

Susan Wehry '70

Susan Wehry's earliest advocacy began in middle school in Fort Thomas, Kentucky when she campaigned successfully on behalf of persons with Down Syndrome for full participation in the community. As an undergraduate, she majored in special education at George Peabody College in Nashville. She completed medical school at the University of Louisville and her residency in psychiatry at Tuft's.

Dr. Wehry has worked with the Y-K Health Corporation which is a non-profit owned and operated by the Yupik Eskimos in the region. She worked to impact the staggering number of suicides among the Eskimo population there. When the Iron Curtain came down, she went for the purpose of learning how we might merge the best of East and West. East Germany provided universal health care to its citizens as a social good; at the same time, it lagged behind in new developments.

Susan's true passion though is with older adults, especially those with psychiatric disabilities. Her work with Alzheimer's and elder care has brought her national acclaim. Susan assisted the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid in the development of webcasts on mental health and individualized care planning and has been an active partner in their current initiative to improve dementia care in nursing homes. In 2011, the Vermont governor appointed her Commissioner of the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living . During her tenure, Vermont rose to #1 for senior health in America's health rankings.

In 2009, Susan authored the much lauded Oasis Program currently used in nursing homes. She views aging not only as inevitable, but a necessary path to wholeness. She is determined to turn the tables on stigma {associated with disability} and ageism.