

Pacesetters and pathfinders: an interview with Amy S. Peele, RN

I first met Amy in Miami in 2013, at the ASTS/NATCO Winter Symposium. Both of us had been in the field of transplantation for many years but, unbelievably, we had never formally met. For this interview, Amy and I met at the annual NATCO meeting in San Diego. After a few walks down memory lane, we began talking about the events leading her into our profession.

Amy was raised in Chicago as the fifth of 6 children. Her mother was a nurse and often brought Amy along to the hospital. However, Amy disliked hospitals, especially after being hospitalized for a back injury as a teenager. Amy spent summers with her Aunt Mary and maternal grandmother at Lake Wawasee, the largest natural lake in Indiana. She loved being at this lake and has written a book¹ about her summers with Aunt Mary. Amy still goes to Lake Wawasee every summer.

Into the Abyss of Transplantation

Amy had not thought about being a nurse, but after graduating from high school she was offered a scholarship to South Chicago Community Hospital School of Nursing. She accepted and graduated from nursing school in 1974. Following graduation she worked on medical and surgical units at South Chicago Hospital. A friend who worked at the University of Chicago told her about some of the exciting procedures performed at that facility. Intrigued by her friend's descriptions, Amy soon joined the nursing staff at the University of Chicago and began her introduction to transplantation and complex abdominal surgical procedures. She loved being in the academic setting, and she gained considerable respect for Dr Frank Stuart, a physician on her unit who influenced her career path.

Amy enjoyed working at the University of Chicago, but she worked 16-hour days for 10 months on a transplant unit with primary care nursing. Describing what most of us have experienced after working such long, intense hours as burnout, Amy decided to leave her position and travel to Europe for 6 weeks. She returned from Europe with a fresh perspective on life, and she applied for a position in transplantation at the University of Chicago. She said, "After that it was all over.

I fell into the abyss that is transplantation!" Her office was in the research laboratory, where she worked with diabetes-induced mice, goats, and rabbits and was involved in the process of making antilymphocyte globulin (ALG).

In 1978, transplant recipients at the University of Chicago received prednisone and azathioprine, in addition to homemade ALG. Amy injected 10 mL of ALG into a patient's thigh after he/she had been pre-medicated. Then ice was applied to the injection site. ALG administration was continued for 7 days. If signs of rejection became evident, the kidney recipient received boluses of solumedrol followed by 750 rad of radiation 3 times to the kidney.

Dr Stuart sent Amy to Hartwick College in Oneota, New York, to learn how to take patient histories and conduct physical assessments. When she returned to the University of Chicago, she recorded patients' medical history and performed physicals on all living donors and presented them to Dr Stuart. She participated in rounds twice a day with the attendings, fellows, and interns. She describes this experience as an amazing education. The coordinator role was a pivotal point in her career and she loved every minute of it. She worked both with procurement and clinical care.

Entering the National and International Scenes of Transplantation

Amy attended her first transplant coordinator meeting in 1978. At this small conference she met many of our pathfinders and pioneers: Linda Jones, Barbara Shulman, Mark Reiner, and Charles Bearden. They talked about starting an organization, which later became NATCO. In 1982, Amy and her colleague Laura Shopie were invited to speak at a Eurotransplant meeting in Leiden, Belgium. Before attending the meeting, they went to Rome, Italy, to observe Dr Tony Fomulari implant a kidney. Amy loved meeting others in the international arena who were as excited about transplantation as she was.

After more than 4 years at the University of Chicago, Amy accepted a position to lead a hospital-based procurement program at Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center in Chicago. In this role she assisted in creating a sterile bone bank with the orthopedic nurse practitioner and oncologists. In 1983, while still at Rush, Amy became President of NATCO. Around this time, Charles Fiske appeared on TV to

plead for a liver donor for his baby daughter. This was the first public realization that our nation needed a national procurement organization. Until this time there had only been a NATCO 24-hour telephone hotline to alert procurement professionals of the need for a donor.

As President of NATCO, Amy represented the organization on Capitol Hill. Interestingly, her assignment was to educate the subcommittee on investigation and oversight of the role of a procurement/transplant coordinator. Discussions centered around how to improve the system and whether national legislation was needed. President Reagan wanted to create a voluntary entity, whereas Congressmen Gore and Waxman advocated for a national program through the legislative process. Amy worked with Dr Everett Koop, the US Surgeon General at the time, who wanted to establish a group he called the American Council of Transplantation.² Finally, legislation was drafted for the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network bill, which was passed and funded within a year.

In 1984, Amy was a guest on the Phil Donahue show as a content expert on organ donation. Two men were on the show who wanted to sell their organs. Amy explained that it was illegal to sell organs. Later, Amy was invited to speak on the NBC Nightly Report. However, the program staff wanted to give her a script of what she would say. She refused to go on the show unless she could speak freely.

The Move to San Francisco

While educating legislators and attending meetings abroad, Amy maintained her position at Rush. In Washington, DC, she met Gloria Horns, a transplant coordinator from the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF), who told her about an open position at UCSF. Amy loved Chicago but moved to UCSF in 1985.

At UCSF, Amy and one other nurse had procurement and clinical responsibilities. They worked on 250 kidney transplants the first year. Amy was single and, because of the long hours she was working, it was probably a good thing. Amy met Marlene Schatz at a transplant course and later at an annual NATCO meeting. Marlene asked Amy to call her son, who also lived in San Francisco. Eventually Amy called and they began dating. In 1987 they were married. Now Amy laughs about meeting her husband through her network in transplantation.

Over the next few years Amy had several jobs, including establishing a center of excellence program for transplantation in a health maintenance organization

and as Director of the Kaiser National Transplant Network. Then, for several years, she focused on raising a family. In 2006, Drs John Roberts and Stephen Tomlanovich contacted Amy regarding a position at UCSF. Kaiser had voluntarily closed their program and more than 1700 patients had to be transferred back to the UCSF waitlist. Amy agreed to serve as a consultant during the transition of these patients. However, she had been away from transplantation for the past 8 years and had to learn all the new Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services regulations.

During the transfer of the Kaiser patients, the director of clinical operations for the UCSF transplant program resigned. Amy accepted this position, which at first covered just abdominal transplant programs but now includes the thoracic transplant programs as well. She has held this position for the last 7 years and describes it as the hardest job she has ever had because of all the regulatory issues. UCSF performs more than 600 transplants annually, including 350 kidney, 150 liver, 40 lung, and 15 heart transplants. UCSF also has programs in islet cell and pancreas transplants and mechanical circulatory assist devices.

Conclusion

It is clear that Amy is confident in her role at UCSF and proud to be part of the team. She loves her job and says she is living her dream as a leader in one of the best transplant programs in the country: "UCSF has good outcomes, great teams and faculty, and the best patient care." In addition to her role at UCSF, Amy is also Chair of the UNOS Transplant Administrators Committee and continues to make her leadership qualities part of the national scene. As she looks back at her career in transplantation, she recognizes the incredible opportunities she has had to make a difference in our profession. She continues to be a recognized leader in transplantation and believes that if you are passionate and committed to your profession, opportunities will come your way. Who would have believed that the little girl who spent summers with Aunt Mary on Lake Wawasee would educate congressional committee members in Washington, DC, and meet the US Surgeon General? That is the life of a pathfinder!

References

1. Peele AS. *Aunt Mary's Guide to Raising Children the Old-Fashioned Way*. Amy S. Peele; 2009.
2. Gunby P. Organ transplant group formed. *JAMA*. 1983;250(16):2103.

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