary basis in the United States.

A total of 19,963 test kits were distributed and 10,369 were returned. More than 6 percent of the returned tests were positive. The 682 positive reactors were notified to see their doctors, and 425 of them complied.

Final results showed that Albany County has about 5.6 cases of diabetes per thousand population which was considered very low.

The tests turned up 111 new diabetes cases in Albany County.

Karol Hodges, RN
Albany County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Albany County Public Health moved to their current location in 1993.

Big Horn County

Service was started in December, 1936, and continued until October, 1938. It was reopened in February, 1939. The lapse in service was due to the scarcity of public health nurses.

In 1936, Penelope (Penny) Gordon Johnson was one of four hired to be Wyoming's first Public Health Nurses. They were sent to the University of California at Berkley for training and she returned as the first PHN serving the Big Horn Basin. The public health emphasis at the time was on maternal child health and health education.

Interestingly, the current nurse manager's first job as a graduate nurse in 1967 was under the same Penny Johnson who was Director of Nursing at the Wyoming TB Sanitarium in Basin.

There was a lapse in Public Health in the County until 1977 when an office was opened in an apartment unit in Lovell until the Senior Center Building was completed. The Big Horn County Commissioners supported the establishment of Public Health by providing office space in the two centers being built in Greybull and Lovell. The emphasis at that time was Home Health and the Agency became Medicare certified.

In the last year, Public Health recorded over 6500 service encounters. Current priorities are maternal family health and primary prevention through immunization. It seems we've come full circle. The Agency is seen as a great resource in the community and functions as the provider of programs and services from the Wyoming Department of Health.

Susan Wiley, RN
Big Horn County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Campbell County

In the 70s, Campbell County, Gillette recognized the need and funded public health nursing early.

In July, 1979, Campbell County withdrew from the state funding and became locally funded, in addition to earning revenue from home health services.

During 1979 the Campbell County Commissioners appointed a Board of Health and assumed total responsibility for the community nursing service within their County Health Department.



Della Amend, RN,
Campbell County
Nurse Manager, 2011



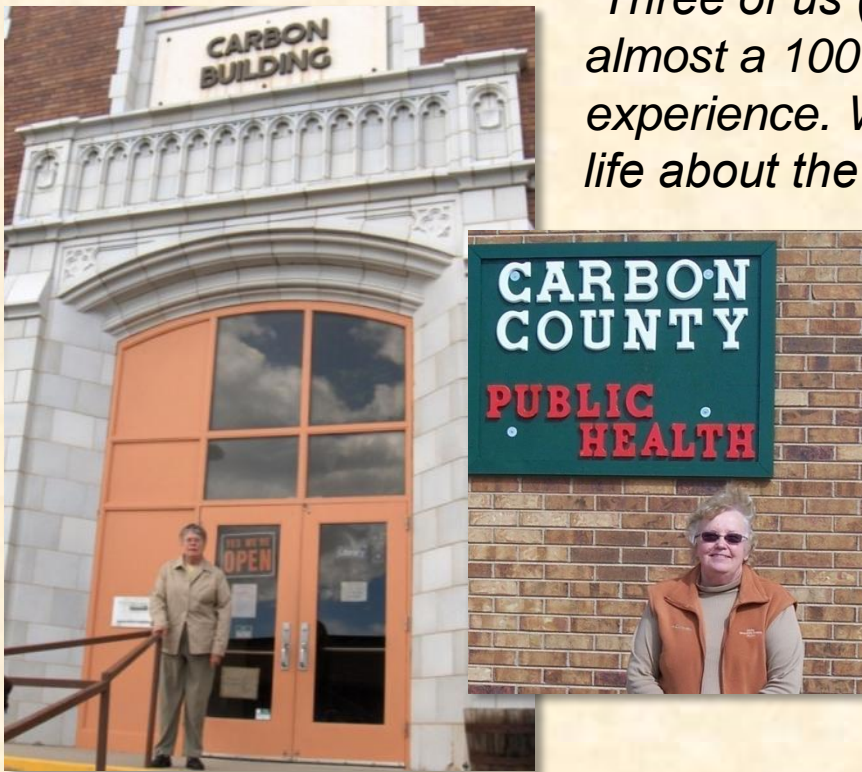
Carbon County

Carbon County Public Health was initially opened in 1949 but not until 1955 was the office fully staffed and funded by the County commissioners.

In 1972 there was only one nurse covering Carbon County traveling 1100 miles per month offering services to all the towns in the county.

“Three of us (Sue S., Sue B. and myself) have almost a 100 years of combined Public Health experience. We all found our "dream job" in life about the same time.”

~Bridget



Bridget Hettgar, RN,
Carbon County
Nurse Manager, 2011

Converse County

Converse County Public Health began in May 1937 and continued until December, 1939. It was reopened in August, 1940. The lapse in service was due to inability to obtain public health nurses.

In 1979 Converse County started a community nursing service with an educationally prepared, experience public health nurse.

Converse County was the site of a prisoner of war camp from January, 1943, through February, 1946 in Douglas. The camp housed more than five hundred army personnel and 1900 Italian POW's until July of 1944, with the surrender of Italy. The camp was then readied for the 3,011 German POW's who occupied it until February 1, 1946.

Some of the POW's worked in surrounding areas, harvesting crops and as timber men in Easterbrook and Ryan Park, for which they were paid four dollars a day. Three Italian prisoners painted sixteen murals on the walls of the Officers Club, one of the few camp buildings still standing. The paintings are registered on the National Register of Historic Places, but the building is owned and maintained by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Douglas Lodge #15, and is open for viewing by appointment only.

Converse County residents received care at the camp hospital, and when the camp was closed, the County purchased the hospital, which they operated until a new hospital was constructed in town in 1952.

Converse County withdrew from state funding and became locally funded, in addition to earning revenues from home health services in 1980; but has since returned to state-supported funding.



Sharon Kilmer RN,
Converse County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Converse County Public Health moved into their new building in 2010.

Crook County

The county clerk had the budgets for Crook County starting in 1945. The county had a line item every year for a county health officer (CHO) up until 1975-1976 year. (They were missing the budgets from 1976-1979 as well as 1947-1950) Starting in 1980-81 the county started a line item for public health nursing (PHN) and it was at this time that the PHN took over the CHO line item. I can't tell if the CHO wages were coming out of the PHN line item or if they just quit paying the CHO. The line item didn't show up again for the CHO until 1990-91 at \$900/yr.

The CHO wages varied from 1945-1976 (Missing the years noted above) from \$300/ year to \$4,890/year. The averages for all these 28 years were \$967. Keep in mind the two high years were 1953-1955 with the pay those years being \$4,890 and \$3,400 respectively. (I am not certain but I wonder if this has anything to do with polio vaccine. I hope to find something in our newspaper.)

According to the minutes from the commissioners meetings, *January 9th, 1980* the minutes read as follows: "Pat Sampson, Weston County Public Health Nurses, John Harper, Administrative assistant for State Nursing Services State Department of Health and Social Services, Greg Jones, D-Pass and Dr. Peters appeared in regards to the proposed County Health Nursing Program.

It was after this meeting we had our first Public Health Nursing manager, Marilyn Keyes

Barbara Coy, RN,
Crook County
Nurse Manager 2011



Fremont County

Fremont County Public Health began in February 1938.

A former public health staff nurse recalls no particular concern over the impact in 1955 when uranium was discovered and mined in Fremont County in central Wyoming. The self-sufficient people, not expecting any help, go along.

“I would go through seven wire gates to a rural school and pretty soon there were more rural schools and then a large school with 300 pupils,” the nurse said.

(Report by Virginia Baldwin, BS, RN, District Supervisor, Nursing Services, Division of Health and Medical Services, Wyoming State Department of Health and Social Services.)

Julie Twist, RN,
Fremont County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Goshen County

Goshen County started in February 1938 and continued until April 1940. Began again in 1964



Cathy Grace, RN,
Goshen County
Nurse Manager, 2011



PHN Office in basement of
old nursing home



House south of the tracks 1978-1993
Offices in bedrooms, immunizations
in kitchen, living room was the lobby



1993-2002 Physician's Office –
thought it was paradise



2002-2011 Current office – already beginning to
outgrow (thought this would never happen)!

Hot Springs County

Hot Springs County started February, 1937, and continued until September, 1938. Due to the scarcity of public health nurses the service was not resumed until February, 1939.

Chief Washakie of the Shoshone Tribe and Chief Sharp Nose of the Arapahoe Tribe knew the benefits of public health.

Wyoming's first state park, Hot Springs, was used for years by the local Indian tribes, who believed that the waters were beneficial to health, and that the waters could make a warrior invincible in battle.



Bree Gerber, RN,
Hot Springs County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Hot Springs Public Health moved into their new building in 2010.

Johnson County

Johnson County Public Health began August 21, 1978

1978-1979 Nursing Service Activities

➤ Miles Driven Sept 1978-June 1979	6,497
➤ Home Visits	358
➤ Office Visits	28
➤ Telephone Calls	400
➤ Admissions (total)	81
➤ Closures	27
➤ Home Visits not found	22
➤ Immunization Clinics	
Immunizations	331
➤ Flu Clinics	
Immunizations	169
➤ Adult Health Maintenance Clinics	
Individuals seen-total	142



“Nurse Jarvis”
Ann Romano-Jarvis, RN,
Johnson County
Nurse Manager, 2011

Laramie County

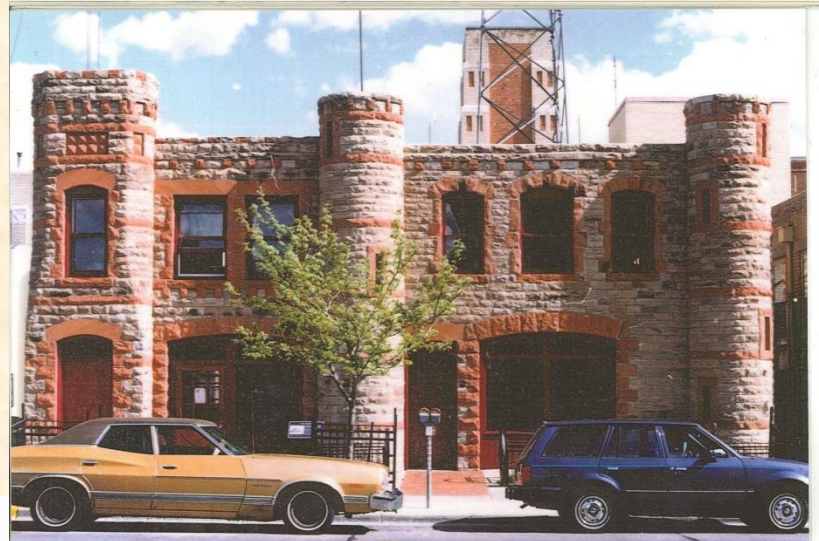
Cheyenne-Laramie County Board of Health

1980 - Laramie County had health department administered by Board of Health.

Cheyenne-Laramie County Health Department offices were in "Castle Dare" in downtown Cheyenne until they moved to their current location. Some of the stones were put in the playground area at Holiday Park when it was destroyed after the new building was built.

Letters that were written in 1916 from the Better Babies Bureau from New York's Woman's home Companion were recently found; they were hand typed explaining to new moms how to take care of "constipation, heartburn, nausea and flatulence".

We have come along way from these letters to Text A Baby in technology, but the messages are still the same.



Katheryn McKee, RN,
Laramie County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Above: Castle Dare
Cheyenne-Laramie
County Health
offices before
moving to the new
location, left.

Lincoln County

*Lincoln County Public Health started in December 1936 in Star Valley.
In the Kemmerer district, it was started in September, 1938.*

Lincoln county was one of the first counties that began public health in 1936. In February 1937, an office was secured in the Seminary Building. The local firemen raised money for a typewriter; a church organization assisted with supplies; Welfare provided some linens for class demonstrations, etc.; the Relief Society varnished chairs, desks, and painted and cleaned office space. The nurse moved into the office the third week of March. Other contributions to the Public Health Nursing Service were: Chamber of Commerce furnished a phone, Local Stake furnished a wood stove and storage cabinet, the C.C.C. Camp made the desk, school built shelves, and the City Council provided a monthly allowance for supplies.

In 1941, money for expenses was furnished for the first time from County tax money. A budget of \$300 by the county, in addition to \$7.00 a month for rent for the Afton office, was appropriated; salary and travel were paid by the State; and the Red Cross paid for the telephone.



Connie Sweeney, RN,
Lincoln County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Natrona County

City of Casper-Natrona County Health Department.

- ❖ Established 1954 with a focus on Environmental Health
- ❖ 1967 First Director of Public Health Nursing hired
- ❖ 1970's Nursing Department quadrupled in size by end of the decade
- ❖ 1974 Co. built 3 story Public Health Building with 1% optional sales tax
- ❖ 2000 moved to present location
- ❖ 2000s Successfully faced Global Public Health challenges with Nursing, Environmental Health and Preparedness Divisions
- ❖ 2011 Natrona County is withdrawing from state funding.



Left: Mary Janssen,
Natrona County
Nurse Manager,

Right: Tia Hansuld,
Disease Prevention
Manager

2011

Niobrara County

Until the 1990s, Niobrara County was the only county in Wyoming that did not have a Public Health Nursing Office. Immunizations were provided to the community by the school nurse but no other Public Health Services were being offered.

A grass roots effort was launched by Connie Baker from the Lusk Senior Center and Donna Ruffing, Niobrara County Commissioner to place a PHN Office there. The State Public Health Nursing Director, Donna Griffin began negotiations with the Niobrara and Goshen County Commissioners. In the final agreement, a Public Health Nurse was hired and nursing supervision was provided by Cathy Grace, PH Nurse Manager from adjacent Goshen County.

The nurse worked half time for Public Health Nursing and half time as a WIC nurse. The office was first located in the Senior Center on Oak Street; clerical support was provided by a “Green Thumb” worker. In 1995, a new Senior Center was built in Lusk; the building included office space for the Public Health Office. The agency continues to be staffed by a half time Public Health Nurse, Lisa Mellott with supervision from the State Public Health Nurse Supervisor. WIC is now provided through the Goshen Co. WIC program through monthly site visits to the Public Health Office. Goshen Co. Public Health also shares a Public Health Emergency Response Coordinator with Niobrara County.

In 2010 Niobrara County PH was no longer linked to Goshen County supervision.



Park County

Park County Public Health started in January, 1940.

In the 1960 annual report three main goals were established as guidelines for Public Health services provided to the community by the Park County Public Health Nurse. These were: 1) prolong life, 2) prevent disease and 9) promote health, both physical and mental.

For many years Mrs. Marie Feeley was the sole Public Health Nurse in Park County. Eventually the nursing service was involved in so many programs that it was impossible for one nurse to carry these programs out adequately so that the county could obtain the maximum benefits from its nursing service. So it was that in 1964 Mrs. Feeley first requested a second nurse for the Park County Nursing Service.



Liz Keefer, RN,
Park County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Platte County

Platte County began in the 70s.

Wheatland is the birth place of:

Dr. Sherard, Judy Stallman, Kathy McGuire, and Angie Van Houten.

Dr. Sherard was the County Health Officer until he left for his position with the state of WY in 2002.

In the 70s, In Platte County, Wheatland's Missouri Basin Power Project financed a public health nursing service to get it started before the local taxes were available; the company asked the Governor to authorize a position since none existed.

Platte County withdrew from state funding and became locally funded, in addition to earning revenues from home health services in 1981.

Platte County returned to state-supported funding in the early 1990s.

Kathy McGuire, RN,
Platte County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Sheridan County

Sheridan County Public Health started in May 1937 but was discontinued in April, 1938. It reopened in August of 1939. Lapse in service was due to the scarcity of public health nurses.

In a 1943 annual report, Public Health Nurse, Barbara Jewett, RN, reports that the Cod Live Oil Program was sanctioned for another year by the “welfare doctor”, Dr. Carr. The Cod Live Oil was purchased through the Sheridan Junior Women’s Club and distributed by the nurse at her discretion to needy infants and preschool children throughout the county.



Melanie Kawulok, RN,
Sheridan County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Sublette County

Sublette County Public Health started in June, 1940.

On a particularly nice day, Sublette Co PH propped open their front door to let in the fresh air. Pretty soon, the secretary announced that badger just walked down the hall! Sure enough, a badger had come in the front door, and headed for the conference room. If you aren't aware, badgers are mean little critters who'd just as likely bite off your leg. So the staff cautiously peeked around the corner and found him rooting about in the room, and after a bit, he wandered to behind the refrigerator, where, according to Annie, he made a whole lot of racket!

Annie, being the supervisor, came up with a plan, and as part of her orientation, put her new nurse to the task. They would close off the room, and open the outside door, hoping that the badger would find the outdoors more to his liking. Of course, this meant that someone would have to sneak by him to open the door. So, armed with a baseball bat, Amy bravely and successfully completed the mission. Soon, the badger was out the door, and all was well. Amy's dad is the game warden, so having a way with animals must run in the family...

Who says public health nursing isn't exciting?

Dereth Gehlhausen, RN,
Sublette County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Sweetwater County

Sweetwater County Public Health began in August, 1941.

Sweetwater County was the first county in Wyoming to have a state program referred to in the 1940s as Crippled Children's Services. Regional clinics were held semi-annually at the Wyoming General Hospital in Rock Springs.

A comparison to Public Health Nursing in the 1940s. In 1945, Sweetwater County Public Health staff traveled 18,017 miles to provide services. For fiscal year 1999, Community Nursing staff traveled 76,542 miles.

In 2011 the Sweetwater County Board of Health withdrew from the state funding and became locally funded.



Janet Gerken, RN
Sweetwater County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Teton County

Teton County Public Health Nursing (PHN) Services was created on April 17, 1974, with the first clients being contacted around May 20, 1974, for the Children's Health Services program.

December 10, 1985 - (excerpts from the Jackson Hole Guide) Bonnie Pockat oversees a student in a special 'first of its kind' class for CPR techniques for infants, and other infant safety practices...When submitted to the state, the program's curriculum proved so comprehensive Wyoming may use it as a prototype for classes in other areas.

September 1994 - Meningitis Outbreak - approximately 6,200 people were vaccinated here in Jackson after 4 cases were reported (1-woman died, 1-crippled and 2 others were sent to the hospital). Community campaign was a cooperative effort between state and local entities to provide free Meningococcal vaccine to residents and workers.



Terry Gregory,
Teton County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Uinta County

Uinta County Public Health started in February, 1937.

Uinta county and the Sled dog race: Our partnership !

Uinta county public health has had a partnership with the International Pedigree Stage Stop Sled Dog Race (IPSSSDR) since the late 1990's. Public health nurses have helped the local committee in promoting the event which includes raising awareness for immunizations.

The local IPSSSDR committee has given public health funds each year to help support the effort to vaccinate children for influenza. Because of their generous donation, we offer childhood vaccinations for a \$5 donation.

Some of the activities include:

- The WDH flu bug at the Meet the Musherers and race start!
- Free flu shots at the race start!
- Public health part of the officials at the meet the musher banquet!

It's a fun event for the family and a wonderful partnership!

We expect to keep the relationship ongoing for years to come.



Patricia Arnold, RN,
Uinta County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Washakie County

Washakie County Public Health started in February, 1937 and continued until September 1938. In February, 1939, it was reopened. Lapse in service was due to scarcity of public health nurses.

Washakie County had no public health nurse between 1944 and 1951. In 1951, Zelda Black became the new public health nurse, and she said that she was immediately “swamped with calls” regarding outbreaks of pertussis (whooping cough) in the county. Zelda’s other main duty during this time was the inspection of hospitals and the seasonal dispensing of tick shots.

Civil Defense was also a highlight of this time period as Washakie County was designated an evacuation center in the event of a nuclear war. The public health office in the county offered classes on the health effects of nuclear fallout and the preventive measures that citizens can take to reduce those effects.

Lori Schaal, RN,
Washakie County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Weston County

*Weston County had a County Health Officer from 1957.
In the 70s a Public Health Nursing Office was established.*

Dr Henry Stephenson was the County Health Officer from 1957 until 2006! He performed his duties in his private office. There was not a designated Public Health Nurse, only his private nurse.

There was no Public Health Nursing Office established until the 1970's. It was located in the basement of the courthouse, of which Lori Bickford had the pleasure of crawling out of....There was a time that Paps were performed in the bank vault in the basement.

Weston County now has a beautiful 3,900 sq ft building with 3 exam rooms, lab, immunization room, 3 staff offices, a conference room and a kitchen!

Lori Bickford, RN,
Weston County
Nurse Manager, 2011



Women in Blue

I was in Uinta County at the time in the County Manager position. Our dress code for State PHN did not require us to wear actual uniforms (yes, they did really did have PHN navy blue uniforms sold from “Hopkins” magazine, etc.)! Instead we had a “modified uniform.” We still needed to wear navy blue or navy blue and white combinations of conservative, professional attire (e.g., navy slacks or skirt with a white blouse). The dress code did allow us to wear a light blue or light blue tailored, professional clothing in the summer instead of the navy blue.

After wearing the navy blue and white for several years, I was surprised to have one of the County Commissioners (one who owned a clothing store called “The Style Den,”) suggest I purchase something from their new spring stock. The selections he was pointing out to me for work were pink and other pastel colors.

I looked at Commissioner Anderson in surprise and told him we can’t wear pink. He was perplexed and asked why. I told him the dress code for PHN was navy or navy and white. He had never even noticed, and after some checking, I found that others outside PHN hadn’t noticed either. Or if they had, they just thought we liked navy blue!



That was a turning point in revising the State PHN dress code. We realized that if no one recognized the navy blue attire as a “uniform of sorts,” we could expand the policy. We continued to have a dress code that stipulated professional, conservative clothes, but we didn’t have to restrict ourselves any longer by color!

~Jackie Cushing
State Nurse Supervisor, 2011

The Black Bag

When I first began Public Health in 1974, part of our required equipment was a black leather nursing bag reminiscent of the doctor's bag Dr. Welby would carry when making house calls. The bag had 2 flaps that overlapped each other. One flap held folded single newspaper pages, the other flap held paper towels, each stack secured with a rubber band.

When we made home visits, we deftly pulled one of the newspapers out of the bag, placing the bag on top of the newspaper instead of directly on the client's table. We then pulled out our bottle of "phisohex" to wash our hands before using the Blood Pressure equipment, and tucked one of the paper towels under our arm to dry our hands. Of course this was for "cleanliness" but one of my patients asked me "is my house that dirty that you have to use that newspaper"?



The bag also doubled as protective armor when confronted with a set of snarling canine teeth upon entering a client's home.

~Judy Stallman
State Nurse Supervisor, 2011

Wyoming Public Health Nursing Director (Chief Nurse Executive)

❖1940s Miss Frances Hersey

❖1950s-60s-70s Marian Chaldek (more than 40 years of Public Health service)

❖1975-1985 Elta Kennedy

❖1985-1988 Toma Nisbet

❖1988-2006 JoAnn Blevins

❖2006-2010 Donna Griffin began with the Wyoming Department of Health on Nov. 1, 1984, first as a nurse management consultant then as state supervisor and assistant director of nursing. On Nov. 1, 2006, became Section Chief for Public Health Nursing. Donna retired June 2010.

❖2010-Present Karen Mahan began her WDH PHN CNE career Dec 2010

State Department of Health Directors (Health & Social Services)

Partial list of Directors:

1940s

State Health Department Director:

- ❖ Dr. Walter J. Pelton
- ❖ Dr MC Ketih

1950s

- ❖ Franklin Yoder
- ❖ James Samson – 1959

1960s

State Department of Public Health

- ❖ Dr Robert Alberts

1970s-

State Health Officer, Director of Health and Social Services (included DFS)

- ❖ Dr. Cohen

1980s

Department of Health and Social Services Director

- ❖ Stan Torvik
- ❖ Jonathan Weisbuch
- ❖ Kathy Carpin

Division of Health & Medical Services Director

- ❖ Dr Cohen
- ❖ Dr Larry Meuli

1990s

Division of Health & Medical Services became the Wyoming Department of Health

- ❖ Jane Sabes
- ❖ Ken Kamis
- ❖ Don Rolston
- ❖ Garry McKee

Division of Public Health Administrators

- ❖ Dr. Richard Hilman,
- ❖ Dr. Bill Letson
- ❖ State Health Officer
- ❖ Dr Larry Meuli

2000s

Wyoming Department of Health Director

- ❖ Deborah Fleming
- ❖ Brent D. Sherard, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.P., Director and State Health Officer (2002-2011)

Dr. Sherard practiced medicine in his native Wheatland for 19 years before joining the Department of Health in April 2001 as state health officer. Former Gov. Jim Geringer appointed Sherard to serve as interim director in addition to his duties as state health officer from September 2002 through March 2003. Former Gov. Freudenthal named Sherard interim director and then director in June 2005.

2011-present Thomas O. Forslund