

'Nurse Bates' relieves doctors at GYN clinic

by CONNIE HOWARD
Staff Writer

Kathy Bates is a registered nurse-practitioner in the gynecology clinic of the Iowa State Student Health Service. She is one of a new breed of nurses trained to relieve doctors of routine cases.

Her office is on the third floor of the Health Service. Women sit lined up along each wall of the corridor waiting room.

While students troop through the corridor on their way to and from the business office at the end of the hall, a nurse calls women off to one side to fill out forms. And "Nurse Bates", a small woman with sandy hair and freckles, shuttles back and forth between her two examining rooms, seeing a steady stream of patients.

Under Dr. J.H. Gardner's supervision, Bates handles most of the gynecology work at the clinic. Standard pelvic and breast examinations which Gardner would have performed a year ago, are now done by Bates. However, Bates still leaves intra-uterine device (IUD) insertions and most disease treatment up to Gardner.

Although students always have the option of asking to see a doctor, Bates said, most readily accept her as a substitute. Some

even prefer to deal with her because she is a woman.

"She's really nice. I'm comfortable with her," one patient said about Bates. Another elaborated: "I'd rather see her than a male doctor. It's kind of humiliating to be sprawled on your backside for a pelvic or to have to ask a man questions about

of birth control. That allowed doctors to concentrate their time on examinations, Gardner continued. Since then, the demand for gynecology services has grown considerably.

This fall the Health Service was extremely short-handed so Gardner asked Bates if she would be willing to train as a nurse-

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sex. She makes it much easier and more pleasant."

Bate's relaxing manner and friendly smile make her an easy person to deal with. Her personality is even evident in the decor of her two examining rooms. Instead of medical charts, happy posters decorate the stark walls, and orange and yellow potholders cover the cold metal stirrups on the examining tables.

The nurse practitioner position which Bates fills is the result of a gradual shift of more and more responsibility from doctors to nurses, Gardner said.

When the GYN clinic opened three years ago, volunteer nurses were responsible for taking the patients' medical histories and explaining the different methods

practitioner. "We chose her because she was familiar with the operation. She worked with the clinic from the beginning. She also has a background well-grounded in family planning," he said.

Originally, most training programs for nurse practitioners were federally funded, Gardner said, but the funds have dried up in the past few years, forcing many programs to close. So, since the demand for nurse practitioners is increasing, private doctors are now training them. And Gardner trained Bates himself.

"I've been getting intensive training on a one-to-one basis with Dr. Gardner for the past four or five months," Bates said. "And I went down to the University of

Nebraska at Omaha and they gave me some material to study since their training program had folded."

Gradually Bates has been doing more and more of the actual gynecology work. She is now authorized to issue contraceptive prescriptions which have been cosigned by Gardner.

Since nurse practitioners are not licensed, there are few legal guidelines which refer to the amount of responsibility the nurse practitioner can hold. The amount of authority Bates has depends on what Gardner thinks she is capable of doing. Since she is working under him, he is accountable for her decisions. One staff member has questioned Bates' credentials, but Gardner says both students and the other staff members accept her authority and cooperate with her.

"I have a great deal of faith in her," Gardner said. "She is good at what she's doing. She's seeing a lot of patients—taking a lot of work off my shoulders."

The workload which Bates handles is indeed heavy. The GYN clinic, staffed by two doctors and several nurses, was formerly open only Tuesday mornings and Thursday evenings. But since Bates has taken over, she sees



KATHY BATES

patients from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. And despite the increased hours or service, contraceptive examinations are still booked up several weeks in advance.

"I really enjoy the job," Bates said. "It has grown and I'm growing with it. Whenever I don't know something, I can always go to Dr. Gardner for help."

When asked if she plans to pursue any further medical training, Bates said she has no desire to become a doctor, but she

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may work towards a master's degree in nursing. "My dream has always been to be a midwife," Bates, the mother of a three-year-old girl, said. "But that takes an extra two years of training beyond a nurse's degree."

Bates is eagerly waiting for the day in April when the dust and confusion of the Health Service

removing will be over so she can say goodbye to her cramped third floor quarters. Both she and the GYN clinic will then move to a basement suite consisting of three examining rooms, a reception area and a bathroom.

"It's going to be really nice," she said. "It will be more private and personal. We'll have plants, posters on the wall, and music. I can't wait."

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