

Sheila Overton, M.D.'83, Reflections of an R.N., M.D.

My journey toward becoming a physician began in nursing school. Having earned a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing (1979), before completing my medical training, has given me a keen appreciation for both roles and the importance of synergy between them. Early in my training, I embraced the principles of incorporating social justice and community service into the practice of healthcare, which strongly influenced my work in the area of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease (STD) prevention.

Teen pregnancy rates have dropped which is, of course, a good thing. But the reduction in the teen pregnancy rate isn't enough for us to declare the problem solved. Every year, seven percent of all teen girls get pregnant—a shocking and unacceptable statistic. Meanwhile STD rates among teens continue to climb.



Photo caption: Sheila Overton, M.D.'83 (center/standing) gives a presentation on teen sexual health in Harlem, New York.

Taking care of pregnant teens provides an up-close, firsthand perspective on the cascade of health, economic, and social problems that result when children become parents. Pregnancy is the leading reason that teen girls drop out of high school. They and their children are all too often relegated to a life of poverty.

Discussion of teen pregnancy and STDs often centers largely on girls, but in my outreach to teens, parents, educators and community leaders, I also emphasize the critical need for teenage boys to understand the importance of making smart choices about their sexual health.

Sheila Overton, M.D.'83, a board-certified obstetrician/gynecologist, has worked passionately to educate parents, teens, teachers and health professionals about teen sexual health. She chaired a Teen Pregnancy and STD Prevention Program at Kaiser Permanente for more than 10 years. In 2000, Dr. Overton received the Los Angeles County Commendation for Excellence in Women's Health. She is the author of [Before It's Too Late: What Parents Need to Know About Teen Pregnancy and STD Prevention](http://www.droverton.org) (www.droverton.org) and is currently in private practice in Maryland.