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MAY L. WYKLE

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The Educator

It's hard to forget the first patient whose life you saved. For May Wykle, her first came when she was working as a nurse's aide and spent one night bathing a patient who had a spiking temperature. "The next morning the nurse told me I probably saved a life. It was then that I realized what nursing was all about," she said.

After working for many years in psychiatric hospitals, May decided she wanted to teach. "You have to determine where your talents are best and apply them. That's what I did," she said. Her talents are also apparent in her love for flower arranging.

May's distinguished career in nursing education began at the Cleveland Psychiatric Institute, followed by the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, her alma mater. Today, she is the dean of that nursing school and has been honored as one of Northern Ohio's most influential women.

Recognizing the growing population of older adults, May decided to refocus her energies on geriatrics. "Aging is so important. I worked hard to ensure there was a stand-alone course in caring for older adults in our basic nursing curriculum. We have to teach geriatrics to our nurses," she said.

While geriatric nursing has never been considered glamorous, May hopes to portray the specialty in a different light. In addition to her work as dean, she is director of the University Center on Aging and Health at Case Western, working to improve the quality of care for elderly persons. In 1996, she served as principal investigator of a research project examining the care of minority elders, and in 1999 she published a book dealing with serving minority elders in the 21st century. She has been promoting these research findings through presentations across the country.

"Geriatrics can be very exciting. Twenty years from now the baby boomers will need care," said the mother of two daughters, one of them also a geriatric nurse. "I always tell young people that what you do today to make the quality of life better for aging adults adds to your own longevity and sense of well-being."