



# New Mexico Nurses Who Inspire Nurses

Jan Martin, DNP, BA, RN, PAHM & Connie Smith-Fassler, DNP, MHA, RN, CNML

**Kathy Lopez-Bushnell, EdD, MSN, MPH, FNP, RN,** Kathy's journey in nursing is a story of inspiration, leadership, and unwavering dedication to others. A proud graduate of the University of New Mexico (UNM) College of Nursing, Kathy earned her BSN in 1969, followed by her MSN as a Family Nurse Practitioner and MPH from Yale University in 1972, and later, her EdD from Boston University in 1982. Her academic achievements reflect her commitment to lifelong learning, which she has seamlessly woven into her extraordinary career.

As the mother of five children, Kathy's legacy extends into healthcare through her family. Four of her children have embraced careers in the healing professions. In New Mexico, Kristen serves as a physician assistant, Lisa as a nurse practitioner, and Tori as a registered nurse, while Whitney, a therapist in Oregon, dedicates her work to children overcoming trauma. Kathy's dedication to caregiving clearly resonates across generations.

Kathy has always been a pioneer, grounded in the belief that **caring and unconditional love are the essence of nursing**. In the late 1970s, her compassion led her to co-found an outreach program for the homeless living under Boston's bridges. With a visionary approach, Kathy and her team built trust with individuals that society often overlooks, securing a grant to provide housing, job training, life skills education, and medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders.

When Kathy returned to New Mexico to care for her aging parents, her passion for serving the underserved continued through her work at Healthcare for the Homeless. There, she found her most fulfilling role, listening deeply to those whose voices often go unheard. Kathy's

gift for connection exemplifies the heart of nursing—acknowledging the dignity and humanity of every individual. She says, "It is not hard to listen to what people are saying- but you have to care to be able to hear them. People need that."

Perhaps Kathy's most profound professional impact came during her 23-year tenure as Director of Nursing Research at UNM Hospital. In this role, she championed evidence-based practice, empowering nurses to solve patient care challenges creatively and rigorously. When existing evidence fell short, Kathy collaborated with staff to design and implement original research, cultivating a culture of innovation and excellence.

During this time, Kathy's research encompassed diverse areas of nursing practice. Perhaps her work spearheading family education on Shaken Baby Syndrome has the most widespread and enduring impact. It was staff nurses in 2010 coming to her over concerns that a lot of their babies were dying. Investigation revealed patients with shaken baby syndrome, but also awareness that education was incomplete and not consistently delivered during their hospital stay. She developed an evidence-based prevention program modeled after an approach implemented in NY. A successful research study of implementing a standardized training and education program delivered to all NICU families at the University of New Mexico Hospitals (UNMH) from 2012 to 2014 led to a legislative initiative begun in 2015. Collaborations with the New Mexico Nurses Association (NMNA) and the UNMH Department of Pediatrics worked together through two legislative sessions until a bill was finally passed in 2017.

New Mexico was at the forefront of the nation on this initiative at the time, as

seen in an American Nurses Association publication in *The American Nurse* (July/August 2016) by Susan Trossman:

"An initiative — developed and driven by RNs to prevent shaken baby syndrome — is gaining momentum in New Mexico. And it's a prime example of nurses who, seeing a need, take action to make an important difference in the lives of an extremely vulnerable population. UNMH nurses helped craft a legislative measure that would require all new parents to be educated about SBS prevention in hospitals and birthing centers statewide, and NMNA supported the initiative."

## New Mexico Senate Bill 21

RELATING TO PUBLIC HEALTH; REQUIRING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO ADOPT RULES REQUIRING HOSPITALS AND FREESTANDING BIRTH CENTERS TO PROVIDE TRAINING AND EDUCATION TO PREVENT SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME TO EVERY PARENT OF EVERY NEWBORN BEFORE DISCHARGE. BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO (April 6, 2017)

The effect continues. Since the initial legislation, other NM agencies have taken up the work as well, and now more standardized shaken baby syndrome prevention education is occurring in NM schools and home visitor programs and is promoted widely by the NM Early Childhood Education and Care Department. Kathy's legacy is one of transformative impact—both in the communities she served and in the countless lives she has touched. Her story is a testament to the power of compassion, resilience, and the boundless possibilities of nursing. ■