


Longest-Tenured Employee Marks 65th Service Anniversary at UPMC

Sister Carolyn Schallenberger began at Mercy Hospital in 1959

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The annals of UPMC's Human Resources Department indicate that **Sister Carolyn Schallenberger, RSM**, has been with UPMC Mercy (and Mercy Hospital before it) since Aug. 30, 1959, making her UPMC's most tenured employee, with a 65th service anniversary to celebrate this week.

But Sister Carolyn will tell you the official numbers aren't *completely* accurate.

It was, in fact, 1953 when she first set foot inside Mercy Hospital as a young nurse-in-training.

"I came as a student nurse," explains Sr. Carolyn. "I thought I wanted to be a nurse, but I just wasn't satisfied — there was still something uneasy in my life. When I got here to the school of nursing and met the Sisters and saw their helpfulness, and their prayerful life in the chapel, I knew that was where I belonged."

In less than three months, she had joined the Sisters of Mercy, the order that founded Mercy Hospital in 1847 as their first hospital in the world, and the first hospital in the city of Pittsburgh. From there it was several years of schooling, with on-the-job training in the summer.

She didn't officially join the payroll until 1959 — and she hasn't left since.

Her story represents not just one individual with notable staying power and a cool motorized scooter that turns heads throughout campus daily.

When Sr. Carolyn became part of the Mercy community in the 1950s, the hospital was just over 100 years old and was run by the Sisters of Mercy. She's been witness to immense changes in the hospital, the health care industry, and the world in the decades since.

And her journey has run parallel to that of Mercy Hospital itself, which remains rooted in tradition and mission, the only Catholic hospital remaining in Pittsburgh today, and at the same time embraces change and innovation at every turn.



Sister Carolyn pictured in 2022 marking the 175th anniversary of UPMC Mercy.

Staff Nurse to Vice President and Beyond

Sr. Carolyn has had nearly every role you can have in a nursing career: As a staff nurse, she began to specialize in pediatrics, and became a pediatric nursing instructor. In 1975, she became director of the Mercy Hospital School of Nursing, a role she held until 1998.

From there, she was vice president of patient care at Mercy in an interim role — until 2005. (Already at what many would consider to be retirement age, she asked hospital leadership to scale back her role and find a permanent vice president.)

After 2005, she settled into the role she's largely had for the past two decades: Helping to orient new nurses, rounding to keep tabs on the hospital's culture, and helping coordinate employees' needs.

The job started with the idea of promoting nurse retention, but it was never *quite* just that.

"The vice president of Finance, at the time, was kind of like a COO, and I remember telling him, 'I just want you to know that you've given a big job to the maintenance men and they're out there working hard, and they love what they're doing. They're really seeing a lot of accomplishments. And if you think I'm out there just talking to nurses, you've got another guess coming!'"

"He said, 'I knew that. That's why I sent you out there.'"



Sister Carolyn, center, served as a pediatric nurse educator in the 1960s at Mercy Hospital.



In the 1970s, Sr. Carolyn, left, served as director of the Mercy Hospital School of Nursing.

A Lifetime of Change — and Some Things That Have Stayed the Same

When Sr. Carolyn first arrived at Mercy Hospital, there was no PACU — there wasn't even what was called a "recovery room" yet.

"I think the biggest thing I've seen over 70 years is the advancement of technology," she says. "I don't remember if it was 1957 or 1958 when the first recovery room opened. It was a big deal. Prior to that, people came straight from surgery to the room. You had vitals every five minutes for a time, then every 15 minutes."

Sr. Carolyn has witnessed the addition of several buildings on the UPMC Mercy campus, including the main tower, which opened in the 1970s. She was there for the advent of telemetry and the creation of Pennsylvania's first burn unit. She was starting her Mercy journey when, in 1954, the hospital became one of the first to treat cancer patients with radiation.

Some things, though, both in health care and specifically at UPMC Mercy, have stayed the same.

At UPMC Mercy, "I think the common ground is the values: The respect for the individual, integrity, and friendship."

Sr. Carolyn is one of three Sisters of Mercy who remain working at UPMC Mercy: **Sr. Placidus McDonald**, who works in the laboratory, is celebrating her 60th service anniversary this year, and **Sr. Sandy Pelusi**, who works in Spiritual Care, joined Mercy in 1976 and is celebrating 48 years of service.

Decorations and Treats On-the-Go

Today at UPMC Mercy, Sr. Carolyn is known for many things, chief among them being her mobility scooter — decorated by a different staff member each month — and her candy jar.

The scooter became a tradition after a 2017 health scare that limited her ability to walk distances; the hospital supplied the device to help her make her extensive rounds and keep her circulating as she loves to do.



Sr. Carolyn (center) is one of three Sisters of Mercy still working at UPMC Mercy, including Sr. Placidus McDonald (left) and Sr. Sandy Pelusi.

"I put a few little decorations on it for Christmas. Well, that gave people ideas, and they came before Valentine's Day and said, 'Can we decorate it for Valentine's Day?' I said, 'Go ahead,' and that's been going on for seven years."

There's a sign-up process — scooter-decorating duties are booked out months in advance — and according to Sr. Carolyn, there are only two rules: "It must be moral, and nothing [decorated] on me. I'm not going to put a crown on or anything like that."

The candy jar is a magnet for busy nurses and other employees looking for a quick sugar boost, and any given day she may have to refill it two or three times. It's also something of an indicator of employee engagement in its own way.

"There have been a few days when I was low on candy, and I said, 'Sorry, I'm coming empty-handed.' And they said, 'That's OK, as long as you come.'"

"That's how you can really tell: It's not just the candy, it's you."

Join In the Celebration

Staff at UPMC Mercy are celebrating Sr. Carolyn's service anniversary and all she's meant to the institution. Head to Viva Engage to join in and congratulate Sr. Carolyn for her service (https://engage.cloud.microsoft/main/org/upmc.edu/threads/eyJfdHlwZSI6IiRocmVhZCIsImkljoiMjk1MzUzMjk0NTkzMjl4OCJ9?trk_copy_link=V2).

Sr. Carolyn's Words of Wisdom

With more than 70 years of experience in health care, Sr. Carolyn has a wealth of knowledge about the evolution of care, at UPMC Mercy and beyond. Here are a few of the pieces of wisdom she shared for other UPMC employees.

On why she continues to go to work every day:

"I've never even thought about leaving. I think there's a spirit you can bring to people, and it's a gift. My gift is making people comfortable and happy, and when you have that, you use it. I guess that's where it is."

On what hospital work was like in the 1950s:

"Things were not as fast as they are now, and there was nothing disposable. Not even bandages — when you took a bandage off, you put it in a container and they went to the laundry, and aides would sit and sort and pack them and they would be sterilized and go back out to the units."

On the integration of Mercy Hospital with UPMC in 2008:

"Some people said, 'Sister, if you leave, we're leaving,' and I said, 'No, we're staying here. We have a mission. And the reverence for the individual is basically what it is. Everybody should be treated equally.'"



*Historical photos courtesy of the
UPMC Mercy Archives.*

After Sister Carolyn initially added small decorative elements to her mobility scooter for Christmas, UPMC Mercy staff members have made it a tradition to deck it out in festive decorations for holidays.

Collapse

The Mercy nuns were/are the foundation of the hospital. You have seen generations of students become nurses. All of these students have been influenced by your grace, knowledge, and caring. You are a role model for us all. Congratulations on your 65th anniversary at Mercy!

Linda (Dunlop) Fowler '62
Katie Fowler