



Spring 4-30-1996

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Recommended Citation

Aaron, Bob, "IWU Nursing Major Headed to Cook County Hospital Internship" (1996).
News and Events. 6633.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/6633>

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April 30, 1996

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IWU Nursing Major Headed to Cook County Hospital Internship

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--She's seen it happen seven or eight times--including twice in the Netherlands. But next month, she'll see it happen everyday in the obstetrics unit of Chicago's sprawling Cook County Hospital.

When Cynthia Powell talks about it--childbirth--she smiles and simply says: "It's incredible."

Powell, a senior majoring in nursing at Illinois Wesleyan University, will spend most of May working as an intern at Cook County Hospital under the direction of Darryn Dunbar, a 1990 IWU nursing graduate, who is among the first male nurses to graduate from the University of Illinois Graduate School of Midwifery. Powell will graduate from IWU on May 5.

"I will be working in labor and delivery," Powell explained, "as well as in a prenatal clinic. I'll have a chance to perform skills I've been certified to do under Darryn Dunbar's supervision.

"As a new nursing graduate," Powell added, "it's hard to get labor and delivery experience so this internship will be very beneficial."

Dunbar has briefed Powell about the hospital routine and layout. She anticipates working a 40-hour week, with 12-hour shifts in labor and delivery and eight-hour shifts in the prenatal clinic.

After two year's experience in labor and delivery, Powell wants to attend graduate school to earn a master's degree in nursing and certification as a nurse midwife. Ultimately, Powell would like to operate a birth center for low-income patients.

Powell realizes she will be facing some big challenges working at Cook County Hospital.

"I will be dealing with a whole different culture," Powell said, referring to the predominantly low-income minority patients served by the hospital. Consequently, she anticipates gaining valuable hands-on experience with the Medicaid program, which provides medical care to low-income people.

Powell first observed a child birth as an IWU sophomore, when she was on an obstetrics rotation at BroMenn medical center, a Bloomington hospital.

"It was really exciting," she recalled. "First I saw a Cesarean section and then I saw a vaginal delivery by a woman who was in a Lamaze class I attended."

Powell spent three weeks in Europe in January, 1995, on an IWU travel course, which included two weeks in the Netherlands, where she studied Dutch midwifery practices.

"I went to a prenatal clinic," Powell said, "and was assigned to a midwife. We made home visits and did checkups after babies were born. Once I was called in the middle of the night for the home delivery of a baby."

Observing Dutch approaches to midwifery gave Powell an interesting glimpse into another culture. The midwife she worked with also served as a translator since Powell does not speak Dutch.

"I thought going into someone's home when they were having a baby would be a taboo for me," Powell said. "But these people welcomed us. They were excited that I was there. In fact, in one instance, I was the second person to hold a newborn baby--after its mother--and the family took a picture of me.

"The Dutch practice of having babies at home," Powell explained, "makes giving birth more of a family event. It's less institutional than having a baby in a hospital. However, the Dutch also give birth in hospitals, where midwives are on staff."

The Dutch system of maternity care often is cited as an example of how such services can be improved in other industrialized nations because of its "woman-friendly" approach.

Powell, a graduate of Rolling Meadows High School, selected IWU's nursing program, in part, because it offers students the chance for clinical experiences as sophomores, which is earlier than in some other programs.

"It's important to start early working with clients," Powell said. "Initially, we work with healthier clients and then more sickly ones. This helps get you ready for working with those who need more help. It also gives you a chance to get acclimated to your future profession earlier."

Initially, Powell was unsure whether she wanted to purse a career in nursing or become a physician. She opted for nursing because of the greater opportunity for patient contact and career flexibility, especially in terms of work hours.

"I like working with people," Powell said, "and I want to help people. I want to make a difference."

She settled on a nursing career after volunteering as a high school sophomore at Northwest Community Hospital in Arlington Heights, Ill., a Chicago suburb. Powell also gravitated toward nursing after assisting others who were giving her grandfather therapy after a stroke.

"I talked to a nurse," she said, "who gave me guidance and made nursing sound exciting. She was a mentor to me."

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,850 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.