

Grant, Ernest James ^[1]

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6 Oct 1958 -

Ernest James Grant was born on October 6, 1958 in Swannanoa, North Carolina, a small rural town in the Blue Ridge Mountains. When Ernest was a boy, segregation ruled in education, housing and employment. The youngest of seven children, Grant was 5 years old when his father died, leaving his mother as the sole parent. The Grant family and local community provided strong emotional and spiritual support, but had little money for his education. In high school, Grant became interested in a career in health care so his high school guidance counselor urged him to start out in an LPN program. Grant heeded her advice and in the fall of 1976, began his long and accomplished career in nursing as a student at the Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College's (A-B Tech) Licensed Practical Nursing program. Grant may have been the first African American male to graduate from this program.

Grant moved to Chapel Hill in the early 1980s and began work at the JayCee Burn Center at North Carolina Memorial Hospital. He found his life's calling. Even in his first months as a burn nurse, he was struck by the need for prevention. He remembers one toddler in particular who was about the same age as his nephew. The child had been underfoot in the kitchen as his mother prepared dinner — chicken fried in a pot of hot oil. When she turned away for a moment, the child pulled the pot of hot grease down on top of himself, sustaining deep, life-threatening burns. Most burn nurses will tell you that for almost every burn injury, they can clearly see the possibility of prevention. Grant became a man with a mission.

Knowing he wanted to provide more services than his LPN credential would allow, Grant returned to school earning a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from North Carolina Central University in 1985 and a Master's of Science in Nursing degree from UNC-Greensboro in 1993. He received his doctoral degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

While providing clinical care for burn victims, Grant knew more could be done to prevent burn injuries and deaths. He became a statewide, and later national and international leader in burn prevention education and policy advocacy. An article in the *Nurseweek Magazine* (2002) listed Grant's achievements in fire safety in North Carolina up to that time:

- Grant lobbied the state legislature, citing data from a five-year study, for the revision of a law passed in 1993 that allowed the sale of fireworks to all people of all ages. The law now restricts sale to those age 16 and older, and Grant continues to work on tighter restrictions.
- Grant successfully lobbied the North Carolina Legislature to pass a bill mandating that hot water heaters be preset to 120 F and labeled with information about preventing scalds.
- He piloted and widely disseminated the LNTB program throughout North Carolina and other areas of the Southeast.
- Grant helped design and implemented the "Remember-ing When" program for seniors, a fall and fire prevention initiative that uses games and group work to teach safety to senior citizens.
- He developed a long-term National Burn Awareness Campaign that focuses on different burn prevention topics each year, such as prevention of camping and recreational burns, gasoline injuries, and scald injuries.

Grant led the effort to pass the Fire-Safe Cigarette Act in 2007, which requires that only "fire-safe" cigarettes be sold in North Carolina. Grant, at 6 feet, five inches, is best known to young school children in North Carolina when he dresses up as Sparky the Fire Dog and gives fire safety lessons in their classroom. For over twenty years, Grant has coordinated the nationally acclaimed burn prevention outreach programs at the JayCee Burn Center in Chapel Hill. Each year he personally educates several thousand citizens. Grant regularly teaches burn management to the military at Ft. Sam Houston, Texas. Following Sept. 11, 2001, he volunteered in the burn center at The Burn Center, New York Weill Cornell Medical Center-New York Presbyterian Hospital and cared for patients injured during the attacks on the World Trade Center. For 10 days straight, he worked 12-hour night shifts. For over a decade Grant has served as a consultant to the government in South Africa preparing fire safety curricula for children, adults and senior citizens and advising the Congress on burn prevention law and policies.

He has been active in a variety of professional nursing organizations at the local, state, and national level. Grant has served on almost every committee and held almost every office in the North Carolina Nurses Association including becoming the first African American male President in 2010. His leadership involvement at the national level includes his tenure on the American Nurses Association Board of Directors, 2004 – 2008 and the Board of Directors of the American Nurses Credentialing Center from 2004 -2007. He has been an active member of the American Association of Men in Nursing, serving as a role model for young men of color entering the profession. In 2011 he was inducted into the prestigious Fellowship of the American Academy in Nursing.

Grant is a sought after speaker, and has written several articles for professional journals. In addition to his nursing activities, Grant is also busy in fire safety organizations. In 2012 he served as the First Vice Chair of the National Fire Protection Association Board of Directors. He is also involved in several church ministries and sings in an award-winning gospel choir.

Grant has earned numerous awards during his career including:

2001 - Nurse of the Year Award from President George W. Bush for his work treating burn victims at the Cornell Burn Center near the World Trade Center site.

2002 - American Nurses Association (ANA) Honorary Nursing Practice Award

2002 - Nursing Spectrum's Nurse of the Year

2003 - UNC-Greensboro Alumnus of the Year Award

2011 - Inducted into the Fellowship of the American Academy of Nursing

References:

Appalachian State University. Ernest J Grant. <https://nursinghistory.appstate.edu/biographies/ernest-j-grant> ^[4] (Accessed April 20, 2017).

Pollitt, Phoebe. 2014. *The history of professional nursing in North Carolina, 1902-2002* Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press.

"Ernest J. Grant, RN, MSN, PhD (C), FAAN." American Academy of Nursing. <https://www.nursingworld.org/ana/leadership-and-governance/board-of-dire...> ^[5] [see webpage for a photograph of Ernest Grant]

Additional Resources:

North Carolina African American Heritage Commission. 2021. *Black History Month 2021 Health Pioneers: An Interview with Dr. Ernest J. Grant | NC AAHC*[online] Available at: <<https://aahc.nc.gov/resources/black-history-month-2021/black-history-mon...>> ^[6] [Accessed 14 October 2021].

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