

*Nebraska Nurses Association
Hall of Fame*



Karen S. Martin

When Karen began working at the Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) of Omaha in 1978, neither she nor her colleagues predicted that the results of their research would be used nationally and globally. However, the Omaha System's four guiding principles have contributed to use: client-centric care, interdisciplinary collaboration, simplicity, and computer-compatibility. The Omaha System exists in the public domain, is recognized as a standardized terminology by the American Nurses Association, and is included in reference terminologies such as SNOMED CT® and LOINC®. Increasingly, implementation spans the continuum of care from community to long-term care and acute care.

Karen received a diploma from Methodist Hospital School of Nursing, Peoria, Illinois, and a BSN from University of Iowa College of Nursing, Iowa City, Iowa. She was employed as an acute care staff nurse, pediatric office nurse, and staff nurse/director of a home care/public health agency in Illinois. Early in her career as a director, she recognized the importance of accurate and complete documentation. When a staff nurse resigned from her position, she told Karen that she had completed her work. You can imagine Karen's dismay when she discovered that many of this nurse's visit entries were incomplete or missing altogether!

Karen and her family moved to Omaha in 1973. She entered the UNMC community health nursing masters' program with a goal of accepting a community health position similar to the one she left in Illinois. Instead, she joined Nancy Scheet and the research team at the VNA of Omaha in 1978 for the next 16 years. Previously, DeLanne Simmons, CEO had formulated a vision for the Omaha System. To say that DeLanne was ahead of her time is an understatement: she knew that computers were the future of health care, and that multidisciplinary staff at the VNA and all other provider organizations needed a simple,

standardized language to enhance practice, documentation, and information management. Not only did the team conduct rigorous research, but they learned to write for publication—quickly. From 1975 until the fourth grant, a R01 funded by National Institute of Nursing Research, was completed, hundreds of nurses and others in Omaha, the state, and globally were involved. Linda Ament and the staff at Beatrice Community Hospital Home Health served as one of the seven test sites. Many participants are recognized in the 1992 and 2005 Omaha System books.

In 1993, Karen became an independent health care consultant. She teaches classes, conducts workshops, and provides consultation as she works with providers, educators, researchers, and software developers. She has made almost 450 presentations and written more than 100 articles, 6 books, and 70 editorials; she has traveled to most of the 50 states and 21 other countries. Karen became a fellow in the American Academy of Nursing in 1988, and has received numerous awards including the Ruth B. Freeman distinguished career award from the PHN section of APHA in 2010. She serves on the review panels of *Nursing Outlook*, *Public Health Nursing*, and *CIN: Computers, Nursing, Informatics*. She is the lead developer of the Omaha System Web site, and co-chair of the Omaha System International Conferences.

Karen was inducted into the Nebraska Nursing Hall of Fame in October, 2011. One letter of support included: “I doubt that few, if any nominees for the Nebraska Nurses Hall of Fame can match Karen’s broad and extensive experience as a practitioner, researcher, educator, and administrator.” Another letter stated: “I am living proof of the dangers of working with Karen Martin and the Omaha System--doing so has changed my life!” She added that the Karen’s efforts have given voice to nursing—our clients, our interventions, and our outcomes.