

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

LONGTIME UMMC LABOR AND DELIVERY NURSE PREPARES TO RETIRE

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JACKSON, Miss. – Ivory Davis loves a lot of things. Chief among them are seeing a baby born and solving a puzzle.

Davis, who will retire Oct. 30 as clinical director of women's health services, started her 40-year career at UMMC in pediatrics, but it was labor and delivery that captured her heart and her intellect. She was on staff there for 26 years, 23 as nurse manager.

"People still come up to me to remind me I delivered their baby – who may now be 21 years old."

Birth was always a miracle to Davis. After decades of delivering hundreds of babies, Davis never saw giving birth as routine.

"I would find myself tearing up every time I wrote the delivery notes in the chart."

And patient care – any kind – is always a puzzle. New administrators and new facilities bring new challenges, new problems to solve.

"I just found it intriguing," she said of the many times she's been asked to work out how her unit could undertake a new challenge, a new procedure, fix a problem or improve performance.

"She has never said, 'No, we can't do that,'" said Dr. James Martin, professor of ob-gyn. "Her only question is, 'how can we make it happen?'" Martin sees her as a sort of "unruffled saint" in the hurly-burly of the state's busiest obstetrical practice.

"She is just an amazing person to work with. She's consistently even-tempered, thoughtful and thoroughly competent."

Davis worked through what may have been the best of times and the worst of times in ob-gyn here. The faculty in ob-gyn and newborn medicine were making remarkable progress in bringing preterm babies into the world safely, but their success was bulging the outdated facilities to their seams.

"We were delivering babies in the hallways behind portable screens, by the sinks outside delivery, anywhere a bed would fit."

She says her thoroughgoing optimism "is just my nature." But she also credits her mother and father for being role models in that respect.

"They were both loving and nurturing and taught us all to be kind to people. I also think being calm helps you stay in control of the crisis situations that come up during the course of the day."

Davis is the oldest of 10 siblings, scattered all across the country. Their mother still lives in Senatobia and presides over family gatherings that now include Davis' 13 nieces and nephews.

"My father said he always knew I was going to be a doctor or a nurse because I always asked for toy nurse or doctor kits instead of dolls and other toys." Now, she admits to being the family's informal medical advisor.

Her family is one of the reasons she's chosen to retire now. "My time with them was always so short. Now I want to spend more time with them."

Davis herself has no children, and she often volunteered to work on Christmas so those staff members with family could be home with them. That rapport with her staff is one of the many things that make Davis "golden."

Janet Harris, chief nursing officer, first knew Davis when Harris was head nurse in the intensive care unit and Davis head nurse in labor and delivery.

"As long as I have known her, she has never said anything unkind about or to anyone, especially her staff. Yet her staff is consistently high-performing with excellent patient outcomes and customer service.

"she sets the bar high and she leads by example."

Davis came to UMMC from Mississippi Valley State University with an A.D. in nursing. She earned the B.S.N. in 1993 and in 1996 became nurse manager in the antenatal diagnostic and postpartum units. In 2003 she assumed her current post as clinical director and oversees the postpartum unit, the antepartum unit, gyn oncology, ob-gyn diagnostic and WIC services.

She has come a long way from that very young nurse, who at 19 was "so intimidated" by the place she would call home for 40 years.

"I thought I would never learn what I needed to learn to work in this exciting place. But I thank God that I made that choice."

So much success in life, she says, is being in the right place and saying yes to the opportunities that come your way.

"I think I've made a difference to a lot of patients, and that's been my personal mission: to impact the lives of women and help empower them to take charge of their health."

"I have worked with so many wonderful people through the years. It's been so exciting and rewarding. Physically, mentally, spiritually and financially I am ready to retire. Emotionally, I don't think I will ever be ready.

"This place just draws me to it."

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