

Shelton Joins West Piedmont as Women's Health and Family Nurse Practitioner

Lydia "Kay" Dunaway Shelton joined the West Piedmont Health District May 10, 2021 as a Women's Health and Family Nurse Practitioner. She will be helping the district expand access to public health services in the region.

As the health district returns to normal operations following the COVID-19 pandemic focus and re-orienting of services, Shelton will offer routine Virginia Department of Health Screenings, Women's Health, Sexually Transmitted Infection and Every Women's Life services. In addition, she and the staff provide health education, prevention of chronic disease strategies, Long Term Services and Support (Nursing Home Screenings) and Tuberculosis Screening and follow up. She will serve the health departments in Henry County/Martinsville, Franklin County, and Patrick County.

Shelton, of Dry Fork, is a career public health nurse practitioner, although nursing was not her original chosen occupation. Out of high school, she attended Danville Community College where she was enrolled in computer programming courses. At the time, the only local (close to her home at the time) job opportunity in the field was with a company that did not allow females in the computer room. On the advice of her sister-in-law who worked at the health department in Chatham, Shelton applied for and landed a job as clerk-typist with the Pittsylvania County Health Department. Watching the public health nurses work with patients, she thought, "I can do this" and proceeded to pursue an education that led to a life-long love of public health.

"I love seeing patients, that's my thing. My love is actually being there with the patients," she said.

Shelton holds a Diploma in Registered Nursing from Memorial Hospital School of Nursing (Danville); a Certificate in OB/GYN Nurse Practitioner from the University of Pennsylvania School Of Nursing (Philadelphia); and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Averett College. In addition, she earned a Master of Business Administration from Averett and a Master of Science in Nursing/Family Nurse Practitioner Certificate from Old Dominion University. She is licensed by the Commonwealth of Virginia-Department of Health Professions as an autonomous Women's Health and Family Nurse Practitioner, which includes prescriptive authority.

Prior to joining West Piedmont, Shelton's career had been with the Pittsylvania-Danville-Southside Health District for many years. Shelton stated it was bitter sweet to leave so many patients and co-workers. She retired from full time practice to have access to more time with her family and friends. Although she has had numerous opportunities to work in the private sector, working in public health is a labor of love for her. The part time position in West Piedmont gives her the best of both worlds.

"This is a part of my life," she said. "The population served by public health has more barriers to getting health care. We can make referrals if they need more than we can offer. We can make sure the patients get what they need."

As a Women's Health and Family Nurse Practitioner, Shelton will work primarily with Family Planning and Reproductive Health, STI's (sexually transmitted infections), Every Woman's Life (EWL) – Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening, Long Term Support & Services (nursing home screenings), and Tuberculosis Screening and follow up. As a public health practitioner, she takes a holistic approach, and considers the whole body, wellness, and prevention.

"People do not realize what public health does for communities," Shelton said, noting that services offered by the health department also include outreach, education, and epidemiology (determining the specific causes of localized outbreaks of infection and toxic disorders such as hepatitis, STIs, or as most recently seen, COVID-19). "Medicine tends to treat people who are already sick but doesn't address the spread or transmission of communicable disease by contact tracing, evaluation, management, and treatment of the contacts to decrease the spread of communicable disease".

"That's what public health is all about. Trying to prevent problems before they start," she said.

Another aspect of public health often misunderstood, she said, is that it is available to everyone, and not just for people on the lower-end of the income scale. Fees are charged on a sliding scale, according to ability to pay. Insurance is accepted.

All services are confidential including services to minors in the women's health clinic and sexually transmitted infection clinic.

"The bottom line is that public health increases access to health care in the community," she said.

To make an appointment to see Shelton or any public health nurse in the West Piedmont Health District, contact your local health department.

Henry/Martinsville Health Department: 276-638-2311

Franklin County Health Department: 540-484-0292

Patrick County Health Department: 276-693-2070