

MAHEC SAYS GOODBYE TO A TRAILBLAZER IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

Susan Meade always longed to live at the beach. There was just one problem. She worked at UNC Hospital in Chapel Hill, and she married a man who wanted to live in the mountains. Make that two problems.

They decided to compromise by moving to Asheville first and then the beach. That was 1977. Fast forward 40 years, and Wilmington's loss has been Western North Carolina's gain.

"Susan is a pioneer in team-based care," shares Dr. Beth Buys, Ob/Gyn Division Director. "She has always worked collaboratively with physicians and physician assistants to ensure patients have the support they need to get well and stay well."



In fact, she has taught hundreds of providers how to practice collaborative care, even presenting on this team-based model at an American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) annual conference.

On September 1, 2017, Susan will retire from a career dedicated to advancing women's health, with the last 25 years spent right here at MAHEC Ob/Gyn Specialists, a teaching practice she helped build.

"Susan could have worked other places," notes longtime friend and MAHEC Board member Janice Brumit. "Instead, she chose to serve some of our community's most vulnerable women including those with high-risk pregnancies and those without insurance, treating every patient with dignity and respect."

Susan was instrumental in helping develop the MAHEC Ob/Gyn Residency Program under the direction of Dr. William Brannan and Dr. Hal Lawrence, whom she first met when she was a labor and delivery nurse and he was a resident in Chapel Hill. When Dr. Lawrence moved to Asheville a year after Susan, he invited her to join his practice.

At the time, Susan was working at the health department and had recently completed her training as a family planning nurse practitioner. She accepted Dr. Lawrence's offer and spent the next 10 years in private practice supporting women in a variety of roles from prenatal education to annual exams to menopause support.

In 1992, Dr. Lawrence was hired to develop MAHEC's first ob/gyn residency program. Susan joined him two days later and went on to direct the reproductive endocrine program and breast clinic in addition to educating residents, medical students, and advance practice practitioners - all while providing excellent patient-centered care.

Susan's impact on women's health extends far beyond the walls of MAHEC. She served for two terms on ACOG's national patient education board, where she worked with physician specialists to develop educational materials that helped patients across the country care for themselves in a variety of ways including breast and urinary health, contraception, menopause and post-surgical care.

"Susan has always encouraged women to take good care of themselves," shares Janice. "She believes in the importance of nutrition and exercise, not just for physical health but for mental health as well. For her it's not a fad. It's a way of life."

Now in her 60s, you wouldn't guess her age until she confesses she's been a group fitness instructor for the past 31 years.

Given her youthful energy, it's not surprising that one of Susan's favorite programs is MAHEC's pediatric/adolescent gynecology clinic, which she and Dr. Andrea Currens oversee. The clinic takes the fear and stigma out of going to the gynecologist and provides a gentle introduction to women's health and hygiene. Teens that come to the clinic learn how to take care of their body and how to make healthy choices around sexual activity and contraception.

"Our teens love her," says Dr. Buys. "Susan is very compassionate and kind but also straightforward and humorous. Patients respond really well to that."

Susan's work encompasses women of all ages, and some of her patients have been with her for 35 years. Patients often referred their mothers and daughters to Susan. "It has been a privilege and humbling to treat three generations of women," she admits. "I've learned how to grow old alongside my patients."

Susan recently completed an annual exam with a patient who has been with her for 30 years.

When Donna first started seeing Susan, she was trying to conceive. Donna was newly divorced and single, which presented a few challenges. Undaunted, Susan performed the artificial insemination. At the time, Donna was the first single woman in Buncombe County to undergo this procedure. A little less than a year later, her son was born by C-section after presenting breech.

"When Susan came to see me in the hospital after work, I told her I had one request," Donna remembers. "Before you do this again, put that stuff in right-side up!"

At their last exam, Donna reminisced about all they had been through and thanked Susan again. "Thirty years ago, you gave me my greatest gift," she told her. They both got a little tearful.

How do you follow that? If you ask Susan, she might recommend breaking into song.

"She's a karaoke queen," Janice admits. "You can't wrestle the microphone out of her hand." When asked about Susan's favorite tune, Janice doesn't hesitate.

"Stop in the Name of Love."

Looking back over Susan's career, it doesn't seem likely she will do this any time soon - stop, that is.

Be sure to join us on August 31, from 5:00 - 7:00 pm, in the courtyard next to Ob/Gyn Specialists for a celebration of Susan's life and career as a trailblazer in women's health.

There's a rumor there might even be some karaoke. Just don't pin your hopes on getting hold of the mic.