



HOMETOWN HEALTH CARE

BRAXTON COUNTY, WV

START-UP NURSE PRACTITIONER PRACTICE

I would not have been able to purchase this building and open my practice if not for the Center for Rural Health Development," stated Charity Woods, a nurse practitioner in Sutton, West Virginia.

Charity Woods was born and raised in Braxton County, West Virginia and is a graduate of Braxton County High School. She earned her undergraduate degree from Glenville State College and then entered the joint nursing program offered by Glenville State and West Virginia University. She earned her master's degree in 2008 and received two diplomas, one from each school.

Upon graduation, she returned to Braxton County and worked for Dr. William Given in Gassaway. According to Charity, "Dr. Given was an old-time country doctor who did everything he could for his patients." This was something well learned and taken to heart by Charity.

After Dr. Given's practice was bought out, Charity transferred to a clinic in Big Otter and worked in the Clay County school system. Charity was the in-school health care provider for all Clay county schools from elementary through high school. "I saw 40 patients per day and even performed PEIA exams for the staff," said Charity.


In 2016, West Virginia joined 21 other states in broadening the legal scope of practice for nurse practitioners, known as APRNs, or advanced practice registered nurses. This opened the door for APRNs, like Charity, to start their own independent practices. Under this new law, a nurse practitioner who has

worked with a collaborative physician for at least three years, and who is licensed by the West Virginia Board of Examiners for Registered Professional Nurses, is eligible to practice independently.

Serving rural communities is what Charity has always wanted to do. "I wanted to practice in Braxton County, it's where I'm from. I've lived here my whole life, and I wanted to give back and make a difference in this community."

The passage of this law was critical for rural communities. Prior to passage of the law, if a Nurse Practitioner's collaborative physician relocated out of state or retired, they could not continue practicing on their own. With a shortage of physicians in many rural communities throughout West Virginia, finding a collaborative doctor was a challenge. Charity explained, "The law was passed in 2016 in order to enable nurse practitioners to serve independently in rural areas."

Serving rural communities is what Charity has always wanted to do. "I wanted to practice in Braxton County, it's where I'm from. I've lived here my whole life, and I wanted to give back and make a difference in this community." With this goal in mind, the new law in place, and a building on Sutton's Main Street available for purchase, all Charity needed was the funds to bring her dream to fruition.



Charity soon discovered that traditional lenders were not willing to offer her a loan to purchase the building and start her practice. Disheartened, Charity spoke to a nurse practitioner in Summersville who told her about the Center for Rural Development.

“They were a blessing, as the Center had an obvious interest in helping me succeed. I began the conversation in April 2017 and signed for the loan in November. The process was an eye opener, but I’m better for it. Not only did I get the revenue for the building and the supplies needed to open my practice, I also received help with the business side of my practice. I knew the medical side, of course, but I was not as prepared for the business aspects of establishing a practice.”

The business coaching provided by the WV Small Business Development Center (WVSBDC) made the difference in the viability of the startup practice for Charity. “There were no guessing games. They knew exactly what I needed and why.” Charity was challenged with developing a three-year business plan but worked with the WVSBDC business coach to assist and help formulate it. With the funding and a business plan in place, Charity opened her practice on February 6, 2018.

“I am the owner and provider, and I want to be here. This is my home, and I’m not going anywhere.” Charity confided that some of her initial patients inquired if she would be there the next time they came in. She explained, “People want the consistency of being seen by the same provider, someone who knows them and will be there for them.”

Charity hopes that by treating patients professionally and respectfully, they will care more about their health care. “I do not have a ‘get them in and get them out’ mentality. I spend time treating and showing my patients that I care about them. By doing so, perhaps they will care more for themselves,” said Charity.

Actually, Charity has one other staff member, her dedicated receptionist, Misty, who helps her handle the day-to-day workings of the practice. Part of her business plan was to have the ability to hire a nurse within the first year. “I have someone in mind, and I’m confident about being able to bring her on.” Currently, Charity


is seeing seven patients a day on average, of which three are typically new patients.

In many cases, Charity’s practice is the only option for health care locally. There is no pediatrician in the area and, as such, Charity treats many children. “I see patients of all ages, and I’m happy to see

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them.” She adds, “My main concern is making people feel better about health care. My patients like that I am from here and that my practice is local and smaller than what they’ve been experiencing. Patients like to receive personal care and to be listened to. That is the role I want to fill and how I want my practice to be.”

Charity understands that in a rural practice she treats what needs to be treated but refers patients to a physician when their health care needs become complex. However, being in a rural community she provides many procedures that are not normally performed in local family practices located in larger cities. She cites



skin biopsies, ear irrigations, and cryosurgery among them.

Charity recognizes that without the Center for Rural Health Development, her practice would probably not exist. She acknowledges the difference she is making in Sutton and Braxton County and says, "If my practice was not here, people would suffer. Those with transportation issues would go without any medical services except for emergencies."

Charity's caring nature and commitment to her patients is evident by the home visits she makes on Friday afternoons. "I love making those home visits," she shares. She treats people who cannot get out, often elderly patients, especially during the winter. Charity normally makes two house calls each Friday.

Thanks to the help provided by the Center for Rural Health Development, the town of Sutton now has a family practitioner in Charity Woods and has a new local dentist who purchased Dr. Marple's practice. Charity asserts, "Sutton could have been a dying town, but instead our town now has a family practice and a dental office to serve its citizens, and this would not have been possible without the Center's assistance."

For the future, Charity envisions having a group of nurse practitioners from around the county joining her practice to offer a variety of services including pediatrics, dermatology, geriatrics, and women's care. Perhaps the Center for Rural Health Development will be instrumental in making this vision a reality.

Laughing, Charity recounted that some patients have asked if she will ever go back to school to become a doctor. She tells them she is quite satisfied being of service as a nurse practitioner. "Nurses, after all, enter the field because they genuinely want to help people." With the help of the Center for Rural Health Development, Charity Woods is doing precisely that.



A P R O G R A M O F

