

Kulmindar “Mindy” Kaur Johal

Award of Distinction 2022

“What I have learned from all the wonderful people I have met in the world, is that life is a precious gift. People want health, security, love, family, friends, employment, and opportunities to achieve their dreams.”

Kulmindar Johal is known as “Mindy” to her friends of the BSN Class of 1959, some of whom are with us tonight.

Mindy began her career immediately after graduation as clinical nurse in the labour, delivery and postpartum units at the North Vancouver General Hospital. That same year, she married Darshan Johal and moved to Victoria to take a role as a public health nurse.

But it would be wrong to suggest they “settled down,” because within four years, her husband had initiated an enduring career with the United Nations and together, with two toddlers aged 1 and 2, they began a succession of foreign appointments beginning in Ghana. For years, while raising a family, supporting her husband’s work, and developing her own career, Mindy criss-crossed the globe.

Her own work in Ghana included volunteering at a local hospital, but she also took a role as “sister-tutor”; the only female member of a six-person faculty at the Ministry of Health. With limited resources available, she credits her nursing education at UBC with enabling her to adapt her teaching to new situations, resulting in students who provided quality client care within their service environment.

Mindy says, “I tried to assist those with whom I worked at home or in field assignments. In the field, I often helped people to obtain whatever resources they required to successfully accomplish their work.”

For example, while Mindy was evaluating a Family Planning Training Program that was evidently not meeting the needs of the service providers nor clients, Mindy stepped beyond her Scope of Work, working days, evenings and weekends to assist the team in developing a new curriculum.

After living in Ghana for five years and adding one more to their number, the family moved to New York City where Mindy was able to pursue her dream degree at her dream school, and by 1972 she had graduated from Columbia University with a Master of Science in Nursing and a certificate in nurse-midwifery. Mindy held academic roles at State University of New York in Brooklyn for several years before joining her husband in Nairobi, Kenya.

Over the years, her job responsibilities in the international context included

- project design, management, implementation and evaluation;
- national-level reproductive health needs assessments and evaluations, developing clinical skills training teams;
- national family planning and safe motherhood curricula;
- national practice and supervision guidelines; and
- designing and conducting family planning workshops for Ministry of Health officials/executives in the business sector.

For one year, Mindy also took a visiting Assistant Professorship in the BSN program at UVic—teaching at the same university her eldest children attended, once again successfully blending family life with her career goals. The next few years played out either in Nairobi, Washington DC, Victoria, or Vancouver, continuing her work for John Snow, Jhpiego (a John’s Hopkins affiliate), American College of Nurse-Midwives and IntraHealth International Inc. She also continued to serve as a contributing member of the International Health Committee of the American College of Nurse-Midwives from 1986 until her retirement.

After retirement, she continues to volunteer and to advocate on behalf of women and infant health, and has recently taken a course that has inspired her to put her story to the page.

