



# I AM

## *Sandra Mixer* *Associate Professor, PhD, RN,* *CTN-A*

From an early age, Sandra Mixer, an associate professor in the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's College of Nursing, knew she would be a nurse. As an eight-year-old, Mixer would wear a traditional nurse's hat and cape and proudly care for her family and friends.

Now, with more than 40 years of experience as a nurse, Mixer continues her caregiving journey with a focus on vulnerable populations.

"I use the culture care theory," she said. "I look at honoring people for who they are—providing health care by assessing and accommodating their needs from their perspective, rather than trying to fit them into the health care system."

At a young age, Mixer accepted death as a part of life. At age 26 she was a hospice nurse caring for patients nearing the end of their lives.

"What a privilege it is to walk that walk with people during that point in their life," she said. "It's only made my life enriched."

Today Mixer focuses part of her research on end-of-life care, providing guidance, education, and compassion for those nearing death as well as their caregivers. She recently finished a community-academic partnership project to provide tools and resources for

those working with hospice patients in Scott County, Tennessee.

"It's so important that people in the community are involved," she said. "It's important to just listen and make sure you develop the educational pieces that would be relatable to the community."

In addition to end-of-life research, Mixer focuses on educating current and future nurses and developing the nursing workforce into strong holistic nurse leaders for rural and underserved communities.

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In a project entering its third year, the College of Nursing is partnering with Cherokee Health Systems to train students and practicing RNs to work as members of interprofessional teams caring for rural and underserved populations in community-based primary care settings. Funded through a grant from the US Health Resources and Services Administration, the project—Transforming RN Roles in Community-Based Integrated Primary Care through Academic Practice

# A Nurse Of Faith

Partnership, or TRIP—is slated to run through 2022.

“Our students are in clinical with interprofessional team members,” Mixer said. “We’ve got pharmacy, nutrition, clinical psychologists, SWORPS [UT’s Social Work Office of Research and Public Service]—all this expertise coming together transforming the way our graduates are going to think about and improve our health care system.”

In addition to developing students into well-trained primary care nurses, the grant provides faculty and practicing RNs with leadership and primary care development in care coordination, health coaching, leading change, self-care, and strengths-based leadership, among other areas.

“This grant allows me to bring all the expertise and all the things I’ve been working toward in my career and work with diverse individuals who share the same values of caring for vulnerable people.”

Although Mixer has been influential in the success of the grant, she credits the partnerships between Cherokee Health Systems and the College of Nursing as major contributors.

“Our faculty and staff from Cherokee have been instrumental in teaching our students,”

she said. “Their involvement in teaching will help transform the role of nurses and primary care.”

Her advice to new researchers interested in community and academic or practice partnerships is to surround themselves with a supportive team.

“You have to have a team,” she said. “The whole purpose of what we do is to serve others, and if you have a team, you will make the science better.”

Mixer brings her expertise and experience as a hospice nurse into the academic and practice setting, merging her holistic culture care approach with academics.

“It’s so important to bring who you are, and for other people to bring who they are and work together,” she stated.

Mixer’s early experience in hospice, combined with her talents, expertise, and passion, have given her a full-circle view of life.

“This is a journey,” she said. “We need to acknowledge death as a part of life and help one another by saying the things that need to be said and closing things out when you get the chance.”

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