

## From Concept to Reality

### Evolution of the Physician Assistant Concept at Duke University, 1964-65

**By Reginald D. Carter, Ph.D., PA**

Prior to Charles Hudson's 1961 article published in *the Journal of the American Medical Association* titled "Expansion of Medical Professional Services with Nonprofessional Personnel," Dr. Eugene Stead, Jr., then chairman of the Department of Medicine at Duke University, had tried to use "professional" personnel, i.e., nurses, to expand clinical services within the Duke University Hospital. The first step toward this goal was taken by Ms. Thelma Ingles, a RN supervisor of medical and surgical nursing at Duke, who decided to take Stead's advice to spend her sabbatical year in 1957-58 in the medical school completing clinical clerkships to expand her clinical decision-making capabilities. After completing her sabbatical, Ingles and Stead created a master's degree nurse clinician track within the Nursing School and presented the program to the National League of Nursing for accreditation. They were summarily turned down, leaving Stead with little recourse but to look elsewhere for individuals that might be used to expand physician services.

It is evident from his letter dated April 21, 1964 to Duke Administrator Charles H. Frenzel that Stead's previous experience with nursing, and thus women, had shaped his concept about who should be trained as physicians' assistants - at least initially. In the letter, Stead states that "During the next ten years I would like to have a hand in training men to be physicians' assistants. This career would be open to men with high-school or junior-college degrees or to any person sponsored by a physician because of work already performed in a hospital, physician's office, or laboratory." Dr. Ruth Freeman, Johns Hopkins University, School of Hygiene and Public Health wrote Stead a letter dated October 13, 1964 responding to his recent visit and paper describing his ideas about training physician's assistants. Dr. Freeman wanted to know why Stead believed that physician's assistants should be only males since he had also said that physician assistant training "might be an upward channel for nurses." In his reply dated October 20, 1964, Dr. Stead thanked Freeman for her thoughtful comments but says that "the problem in nursing lies in the fact that we have not produced many professional (clinical) nurses, nor do we seem likely to do so in the future. I would like to leave them an unconstructive line of development, but would not like to (be) paralyzed by their ability to reproduce their kind in large quantity." Stead was frustrated with nursing leaders' reluctance to broaden their professional scope of practice. He was not willing to wait for them to change their stance and turned instead to another source of trainees, ex-military corpsmen, who had been hired and trained to work in the hospital as clinical technicians.



Stead in 1967

The paper Freeman referred to in her letter, was drafted by Stead on July 1, 1964. It described the need for physician's assistants and stated the minimum eligibility requirements for trainees to be high school or junior college and one year of health related experience. In the paper, Stead described the resources available for training PAs at the Duke University Medical Center. He suggested a two year curriculum consisting of a year of instructions in the laboratories (didactics)

followed by a year working with doctors at Duke and community hospitals. He concluded by describing example tasks that PAs could perform including recognition of clinical problems, such as, cardiac failure, shock and acute blood loss. According to Stead, "The physician-in-charge would be legally responsible for the acts of the assistant." The PA could work in the office, the hospital, and the home.

In a letter dated August 21, 1964 to Everett Hopkins, Vice President for Planning and Institutional Studies at Duke University, Stead stated that he planed to start a program with 12 trainees sometime after October 15 "to create new positions in the health field that would not

conflict with any existing professions." He estimated expenditures to be \$58,800 the first year and \$94,800 the second year. To cover these expenses, Stead convinced Dr. Herbert Saltzman to include stipends and teaching support for physician assistants in a grant being prepared for the National Heart Institute to train chamber operators for the hyperbaric unit at Duke University. The grant was submitted in October 1964. To seek additional funding, Stead wrote letters in the summer and fall of 1964 to Dr. Elliot Findelstein, US Public Health Service, Neurological and Sensory Disease Service Program, to determine if he thought PAs could assist with the management of stroke patients, and to Mr.



Duke Medical Center Hyperbaric Unit, Delmar Shelton, PA-C, ca 1985

Robert Ballentine, US Department of Labor, to see if funds from the Manpower Development Act could be used to finance PA training.

Although the attempts to the Public Health Service and Labor Department failed to gain support, the grant to the National Heart Institute was approved and awarded in the spring of 1965. With funding, Stead sent a memorandum dated March 23, 1965 to Dr. Barnes Woodhall, Vice Provost for Medical Affairs at Duke University, stating that the hyperbaric unit would begin a formal training program for environmental chamber technicians and physician-assistants in July 1965. Dr. Stead asked Woodhall to "set up an appropriate committee to guide the emerging programs designed to bring new personnel into the health field." This committee was appointed with Dr. Andrew G. Wallace, assistant professor of medicine as chair, on April 17, 1965. The Committee's charge was to decide matters of curriculum, selection of students, administration, faculty, certification and utilization of graduates. Based upon the Committee's recommendations made in May 1965 and with financial support from the National Heart Institute in July 1965, Stead launched his program on October 4, 1965. The first four students, all former Navy Hospital Corpsmen, were Victor Germino, Donald Guffey, Richard Scheele, and Kenneth Ferrell.

### ***Epilogue***

Although Stead's concept had been rejected by nursing, he recruited a part-time nursing educator, Ms. Kathleen Andreoli, to be his academic coordinator and assigned Mr. James Mau, his department administrator, to manage the program. Other instructors were drawn from the medical school faculty. A female dietitian was accepted into the second year class but withdrew after six months to take a commission in the US Air Force. Germino, Scheele and Ferrell completed the program and received their PA certificates on October 6, 1967. Admitted in

October 1968, Ms. Joyce Nichols was the first women to complete the program on October 3, 1970.

Whereas Ingles' and Stead's attempt to provide nurses advanced clinical training failed to gain momentum in the late 1950s, Loretta Ford, RN and Henry Silver, MD, were more successful in 1965. They launched their pediatric nurse practitioner program at the University of Colorado to train baccalaureate nurses to extend clinical services to children in medically underserved, impoverished areas of the state. A number of institutions followed suit and clinical nursing programs in other disciplines began to make their appearances in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The American Nursing Association finally accepted and endorsed the training of nurse practitioners in the 1970's.



**Medical School Dean, William Anlyan, MD, signs certificates of first three Duke PA Graduates Germino, Scheele and Ferrell – October 6, 1967**

[\*\*Click Here for On-line Reference Materials\*\*](#)

## **On-line Reference Materials:**

### [Starting Physician's Assistant Training Program at Duke University, Correspondence, Stead to Frenzel, 21 April 1964. \(ID 142\)](#)

A 1964 letter from Eugene A. Stead, Jr. to Charles H. Frenzel at Duke Hospital expressing desire to meet to discuss establishing an educational program to train physician's assistants. His vision is to provide the students "one year of training in a physician-directed area in the Medical Center and one year of experience in a community hospital. He would be licensed by an appropriate change in the Medical Practice Act." Dr. Stead provides a brief description of the role of PAs in making home visits, working in the office and in the hospital.

### [The Physician's Assistant, Monograph, Eugene A. Stead, Jr., 1 July 1964. \(ID 145\)](#)

A working paper dated July 1, 1964 written by Dr. Eugene A. Stead, Jr. describing the need for physician's assistants. He states the minimum eligibility requirements for trainees (high school or junior college and one year of health related experience) and describes the resources available for training PAs at the Duke University Medical Center and suggest a two year curriculum consisting of a year of instructions in the laboratories (didactics) followed by a year working with doctors at Duke and community hospitals. He finishes by describing some of the tasks that PAs could perform including task and recognition of clinical problems, such as, cardiac failure, shock and acute blood loss. "The physician-in-charge would be legally responsible for the acts of the assistant." PAs would work in the office, the hospital and the home.

### [Starting Physician's Assistant Training Program at Duke University, Correspondence, Freeman to Stead, 13 October 1964 and Stead to Freeman, 20 October 1964. \(ID 144\)](#)

Dr. Ruth Freeman, Johns Hopkins University, School of Hygiene and Public Health writes Dr. Eugene Stead, Jr. a letter dated October 13, 1964 asking Stead why he felt the physician's assistant should be male since Stead had indicated physician assistant training "might be an upward channel for nurses." In his reply dated October 20, 1964, Dr. Stead thanks Dr. Freeman for her thoughtful comments and says that he thinks that "the problem in nursing lies in the fact that we have not produced many professional {clinical} nurses, nor do we seem likely to do so in the future. I would like to leave them an unobstructive line of development, but would not like to {be} paralyzed by their ability to reproduce their kind in large quantity."

### [Starting Physician's Assistant Training Program at Duke University, Correspondence, Stead to Hopkins, 21 August 1964. \(ID 158\)](#)

A 1964 letter from Eugene A. Stead, Jr. to Everett Hopkins, Vice President for Planning and Institutional Studies at Duke University stating that the Department of Medicine was establishing a training program to create new positions in the health field that will "not conflict with any existing professions." Dr. Stead notes that "We are prepared to admit 12 trainees at any time after October 15, 1964." He provides a two year budget for the program with expenditures of \$58,800 for the first year and \$94,800 the second year.

### [Starting Physician's Assistant Training Program at Duke University, Correspondence; Stead to Finkelstein, 18 August 18 1964 and Stead to Ballentine, 24 September 1964. \(ID 143\)](#)

Letters from Eugene A. Stead, Jr. dated August 18, 1964 to Dr. Elliot Finkelstein, US Public Health Service and September 24, 1964 to Mr. Robert L. Ballentine, US Department of Labor. After stating his intentions to train PAs, Stead asks Finkelstein who heads the Neurological and Sensory Disease Service Program, US Public Health Services, if the "neurological group" have any interest in the program, especially if PAs can be trained to care for stroke victims. His letter to Ballentine stresses the need for PAs to meet growing demands. "The economic potential for physician-assistants is good. They will be immediately used by all segments of the medical profession and will make an immediate contribution to general medical care." Stead finishes his letter to Ballentine by asking if "the Manpower Development Act can offer financial support for such a project."

[Hyperbaric Training Grants \[Duke University\], Correspondence, Satzman to Woodhall, et.al., 15 March 1965, ID 301](#)

This letter from Dr. Herbert A. Salzman, director of Hyperbaric Medicine, Duke University dated March 15, 1965 to Dr. Woodall and other Duke Administrators indicates that "both" hyperbaric training grants were approved by the National Heart Institute" to become active on July 1, 1965. One grant will underwrite the cost of training hyperbaric chamber technicians and physician's assistants. An attached letter dated March 22, 1965 from Dr. Woodhall dated March 22, 1965 congratulates Dr. Saltzman for receiving his grants.

[Starting Physician's Assistant Training Program at Duke University, Correspondence, Stead to Woodhall, 23 March 1965. \(ID 146\)](#)

Memorandum dated March 23, 1965 from Dr. Eugene A. Stead, Jr. to Dr. Barnes Woodhall, Vice Provost for Medical Affairs at Duke University, stating that "In July 1965, the hyperbaric unit will begin a formal training program for environmental chamber technicians and physician-assistants." Dr. Stead requested that Dr. Woodhall "set up an appropriate committee to guide the emerging programs designed to bring new personnel into the health field." Dr. Stead suggests that Jim Mau (administrator in the Department of Medicine) be the secretary for the committee. This committee was appointed with Dr. Andrew G. Wallace, assistant professor of medicine as chair, on April 17, 1965.

[\[Duke\] Physician's Assistant Program: Ad Hoc Committee Report, May 1965, ID 299](#)

This is the report of an ad hoc committee appointed by Dr. Banes Woodhall, Vice Provost, Duke University to evaluate "programs within the Medical Center designed to bring new types of personnel into the health field." The committee concentrates on a new member of the health team called a "physician's assistant." A brief description of the role and training is provided. "This program calls for intensive training in areas which complement available talents without attempting to replace available talents." The report discusses selection of students including pre-requisites, the curriculum divided into a didactic and clinical phase, course descriptions, organization and faculty, certification (by the Medical Center), and utilization of students and graduates. The report ends by stating three unsolved problems; (1) should the model be viewed as vocational training with set limits or should it be an open-ended model that would "see what they are capable of?" (2) skills are easy to teach but judgment is more difficult to teach - so PAs should be supervised and (3) where do PAs fit on administrative structure on hospital wards - what should be their relationship with nurses?

[Minutes of the Hyperbaric Operating Committee \[Duke University\], 4 October 1965, ID 303](#)

These minutes of the Hyperbaric Operating Committee, Duke University Medical Center, dated October 4, 1965 states that the "formal portion of the Physician's Assistant Program began on October 4 and seems to be proceeding well, with good acceptance so far." Dr. Saltzman relates that the only modification has been the matriculation of four rather than two students into the program.