



BETTY SMITH WILLIAMS

DrPH, RN, FAAN

The Mentor

Betty Smith Williams learned from her mother that she could make a difference by becoming actively involved. When Betty was growing up in South Bend, Ind., her mother was always active in social and civic organizations. “I saw very early on how activism and collectivism could impact change,” she said.

This early example inspired Betty to lead a life of involvement. In the late sixties, she cofounded the Council of Black Nurses in Los Angeles, and later became a founder and seventh president of the National Black Nurses Association. Today she is president of the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Associations, which addresses cultural diversity in the nursing profession and the health care status of Americans from diverse cultures.

In 1957, Betty began her nursing journey in home health care and later in public health, before becoming a professor at UCLA, University of Colorado and California State University. “Because of my age and the times, I was by myself in a lot of things. I was the first black person to wear the cap of Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing, Case Western University. And I was the first black person to teach nursing in a California college or university,” she said.

That’s why one of Betty’s driving forces has been to promote racial diversity and to get African Americans involved in nursing leadership. She is a role model and mentor for nurses globally. “What satisfies me most is that through my work, and the work of my peers, we have stimulated others to find avenues in nursing,” said the avid African art collector.

After 45 years in the field, Betty says nursing still excites her. Retiring, she said, isn’t on the horizon anytime soon for either her or Harold, her husband of 48 years. “I hope to have the opportunity to identify, influence and inspire more people. The greatest compliment is when someone decides to do what you like to do,” she said. “I would like to be around to pass on the mantle of leadership.”

MARCH 03