

# Chamberlain working to 'open doors'

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

New Community Health manager Dee Anna Chamberlain comes to Grand Ronde from a life in nursing.

Chamberlain, a registered nurse, started at the Community Health Program in October. She said in an interview in her desk-sized office at the back of the Health & Wellness Clinic that "for the last three weeks I've been on a dead run."

She brings a career to Grand Ronde that has included work in the operating room, the classroom and the community. Schooled at Oregon Health & Science University and the Oregon Institute of Technology, Chamberlain has developed and operated a home health care business that educated nurses about how to care for high-risk babies.

She worked for 10 years as a clinical nurse specialist in home care at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Fresno, Calif., and then worked for eight more years as the nursing coordinator/director for the Licensed Vocational Nurse program at Madera Community College. She taught fundamentals of nursing, chronic illness and gerontology in that program.

That was the job that stole her heart.

"Madera was ethnically diverse," she said. She taught 30 students with seven different first languages.

"That was so wonderful. We had big food days," she said, "and it was awesome to taste all of the foods."

Among her challenges was "nego-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Dee Anna Chamberlain is the Tribe's new Community Health manager.

tiating to make the system work," but "working with the underserved is so much more than just negotiating systems. It is listening to people and what their needs are; it is working in the system to open doors for them to change their own life.

"At the VA, that meant educating and facilitating the veteran to a healthier lifestyle, which meant they were able to stay at home and not go to a nursing home.

"In Madera, it was opening doors by developing a program that allowed the underserved to succeed at becoming a nurse. That is so empowering for a group of minority people who were told they couldn't be a nurse. When they graduated, they saw they were smart enough,

and could now earn money to care for their family, and they did it themselves. That is truly life changing."

Her plans for the Community Health Program are already taking advantage of these skills.

Chamberlain arrived at the Community Health Program, designed to help educate Tribal members on their health and instill a method for creating healthy lifestyles. The department also focuses on transportation and planning food for Powwow, Restoration, Meals on Wheels and the annual Christmas party.

Chamberlain said she plans to add educational components to the program and open up other new possibilities.

"I would like to see more coordination of the Education Department with Head Start, in-home visits with high-risk moms, education on disease prevention and disease management for all ages," she said.

On the morning of the interview, Chamberlain came out of a staff meeting with new plans to use a Tribal bus for monthly shopping trips for Elders.

Also in the works, Chamberlain is setting up a new education program at the pre-school level that will deal with prevalent health issues in the community, including diet and information about safe relationships.

Also for the parents of Head Start students, Chamberlain is working on a new baby program. When up and running, parents will receive a nursing visit when a baby first comes home. The nurse will answer questions, give the new mother information about all the things she and the baby may need, and the things she may need to know.

"Education is key," she said.

The education efforts also will include, for example, how to help

an Elder safely in and out of a car. Also when it comes to cars, the program is preparing and passing out car kits with gloves and handy wipes and other conveniences for good health and well being.

In the hopper are plans to update policies and procedures that will bring the program into the Tribe's electronic medical records, so doctors will know what services the Community Health program has been providing.

Chamberlain said she aims to expand the role of Community Health representative and certified nursing assistant positions to include an educational component. For Elders who receive the one noon meal from the Elders' meal site, that education might involve helping coordinate and plan other meals during the day, whether that involves cooking or ordering in. On shopping trips, education might touch on reading labels.

"There are all kinds of prevention work that we can be doing," she said.

Born in Vancouver, Wash., and raised in Vale, Ore., Chamberlain is a Northwestern through and through. Her father's family homesteaded Umatilla County and over the years, she said, her father always thought he was Indian. She has 30 first cousins scattered across Oregon and Washington.

Her own return from California a few years ago was like "coming home," she said.

One of her passions is travel, and at least one of her grown children has followed suit.

In August, she returned from a trip to the Czech Republic where her oldest son, Drew, is teaching English. Her son, Chris, specializes in genetics and psychology. Her daughter, Stephanie, with a degree in human development, has recently married and put career plans on hold, Chamberlain said.

Not so with Chamberlain's career. In addition to her work at the Tribe, she continues to teach two courses in gerontology one afternoon a week at Western Oregon University. For a year, she also taught nursing at Oregon Health and Science University.

On the first and fourth Saturdays of the month in Dallas, where she lives now, Chamberlain volunteers at the Polk County Free Clinic helping provide a multitude of free and low-cost services to the community.

"We're always looking for volunteers," she hints.

Here in Grand Ronde, "We're just beginning," she said. "All these programs will have to evolve."

In this effort, Chamberlain said that she wants to hear from the community about things people want and need, but, she cautions, "We don't do windows." ■

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