

# Your Health Matters

## CARING FOR GENERATIONS

She has served four generations of friends and neighbors during her 36 ½ years of service as a nurse at the Montgomery County Health Department. Kathie Hoette, RN, retires August 31<sup>st</sup> after nearly 4 decades of service to Montgomery County residents.

“I can’t believe it’s coming to an end,” says Kathy. “It’s been a real honor and pleasure to work for the people of Montgomery County. We go into people’s homes – they invite us into their homes, and most of them are very grateful.”

Kathy was invited to join the Montgomery County Health Department back in 1980 by former administrator Jewel Ernst, a church acquaintance. Since she had two small boys at the time, Kathy was only willing to accept part-time work. She started working three days a week, helping with Family Planning Clinics, well baby exams, and travelling into people’s homes to check their blood pressure.

Kathie says public health looks very different now, due to technology and changes in the Medicaid program.

“As Medicaid has expanded, people can see their own doctors. We don’t do well women clinic anymore. We don’t give many immunizations. We don’t do well baby clinic – it’s changed.”

She explains how the Health Department has shifted its focus to meet changing needs in the community.

“Our home health program has expanded. The patients we see now, they’d be in the hospital for weeks. You’d never see those patients at home, but now we are teaching the families to care for them at home.”

Kathie says an important part of home health services is education.

“A lot of what we do is education. When I was a child my mother would get a prescription and the doctor would tell her to take it twice a day. It wouldn’t have the name of the medication on the bottle or the dosage. The doctor would just say, ‘Take these pills’, but wouldn’t say why. Now we [public health nurses] do



a great deal of education on that. The education part is probably three-fourths of what we do in home health. We might change dressings, but educating them on their condition and how to take care of themselves and what to report to the doctor, is what we do.”

Kathie also provides health education to children. She teaches children to brush their teeth, to eat healthy foods, and to stay active. She visits local childcare centers with her puppet Lana using games to introduce children to healthy foods like broccoli and sweet potatoes.

Kathie says she is now teaching the grandchildren of patients she used to see in clinic.

“I think about how many people I’ve interacted with in 36.5 years. You see them in immunizations and WIC, then they grow up and get married. I met a woman from New Florence at a concert I was attending, and she said I was her pre-natal instructor. There was a woman that brought her child in for immunizations before school started, and he was crying and she told him, ‘Kathy gave me all my shots!’ People give me hugs. They remember me – hopefully it’s good memories!”

Kathie says the most rewarding part of her work is making an impact on the people and the families here in Montgomery County.

“It’s different when you work in a hospital. You see someone for a week and never see them again. Here the closeness, the people you know through 4-H, church, whatever, it’s a close community... you know their history and the family dynamics . . . and you can do your job better if you know what’s going on in that family. It’s rewarding to know that I’ve been able to stay here and help make the people of Montgomery County more educated and healthier, hopefully, by what I’ve done.”

Kathie plans to enjoy her retirement spending time with her grandchildren, helping at church, and serving in a prison ministry. She will also volunteer for the American Red Cross, and hopes to work with the Health Department to build a public health volunteer program in Montgomery County.

“I’ve enjoyed it, and it’s ever changing,” says Kathie about her career in public health. “Public health is changing from day to day and you never know what you’re going to get.”

We wish her all the best in her retirement, and thank her for her tireless years of caring, compassionate service to the residents of Montgomery County! ■



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