

THE KENNETH B. SCHWARTZ CENTER

Dedicated to strengthening the relationship between patients and caregivers

Donna Picard, BSN, RN, BC
Greater Lawrence Family Health Center
Lowell Community Health Center

In the early days of the AIDS epidemic, pediatric nurse Donna Picard treasured every moment with her young patients, knowing many would not live into adolescence. Thankfully, advances in AIDS treatment have extended life and reduced mother-newborn virus transmission. Still, Donna remains a powerful force in the lives of “her kids” as she calls them.

To her kids and their parents, she is a guardian angel, accessible to them 24 hours a day, visiting them at school or home when an office visit is not possible. She makes sure they have food in their refrigerators and heat in their houses, as well as the extras that are often out-of-reach – summer camp, after-school enrichment programs and presents at holidays. She is often the first person patients call to celebrate a child’s birth or to help problem-solve a crisis.

“She has been the most stable influence in the lives of many of the children she has cared for since birth,” said a colleague.

A pioneer in AIDS treatment, Donna participated in the drug trials that yielded the current treatment for preventing newborn HIV infection. Then she became a nurse on a mission, bringing the state-of-the-art protocol and the gospel of HIV testing for pregnant women to countless patients.

“Because of advances made in the treatment of HIV infection in pregnant women, we have almost completely eliminated maternal-infant HIV transmission in the United States,” said John Sullivan, MD, the Vice Provost for Research at University of Massachusetts Medical School and one of the country’s foremost experts in pediatric AIDS and HIV. “Our program and the outstanding efforts of Donna Picard were significant contributors to this incredible accomplishment.”

Until Donna was satisfied that local hospitals’ Labor and Delivery Departments were following the protocol, she asked to be paged every time an HIV-positive mother was in labor. She educated numerous OB-GYN practices about the importance of HIV testing for moms-to-be. She now focuses on other aspects of AIDS work, including coordinating care for HIV patients, teaching and mentoring staff and providing clinical supervision during residency rotations.