

Pat Scott Thompson, BSN 1976

What is your official title and what are your responsibilities in your current position?

I am a family nurse practitioner employed by a federal safety net clinic. I work as a sub at all of the clinics, taking care of primarily patients with acute needs. After attaining my BSN at WCU, I graduated with a master's in nursing from the University of Kansas in 1989, a post master's certificate as a family nurse practitioner from Pittsburg State University in 2007, and a Doctorate of Nursing Practice from St. Louis University in 2013.

What is a typical day like at work? What do you enjoy most about your current position?

In some clinics, my patients are already scheduled, so I look over their charts in the electronic medical record, and see what has been done for them in previous visits so that I can plan for their visit that day. In other clinics, I just wait to see what walks in the door. I see patients with all sorts of acute and chronic health care needs. I sub in the Walk In Clinic at our main clinic, and in the school-based clinic at the elementary school and middle/high school in a town 74 miles away, and on the school van, which travels to 4 elementary schools, the middle and high school in our local town of Pittsburg. The rest of the time, I sub in any of our 6 main clinics in our system.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Reading, traveling, visiting with friends, playing cards or playing Trivia Crack or Words With Friends online.

What advice would you give to a current student who aspires to follow in your footsteps and pursue a similar career path?

The new trend now is BSN-DNP. That is, students are admitted to a BSN program such as West Chester's, and complete the nursing degree and ultimately, the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree. This is not currently a requirement to be a nurse practitioner, but the nationwide emphasis is on attaining that degree in order to practice as a nurse practitioner. Currently, all that is required to be a nurse practitioner is a master's degree in nursing and completion of a nurse practitioner program, which will enable the graduate to be licensed as a nurse practitioner, usually after passing a national certification exam. My most important advice is to encourage nurses considering being nursing practitioners to work for 3-5 years in a hospital, health department, or a clinic, or all three, to get a broad base of clinical knowledge. Countless times, I have relied on knowledge of inpatients and outpatients that I cared for to be able to correctly assess and treat my patients. You cannot learn these lessons from books.

What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishments (both personally and professionally)?

I love to start new things, new programs, new projects. Being the first director of a health department/home health agency in a frontier county of rural Kansas was a great opportunity. Later, I branched into nursing education, and doubled the capacity of the associate degree nursing program in Parsons, KS. During that time, I was president of the state association of associate degree and practical nurse program directors, so became involved in introducing legislation to change nursing education and licensure in the state of KS, enabling nursing program students to take the NCLEX-RN (nursing “boards”) before graduation. When I became a nurse practitioner, I partnered with a NP colleague to open a satellite clinic of our federally qualified health center (FQHC) based in Pittsburg KS. Later, I started two other satellite clinics for this FQHC.

On a personal level, I will be married for 33 years in July, and had four children in 5 1/2 years. I was able to be a stay-at-home mom with them until the youngest went to kindergarten, while completing my master’s degree. Subsequent employment in nursing education afforded a work schedule that dovetailed with their school schedules. All of the children are adults and live within ½-day driving distance.

What is your favorite memory of your time at WCU?

As a nursing student, we really had to hit the books. We were in a brand new program, and were the first class of baccalaureate nursing students to graduate. Dr. Doris Schoel was the program director, and together with Mary Kline, had a great vision of nursing education in the future. We graduated into a state of nursing professionals that were primarily diploma nursing graduates, trained to be able to hit the ground running to run hospitals. In contrast, Dr. Schoel envisioned education of nursing students to be change agents that would expand the roles of nurses. We met a lot of prejudice in the workplace, as diploma graduates had done some many more “procedures” than we BSN students had. It would take a year or two for the in depth classes in the arts and sciences to enable us to shine in the nursing profession, as we learned new things, and were better able to integrate that knowledge into total patient care.

I regret not taking advantage of the social opportunities afforded by WCU. Favorite memories center around time spent in class and clinicals with my nursing classmates. In my spare time, I was the nursing class president, was on the Daedalus staff and also typed logs for the campus radio station. You have to remember that the early 70s were tough times for WCU, then called West Chester State College. I remember the threat that the college would be “censured,” which would mean that our nursing program which would have grave implications for us in seeking licensure and employment. Time passed as we labored on in the program, and the threat had passed by the time we graduated. We had a lot of fun designing out nursing uniforms and caps, and we designed our nursing pin, which had a tiny diamond in it, honoring us as graduates of the first class. That mold was discarded after pins were made for our class. Now, no one wears nursing caps, and rarely wears nursing pins. Much has changed in medicine and nursing in the past 40 years!