

New Mexico Nurses Who Inspire Nurses

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Nursing is a profession that inspires through its dedication, compassion, and resilience. Every nurse's career path is unique, reflecting a journey filled with diverse experiences, challenges, and triumphs. In this and upcoming editions, we will feature the stories of extraordinary nurses who have made a significant impact. We believe that sharing these stories is not just a way to honor these nurses, but also a way to inspire and connect with our community. Do you know a New Mexico nurse who has been a major inspiration in the development of your career? We want to hear about them! Contact: dwalker@nmna.org



Felina Ortiz, DNP, RN, CNM, FACNM

was born and raised in Utah and maintained strong ties to New Mexico since all

four grandparents and extended family are among several generations of northern New Mexicans. She did not initially choose nursing, although she worked in high school as a nursing assistant. It was after her first few years spent pursuing another degree that a nurse friend told her about midwifery, which immediately called to her. Felina went into nursing to become a nurse-midwife. Starting as an LPN, then on for her RN – first ADN, then BSN in Utah. From career beginnings, she worked in community health settings, in clinics serving all individuals regardless of insurance or immigration status.

Her work in New Mexico has been impactful, deeply inspired by the thriving tradition of midwifery in the state. This inspiration led her back to her northern NM roots, where one of her grandmothers had long served her communities as a curandera-partera (Traditional Hispanic Midwife). This calling led her to pursue her MSN in Nurse-Midwifery at UNM. She returned to Utah, but she missed

the richness of NM's multicultural communities and quickly returned here with her family and set down roots. "I'm connected to the land here." She also deeply affirms that "the different ethnic cultures are celebrated every day not just on a particular day." The midwifery culture in NM is unique and very different from other states she says. "It has a rich history based on community. We are a family of midwives here. More pieces of healthcare need to be working together like this." Not just a family of midwives but of RNs too. Two of her children, and her daughter-in-law are all practicing NM nurses.

Her connections to family and community guide her practice. She is energized, inspired, and motivated by her family, familial curandera-partera roots, nurse-midwifery faculty family; and being witness to her growing family of former students, now practicing midwives, who are creating positive change in the many communities they serve. Accomplishment is when students complete their program as strong advocates for themselves, their patients, and the communities they serve. As for her patients, she began her nursing journey in Utah working for a county health department providing vital home visits through

the Families and Community Working Together Program as a FACT RN. In New Mexico, her midwifery practice, as well, has been dedicated to serving rural and/or underserved communities, providing much-needed and hard-to-find maternal/infant care.

As a first-generation college graduate, Felina takes great pride in her academic accomplishments. In 2015, she received her DNP from NMSU. Becoming a faculty, although not what she saw for her career, has opened many new doors to serve others. Great joy is found in collaborating with other faculty and growing new nurse-midwives. She also understands first-hand the challenges of being raised in poverty and the positive impacts faculty can have on opening doors to new horizons, especially for students who don't naturally feel like they belong in an academic program. Believing in the adage that hard work opens doors, Felina fondly recalls the generosity of a midwifery faculty member who provided her with expensive essential books for her midwifery program, emphasizing the importance of paying it forward. This ethos guides her work as she now educates future midwives in UNM's DNP Midwifery program, nurturing and empowering more nurse voices.

Dr. Ortiz's efforts have not gone unnoticed. Her dedication and hard work were recently recognized with a \$4 million federal grant to enhance NM maternal mental health, increase the midwifery workforce, and strengthen statewide community engagement with midwifery student clinical experiences. A second \$400,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation is intended to bolster NM's birth work resources state-wide through increasing recruitment and community presence of doulas, lactation consultants,

maternal child health nurses, and many others. These grants are a testament to the significant impact of her work on the nursing profession.



Lorenzo Saenz, MSN, RN, CHSE, a former Army Medic, is now a valued member of the faculty at Western New Mexico University, where he works in the Simulation Lab. His academic journey includes a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a master's degree in nursing. A native of Grant County, Lorenzo finds solace in the vast sky and enjoys spending time with his family, fishing, hunting, and camping.

Lorenzo chose nursing later in life because of its broad scope and numerous opportunities for different types of work, seeing it as a unique way to serve others. He met his wife while serving in the Army in Kansas. Together, they have a son, who is entering his own nursing student jour-

ney this fall. Passionate about teaching, Lorenzo loves seeing the "lightbulb moment" when a student grasps a new concept in a deeper way. He is an educator at heart with the soul of a soldier.

Transparency and integrity are the values that guide Lorenzo's practice. He believes in owning errors and growing from them by figuring out what could have been done better. Integrating reflection into his nursing practice has helped him to strengthen his skills, knowledge, and resilience. Lorenzo's resilience as a nurse grew while working in the Emergency Department as a novice nurse. On his first day of orientation, one of his patients went into cardiac arrest just 10 minutes after his shift started. This challenging experience strengthened his resolve to embrace the "scary monsters" we sometimes cope with in nursing, face them, and learn from them in ways that improve the care we provide going forward.

Instilling a reflective practice is also a primary focus of his work with his stu-

dents. He has faced challenges in obtaining buy-in for simulation-related innovations, leading him to research deeper and implement evidence-informed strategies that integrate improved student kinesthetic ("muscle memory") skills. Lorenzo's data-driven methodology pilot for clinical skill labs has been demonstrating improved outcomes in student skills development, and improvements in student-perceived comfort levels.

Many of his students are first-generation college students and graduates. Lorenzo remains passionate about nursing because he sees how the trajectory of a family can change and improve when a parent becomes a nurse. He is particularly proud that Western New Mexico University has open enrollment with no ACT or SAT tests required. He works to change the intrinsic motivation of students so they can accept accountability, ultimately making them better human beings. ■

Rachael's Reflection: A Recap on ANA Hill Day and Membership Assembly in D.C.

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improving overall mental health.

The Assembly also approved a scheduled dues escalation starting in 2025. Additionally, they provided input on the Professional Policy Committee's recommendations for the draft revision of the ANA's 2015 Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements, which will be open for public comment through July 31, 2024.

ANA Enterprise CNO Debbie Hatmaker reported on the progress made on last

year's dialogue forum recommendations. Dr. Hatmaker highlighted the formation of the Racial Reckoning Think Tank, aiming to advance an anti-racist profession.

As New Mexico nurses, our commitment to advocacy is vital. The efforts made on Hill Day and during the Membership Assembly echo across the country, impacting legislation and shaping the future of nursing. Together, we are not only advancing our profession but also ensuring that every patient receives the highest standard of care.

Let this be a call to action for all of us to stay engaged, informed, and passionate about the policies that affect our practice and our patients. Our voices matter, and together, we can make a difference. ■

—**Rachael Frija, DNP, RN,**
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