The new face of NURSING
Being part of this vibrant urban community defines who we are.

Through research, education and community partnerships, we address issues related to urban health, symptom science and health promotion. And while Detroit offers much to celebrate, our city’s residents disproportionately face health disparities and difficulty accessing health care. We strive to be mindful of this with each decision we make, whether it’s recruiting new faculty, making admission decisions, determining building upgrades, implementing curriculum changes or building community partnerships.

This issue of Urban Health highlights but a few examples of how we make an impact in Detroit and beyond.

When it comes to education, the college’s unique position allows us to prepare nurses uniquely qualified to provide care for urban populations and to address issues related to health disparity and health promotion. And we continue to make strides in changing the face of nursing; learn more about the impact we are making to workforce diversity on page 4.

Nurses who work with people and their families in urban environments are also exceptionally qualified to generate new nursing knowledge that informs and supports clinical practice. In one innovative model, faculty members Drs. Bell and Diver-Spruit (see page 20) create evidence-based communication readiness tools for young people dealing with cancer, made possible through their own unique professional partnership.

We continue to keep a sharp focus on the future of nursing, aided by two college-led events. The first, the inaugural Dr. Virginia Hill Rice Endowed Lectureship, was held this past October (see page 14) and allowed us to consider a futurist’s perspective on health care. The second event is the college’s annual research conference, Contemporary Issues in Urban Health: Building Healthier Communities through Nursing Science. Mark your calendar now and plan to join us April 17, 2019, for this day of networking and professional growth.

I am grateful that, together with students, staff, faculty, board members, and other community and inter-professional partnerships, we can — and do — make a difference.

Dean Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo, Ph.D., RN
Inside this issue of URBAN HEALTH

FEATURES

4  The New Face of Nursing
The College of Nursing is expanding access to nursing education and careers to students from underrepresented groups — which could lead to dramatic changes in the workforce.

10 Lessons of a Lifetime
Board of Visitors member Phyllis Brenner reflects on a career in nursing and a future of supporting students.

14 Talking Tomorrow
Rice Lectureship discusses how the decisions of today will affect nursing profession and education.

16 2018 Contemporary Issues in Urban Health: Contributions from Nursing Science
Conference offers a dialogue on urban health.

18 Her Soul’s Joy
Dr. Joanne Pohl went looking for a career — and found so much more.

20 Life and Death Conversations
Research focuses on young patients and their readiness to talk about serious illness.

26 Tomorrow’s Nurse Scientists Begin Here
College of Nursing recognized by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for third straight year.

30 Leading the Way
Jonas Scholars will take nursing research and care to the next level.

ALSO INSIDE

13 2017-18 Commencement
25 White Coat Ceremony
32 Photo Gallery — College of Nursing Students in Softball
33 Faculty Accomplishments
39 College of Nursing Updates
40 Class Notes

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Contributors

Editorial
- Mari Ellis
- Chris Williams

Design
- Joseph Bowles
- Matt Balcer
- Crystal Mott
- Devin Drake

Photography
- David Dalton
- Cliff Roberts
- Ally Rooker
- Henry Ford Health System
The NEW FACE OF NURSING

The College of Nursing is expanding access to nursing education and careers to students from underrepresented groups — which could lead to dramatic changes in the workforce.

By Chris Williams

A workforce that is as diverse as the population it serves is essential to providing high-quality nursing care. Wayne State University’s College of Nursing has long recognized the need to create a workforce that reflects the diversity of Detroit and the surrounding community. Along with its community health partners, the college is leading the way through innovative urban health education, training and community partnerships.

Barriers to effective health care can include overt discrimination, but often include other factors such as language/communication barriers, lack of transportation, lack of insurance, cultural and religious differences, biases toward sexual orientation, and differences in socioeconomic status. These barriers inhibit effective communication and prevent the development of trust and understanding between the patient and health care provider, which is crucial to successful health outcomes and patient satisfaction. A practitioner who understands a person’s unique life situation, traditions and beliefs can best offer solutions that promote healthy living and encourage adherence to prescriptions, medical tests and follow-up appointments. In addition, studies have shown that patients often communicate more openly with health care providers who are of a similar racial or ethnic background. Researchers familiar with the nuances and traditions of a specific culture may have greater insights or a curiosity into the development of effective strategies that can positively impact the health care of a diverse patient population.

Unfortunately, the “face” of the health care professional often does not reflect the diversity of the communities that they serve. According to the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, only 9 percent of all nurses are men and 75 percent of all nurses are white. This lack of diversity is concerning, especially when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services state that minorities are more at risk for stroke, asthma, diabetes and HIV. To offer effective care, the nursing workforce must reflect the diversity in the populations it serves. Change in the workforce begins in education — and not only in the classroom. To recruit and educate future clinicians, educators and researchers from diverse backgrounds, colleges of nursing must reassess everything from internal processes and student recruitment to opportunities available for clinical training and mentorship.

Located in one of the nation’s most diverse cities, Wayne State is home to faculty and students from nearly every country, race and socioeconomic class. Several renowned hospitals, health care centers and clinics are at the university’s doorstep, providing countless opportunities for experiential learning in the care of a multicultural population. The College of Nursing is uniquely positioned to educate its students from diverse cultures and backgrounds and integrate them into the workforce.

The Wayne State University College of Nursing has been the recipient of numerous grants from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, each designed to address the issue of diversity in the nursing workforce. Its most recent HRSA grant — a prestigious four-year, $1.8 million Nursing Workforce Diversity grant — is tackling that issue at the ground level by supporting incoming freshmen from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds. Expanding access to a nursing career to those from underrepresented groups who have been admitted through participation in this grant is one way the college aims to improve patient health and treatment outcomes. With support from the grant, the college is creating a sustainable model for student success as well as working to improve the health of the culturally diverse populations of Southeast Michigan and beyond.

She sits alone in her hospital bed, thoughts racing through her mind. The staff is doing the best they can despite their inability to speak her language. She’s unsure how to bring up her questions and communicate her fears. Surrounded by unfamiliar faces, she wonders who will take care of her children while she’s in the hospital. How long will she be away from her job? What if the hospital food doesn’t match her religion’s diet? Can she trust these caregivers when they don’t understand her story?
The college recently completed the first year of this grant and has planned improvements in how students are recruited, educated and supported in an academically challenging program. The lessons learned through this grant may ultimately be disseminated to other nursing programs in Michigan and throughout the country.

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF DIVERSITY

He sits at the table, head in his hands. His son is sick and his wife is at work. Help can’t arrive until 9 a.m. and his clinical rotation starts at 2 a.m. He’s only four credits from a degree, but this hands-on experience is essential to graduating. Between sick kids, a full-time job and his wife’s career, it’s nearly impossible to make it to his clinical site on time. If only there was more flexibility; he could easily make it to afternoon or evening shifts. The way the schedule is now, though, he’s afraid dropping out might be the only way to keep it together.

The student experience has changed in the last few decades, with students of various ages and cultures — many of whom are first-generation students — coming to campus. They’re often single parents who are working full time, entering an atmosphere that may not have taken their background into consideration. If colleges are unable to foster environments that value diversity and acknowledge these diverse student situations, students cannot succeed, and the workforce will suffer. Even when schools successfully recruit students from a variety of backgrounds, they must examine their processes to identify structural and procedural obstacles that may inhibit student success.

To that end, the grant has incorporated opportunities to enhance ongoing workforce diversity discussions. In year one of the grant, the Wayne State College of Nursing enlisted its community partners, the Henry Ford Health System, to present a series of cultural competency and humility workshops, which were facilitated by Dr. Denise White-Perkins, director of the Institute on Multicultural Health. During these workshops, College of Nursing faculty and staff engaged in meaningful discussions and worked to identify unconscious biases that might make them less aware of student needs.

“Everyone is still finding their own path,” said Dr. Katherine Zimnicki, the grant’s principal investigator. “There’s so much to think about and changes are happening so fast. They’re often single parents who are working full time, entering an atmosphere that may not have taken their background into consideration. If colleges are unable to foster environments that value diversity and acknowledge these diverse student situations, students cannot succeed, and the workforce will suffer. Even when schools successfully recruit students from a variety of backgrounds, they must examine their processes to identify structural and procedural obstacles that may inhibit student success.

During the workshops, facilitators asked faculty and staff to consider their own possible biases and privileges through a series of interactive activities. The discussion then grew broader, examining potential biases that might be embedded in the structure of the college: how they might affect recruitment, admission, retention and graduation; and what could be done to overcome them. This required participants to consider processes from a different perspective and look beyond their own situations.

“Sometimes, we only see things through the lens of our experiences and fail to look at the story of the student, team member or patient we’re working with,” said White-Perkins. “If we understood our perspective, we’d have a better idea of how to work with them.”

The hope is that these discussions will identify issues that can be addressed in order to alleviate stressors and barriers. One area in which these discussions are beginning to bear fruit is scheduling. For example, historically, the college’s clinical groups start early in the morning, which often poses a challenge for students who might have transportation limitations, children, full-time jobs or other obligations. The college is now exploring the possibility of expanding or staggering clinical times, which could be more supportive of the needs of a diverse population.

The grant also allowed for the creation of an advisory board with representatives from the college and its professional and clinical partners to address these and other issues and ultimately foster a more inclusive college community that will continually reassess its policies and make adjustments to alleviate obstacles for underrepresented students. This institutional change is crucial, and something that could be applied to universities nationwide, allowing them to not only recruit a diverse student body but also facilitate an environment that positions them to thrive.

ENCOURAGING STUDENT SUCCESS

They sit in the classroom on the first day, looking at the strangers around them. They’re working hard to get here — many are the first in their families to attend university. But between sick kids, a full-time job and night classes, they struggle to keep up. The stress of mastering test scores and applying to college, will they be able to handle the workload and ultimately make their way into nursing school? Are their fellow students friends or competition? As the first in their families to attend college, how can they best navigate university life? And the bigger question: How will they pay for it all?

Diversity in nursing depends on colleges recruiting and graduating a student body that represents the community. To do that, schools must foster an environment where diversity and humility are valued. The program’s two-step process puts added stress and pressure on students who have already worked hard to gain admission to university — many of whom are first-generation students without parents who can share lessons learned through their own college experiences.

In 2016, the College of Nursing began using a holistic admission process to directly admit freshmen. The college uses the existing holistic admission process to identify students who meet the criteria to be admitted to the B.S.N. Direct Admit for Freshmen pathway as well as receive workforce diversity grant support. This process uses not only metrics such as test scores, but attributes and experiences that have been identified by the College of Nursing as important to the role of the professional nurse. Specifically, the admission process looks beyond GPA — although it is still a factor — and considers community service, essays, references and other criteria. This gives students who might not traditionally test well but show potential and drive the opportunity to gain a quality nursing education at Wayne State University. The grant supports 16 freshmen students admitted in each of the four years of the grant. This approach to admission removes the stressors associated with applying separately to the College of Nursing and thereby allows them to be more involved in the university and participate in activities and experiences that will be beneficial both as a student and as a nurse,” said Zimnicki. “So far, our freshman students have progressed just fine. Admitting them as freshmen does not seem to affect their ability to progress in the program."

“This provides a more even playing field. There is a lot out there that says test scores are not necessarily the best indicator of a student’s ability to succeed at the university or college level. Many colleges and universities throughout the country are looking at a holistic admission process as a way to achieve a more diverse student body.”

In addition to tuition assistance, students enrolled through the grant program receive a monthly stipend to help with day-to-day expenses intended to reduce the number of hours worked outside of their nursing classes. Students are also expected to attend weekly study groups, have access to tutoring and meet regularly with a dedicated Academic Services Officer.

“We try to make the study groups diverse, not just the people who are from their own ethnic or social background,” said Zimnicki. “They have to study together for four hours a week. We also provide tutoring, and they have a dedicated academic advisor in the college who they’re required to meet with at least once a month.”

Providing academic success on campus, however, is just one area in which colleges need to support students. They must also leverage partnerships with local hospitals, clinics and nonprofit organizations and implement unique solutions to ensure these students have social groups and professional mentors who help them thrive.

The activities of the grant include social or nursing-related functions, such as a trip to the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Charles H. Wright Historical Museum, a demonstration in nursing’s Simulation Lab, bowling, and a picnic on Belle Isle. These activities not only give students a chance to build friendships and form bonds that will hopefully last beyond graduation. Creating these networks can also support academic success.

“Being successful at university is about more than academics. It’s about those relationships that you form with your classmates and faculty as well as the commitment to your program and to the university.”

Dr. Katherine Zimnicki, Wayne State University College of Nursing

“Being successful at university is about more than academics. It’s about those relationships that you form with your classmates and faculty as well as the commitment to your program and to the university.”

Dr. Katherine Zimnicki
“We had a student who said, “I never saw anybody who looked like me.’ She felt very isolated, even in this urban setting,” said Zimnicki. “By linking her with mentors from professional organizations and faculty, we helped her feel a part of a group. We helped her see she can succeed, and she is now a graduate of the College of Nursing serving the metropolitan Detroit area, which is what this grant is all about!”

FIRSTHAND NURSING EXPERIENCE

Even before classes begin, students are often anxiously looking toward life beyond graduation. What will it take to put their passion alive and serve the communities they love? Is there anything that can be done to immerse them into the nursing world even as they begin to acclimate to college life?

Crucial to the College of Nursing’s work in understanding how to improve workforce diversity is providing a bridge between academic success and real-world experience. This happens for students enrolled through the grant as they take their first nursing classes. To allow opportunities for firsthand experience and practical knowledge, the grant provides students the opportunity to participate in a program through which they have become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)

This training, which occurs following their first year of undergraduate studies, provides students with not only a financial boost, but also offers early exposure to the health care field and an early window to working professional nurses.

“Financially, you can make more money as a part-time CNA than at many minimum wage jobs,” said Zimnicki. “It also gets their leg in the door of a health care system, so that in addition to an avenue for employment, the student is exposed to nursing role models. They get experience with some basic entry-level patient care skills like learning how to take blood pressure and ambulate patients, and this increases their confidence in their ability to succeed in the nursing program.”

Firsthand immersion into the world of nursing begins before students’ first day of classes. Through the grant, the college also partners with the southeast chapter of the Michigan Area Health Education Center (AHEC) for a weeklong event featuring a variety of activities on campus and throughout the city. While there are study skills and mentoring sessions, there are also trips to the Detroit Historical Museum, a trip on the QLine, and a walkthrough of a community clinic and community garden. The goal of this week is to expose students to the city of Detroit as well as the resources available through Wayne State and the College of Nursing. This exposure not only prepares them for nursing careers, but it could lead to something else that helps them diversely the workforce in their own community following graduation.

“If we are stimulating and encouraging local students to get these degrees and licenses and get into these careers, then we’re going to develop a workforce that wants to stick around and serve the people and place they grew up around,” said AHEC’s Sam Young.

Part of the immersion week also includes a visit to the AHEC-run Covenant Community Care clinic, where students meet with practitioners and receive an up-close look at what a community health center does, and view the unique needs facing Detroit residents and the opportunities to serve beyond traditional hospital settings.

“The role of the nurse is becoming more critical to community health centers,” said Young. “We need their expertise and their ability to educate patients. Nurses have a specialized skill set to allow them to perform critical care functions, but also take a step back and observe specialized things with patients.”

MOVING TOWARD SUCCESS

She’s back in the hospital, but she’s not scared. She’s been treated well and has a plan for healthy living when she leaves that accommodates both her busy schedule and her religious commitments. It was easier this time. Her nurse spoke her language and was familiar with her background. In fact, he grew up right down the road from her. From the moment she first talked to him, the nurse put her at ease. He knew her story; he was easy to trust. She’s back in the hospital, but she’s not scared. She’s been treated well and has a plan for healthy living when she leaves that accommodates both her busy schedule and her religious commitments. It was easier this time. Her nurse spoke her language and was familiar with her background. In fact, he grew up right down the road from her. From the moment she first talked to him, the nurse put her at ease. He knew her story; he was easy to trust.

The Workforce Diversity program grant welcomed its second cohort in fall 2018. Long term, Zimnicki said she hopes the program results not only in individual student success but also in institutional changes throughout the college — and beyond.

“Success will be measured as each cohort progresses through the College of Nursing through cultural surveys that show we have made improvements in the cultural climate of the college, or perhaps in changes to the nursing curriculum, the physical building, or the structure of the program itself. For example, maybe we create a reflection room for students who want to pray or meditate during the day, a quiet place that is open to all. Perhaps we can make scheduling of classes more flexible or identify those key strategies that will improve the success of all students within the college. The possibilities are tremendous!”

Already, the college has made strides to take advantage of its metropolitan location and make more students throughout the Detroit area aware of the opportunities available to them at the College of Nursing. “We’re doing purposeful outreach and recruitment of students from schools within Detroit, as well as those outside of the city, instead of waiting for people to come to us,” said Zimnicki. “We have a great reputation nationally and in Michigan, so showcasing that with potential students is important.”

Lessons learned through this program could also reverberate outside of Detroit. Zimnicki said that other universities could put many of the same programs into practice, and that eventually programs should be able to accommodate diversity and provide underrepresented students with similar opportunities using existing resources throughout their institutions. Throughout the planning and initial implementation of the program, Zimnicki said, College of Nursing faculty and staff identified programs at Wayne State and with its partners that could keep this work going after the grant period ends.

“The question always becomes sustainability. You have to do something after those four years are up. For all of our students, it is important to have strategies that support them throughout the entire program,” said Zimnicki. “We cannot be dependent on grants because you never know when they’re going to cut this kind of funding. We have to do something after those four years are up. For all of our students, it is important to have strategies that support them throughout the entire program,” said Zimnicki. “We cannot be dependent on grants because you never know when they’re going to cut this kind of funding. We have to do something after those four years are up. For all of our students, it is important to have strategies that support them throughout the entire program,” said Zimnicki. “We cannot be dependent on grants because you never know when they’re going to cut this kind of funding. We have to do something after those four years are up. 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Phyllis Brenner was only a student at Wayne State University for a short time in her educational career. But the years she spent obtaining her pre-medical education at Boston University and her degree at the University of Colorado are among the most formative in her life. Brenner ascribed a lasting impression.

Now retired after a storied career as a nurse, administrator and professor, Brenner has joined Wayne State University’s Board of Visitors, contributing to the college’s Board of Visitors, making waves in urban health in Detroit and beyond.

Phyllis Brenner

Brenner an up-close look at the health care community and instilled a passion for helping others — a dedication that she felt sometimes got lost in the ultra-competitive world of pre-medical education and institutions that prohibited family visitations.

“Everybody was trying to be Number One,” she said. “I figured out a long time ago that the way to succeed is to work together, not to work against one another.”

Brenner switched her major to nursing. She flourished at BU and moved on to the University of Colorado for her master’s degree in maternal child nursing. She moved back east following graduation and began her career as a pediatric nurse, but it wasn’t long before she desired a new challenge.

“I saw a lot of things that I thought administration could do differently. It was the mid-’70s, and the hospital I was at was very traditional and hierarchical,” she said. “I saw a lot of old practices going on without explanations for why we did things the way we did. I realized that to affect any kind of change in care delivery, you needed to be part of the leadership group, not a fairly new graduate suggesting new practices or ideas.”

Brenner accepted an acting-head nurse position and her master’s-level education put her in a position to succeed. Shortly thereafter, she relocated to Southern California to work in the Kaiser Foundation Hospital System and picked up a second master’s degree in management from Claremont Graduate University. But it was soon time for another change. She wanted to better understand unions and why nurses seemed to be interested in unionizing — and the best place to do that was Detroit.

Brenner enrolled in the College of Nursing as a Ph.D. student in 1982 and describes her time at Wayne State as “phenomenal,” in part because she was afforded two years of federal funding for advanced nursing education administered through the College of Nursing and was then awarded a two-year Rumble Fellowship by the university. That, coupled with the lower living expenses in Michigan, freed her up to focus on her education full time.

“Wayne State was near the top of my list because it was ranked in the top five Ph.D. programs at the time and it had a phenomenal labor relations program,” Brenner said. “I thought that would nicely round out the fact that I had a nursing master’s degree and a master’s degree in management. This would give me a Ph.D. in nursing and exposure to how unions really worked.”

Brenner said her time at Wayne State helped guide her research and imparted lessons that were crucial to her career, both as a nursing administrator and, later, as an educator.
“I came to appreciate diverse views, perspectives, and approaches to learning and problem-solving in and outside of the classroom,” she said. “A very wise dissertation committee chair taught me the value of both allowing the student freedom in choice of topic to be explored but balanced with the pragmatic realization that one’s dissertation topic is an important initial research endeavor, but it should not be scaled as to be impossible to achieve in a mentored and reasonable time frame. I can honestly say that my many master’s thesis and D.N.P. project students are especially appreciative of the advice and role modeling I experienced as a doctoral student.”

After receiving her Ph.D., Brenner took an administrative position at Strong Memorial Hospital at the University of Rochester (New York) and went back to service. However, the academic bug had bitten. She returned to the University of Colorado, this time as faculty, teaching nursing leadership at the undergraduate and graduate levels. She ultimately returned to the Detroit area, where she taught at Madonna University in Livonia for 21 years before retiring in 2016. She said her years in the field helped her prepare students for the expectations of nursing work.

“I remember a couple of undergrads saying they weren’t getting their baccalaureate degree to push bedpans, and I would say, ‘Then you might want to find a new major real quick, because nursing is not for you,’” she said. “Patients have all kinds of needs, and you will need to assist them to accomplish them all. I felt that I could be a voice of reality to them; they needed to change their expectations.”

Despite the fact that her time at Wayne State was a relatively short experience in her academic career, it had a significant impact, and Brenner maintained a strong relationship with the College of Nursing. She is the newest member of the Board of Visitors and engages with faculty and alumni at a variety of events, and is a supporter of the work done by the college.

College of Nursing Dean Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo said the college will benefit greatly from Brenner’s expertise, support and guidance. “As an alumna of our program, Phyllis has gone on to a very successful career; she is an outstanding representative of our alums who recognizes the important effect that giving back has,” said Clabo. “Her leadership will be a very valuable contribution to the college’s Board of Visitors.”

Brenner said the college’s continued commitment to meeting the health needs of the urban community continues to inspire her, and played a role in her decision to continue her involvement by joining the Board of Visitors.

“Having more flexibility with my time, it felt that now was the right time to serve my alma mater in a more formal role than just an alumna,” she said. “Since Michigan had been my home since 1995, I was in the right place at the right time when the invitation to serve on the Board of Visitors was extended to me.”

Brenner’s commitment to helping others will continue to impact Wayne State nursing students for years to come. She has included a planned gift to the College of Nursing in her will as a way to leave a legacy to support future students. Brenner has indicated that the funds should be used to enhance wrap-around support services for students with needs generally not covered by scholarships.

“Although I don’t come from a family with wealth, education was always very important. I remember my mother saying to me when I decided to go to BU that she could not afford to give me more than what she was getting as survivor benefits from my dad, who had been a veteran. If I wanted to go to BU, that was fine, but I would have to take out loans that I would have to repay,” Brenner said. “I took out loans, I worked, and in those days, could actually repay loans without going into debt or declaring bankruptcy. However, not everybody has that ability, as the costs of education have skyrocketed and the debt burdens are so much higher nowadays. You can often get scholarships that cover tuition and books — you don’t usually get the support you might need for living expenses, unexpected emergencies or tutoring.”

Between the university’s support of her while she was a doctoral student and the College of Nursing’s commitment to changing the face of the nursing profession, Brenner said her choice to recognize the college was an easy one.

“I think of Michigan as my adoptive home. I very much appreciate Wayne State’s commitment to diversity,” she said. “Throughout the better part of my nursing career, about 93 to 97 percent of the nursing population has looked like me — white and female — but the population is not 93 to 97 percent white and female. We must do a better job preparing diverse people for the nursing workforce. When someone is scared and sick, there is something to be said for receiving care from someone who doesn’t seem like a stranger.”

That same concern for the well-being of others that propelled a young student into a nursing career in Boston continues to fuel Brenner after retirement as she supports the college’s mission to prepare the next generation of nurses as caregivers, researchers, innovators, policy advocates and leaders. And thanks to her gift, her support will extend to generations beyond that.
Talking TOMORROW

Rice Lectureship discusses how the decisions of today will affect nursing profession and education.

The inaugural College of Nursing Dr. Virginia Hill Rice Endowed Lectureship was made possible through a generous endowment from Virginia Hill Rice, Ph.D., RN, CNS, FAAN (’65), an emerita professor of nursing at Wayne State University. Rice’s vision was to establish an annual lectureship that focused on the future of nursing science and health care.

“I always knew I was going to make a gift to the college after I retired from the Nursing faculty. I considered a few options, but realized what a unique and important opportunity I had to establish the college’s first endowed, annual nursing lectureship,” said Rice. “The college does essential work generating new nursing knowledge and validating it.”

Rice’s vision became a reality on Oct. 3, when attendees gathered at the WSU Law School’s Spencer M. Partrich Auditorium to engage in dialogue on nursing’s professional and academic future. Speaker Matt Thornhill, founder and managing partner of Institute for Tomorrow, presented, “Winning Health Care Organizations of Tomorrow.”

“Dr. Rice provided the vision and leadership that helps keep our eyes firmly focused on the future of nursing and health care. I am grateful for her generosity,” said Dean Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo in her welcoming remarks. Attendees — which included Wayne State faculty, students, residents, community partners and the general public — gave Rice a standing ovation.

Clabo also introduced Thornhill, describing him as, “A nationally recognized speaker, considered to be the nation’s authority on the impact of generational dynamics on demographic, cultural and societal trends.”

In his opening comments, Thornhill noted “History doesn’t just happen; it’s because someone made choices. The future isn’t just going to happen. It’s going to happen because today we are going to make choices that affect the future,” said Thornhill. “What’s ahead for health care and nursing education? Growing demand; shrinking supply; competition for students, workers and researchers.”

Thornhill also stressed the necessity of contributions from all generations, races and genders. “Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance,” he said. Thornhill encouraged attendees to ask themselves, no matter where they are, how to make nursing a place for people of every race and income, and to be a “big tent” where everyone belongs. “This is not about everyone being the same but about everyone having the same passion and bringing different viewpoints,” he concluded.

Following the hour-long presentation, Thornhill took several questions from the audience and engaged in further discussion throughout the reception that followed.

The second annual Dr. Virginia Hill Rice Endowed Lectureship will be held in fall 2019.

Virginia Hill Rice, Ph.D., RN, CNS, FAAN is an emerita professor of nursing at Wayne State University. She holds a doctorate in social psychology and received her master’s as a clinical nurse specialist in medical-surgical nursing from the WSU College of Nursing in 1965.

Rice began her time at Wayne State when she was hired as a part-time assistant professor in the College of Nursing in 1982. She received a full-time associate professor appointment in 1986 and was tenured in 1990. Rice was promoted to full professor rank in 1997. During her time at Wayne State, she developed an extensive track record of funded research from the National Institutes of Health, the Michigan Department of Community Health, the American Heart Association and the Shoman Foundation in Jordan. She has numerous publications and national and international presentations in stress and coping, patient teaching, and tobacco control. In addition, Rice produced two editions of the Handbook of Stress, Coping, and Health: Implications for Nursing Research, Theory, and Practice.

As a faculty member, Rice served on numerous committees, including serving as vice president of the Academic Senate, chair of the WSU Centers & Institute Committee, chair of the College of Nursing Faculty Association, and faculty representative on the Board of Visitors. For her exemplary work, Rice has been recognized with a number of honors and awards, including the 2011 WSU College of Nursing Lifeline and Alumna of the Year Award, the Nightingale Award for Excellence in Nursing Research, the Midwest Nursing Research Society’s Advancement of Science Award, the Governor’s Recognition for Contribution to Tobacco-Free Michigan Action Coalition, and the Michigan Public Health Institute’s Outstanding Leadership and Service Award. In addition, Rice received a Leadership Award for Community Research from the Arab American Community Center for Economics and Social Services (ACCESS), a Greater Detroit Distinguished Volunteer Award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals on National Philanthropy Day 2012, and a Crossroads of Michigan Outstanding Community Service Award for 20 years of volunteer service. Rice retired from the university in 2015 and was granted professor emeritus status. In retirement, Rice has continued her community service with Crossroads of Michigan and the Holley Institute for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, which was co-founded by her husband, Dr. William Rice, an alumnus of WSU’s medical school.

She is the proud mother of two accomplished sons — Dr. Grantland S. Rice, the founder of Academic Partners, an academic advisory firm, and Garrett L. Rice, a senior partnership manager at Apple Inc.
The Wayne State University College of Nursing hosted its second annual Contemporary Issues in Urban Health Conference, which showcased how nursing science shapes the future, on April 11, 2018, at the Student Center ballroom on Wayne State’s main campus. Dean Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo welcomed guests, noting, “In the College of Nursing, addressing issues of importance to our urban community is in our DNA. This work is framed in our mission — and the mission of the broader university.”

Provost Keith Whitfield extended greetings from Wayne State University as well, noting his personal connection through his mother’s nursing career for the importance of the urban health conference.

The need and interest for a dialogue on a range of urban health topics — including health disparities — was confirmed when reservations reached capacity the week prior to the conference. Attendees included nurse scientists, community members, practicing nurses, and students and faculty from many universities and backgrounds such as nursing, medicine, pharmacy and social work. All were drawn together to examine how social and environmental factors interact to affect health outcomes in vulnerable, underserved populations.

“The presentations were outstanding,” said Dr. April Hazard Vallerand, College of Nursing Alumni Endowed Professor, as well as chair of the conference planning committee. “We were truly honored to have two internationally recognized nursing scientists who brought additional perspectives to bear on the discussion.”

The morning keynote, Dr. Ann Cashion, presented, “Nursing Science: Harnessing Data Science for Precision Health in Urban Research.” Cashion, acting deputy director of the National Institute of Nursing Research, noted that all science is nursing science — as long as patient outcomes are the focus of the work.

Continuing with the theme of urban health, Wayne State Nursing Professor Dr. Barbara Pieper presented, “Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Using Proteomics to Aid Wound Healing.” Attendees then chose a break-out session to learn and engage with three WSU Nursing faculty members, who shared their research findings and a local perspective on urban health and community.

During lunch, attendees perused a poster presentation showcasing Wayne State College of Nursing student, faculty and community partner research and evidence-based practice projects. All shared a common goal: to reduce disparities in health outcomes and to address the needs of urban populations.

Dr. Jacquelyn Taylor, a WSU College of Nursing alumna and the Vernice D. Ferguson Endowed Professor in Health Equity at New York University’s Rory Meyers College of Nursing, was the afternoon keynote. She continued the discussion on the importance of urban health in her presentation, “Hypertension Genomics in Black Families: A Tale of 3 Studies, and counting.”

The conference also provided a wonderful opportunity for the College of Nursing to honor its 2018 Alumna of the Year: Dr. Joanne M. Pohl (M.S.N. ’70), who was recognized for her leadership in both local and global health.

In addition, the nursing honor society Sigma Theta Tau International-Lambda Chapter presented awards to assistant professor Dalia Khalil, Ph.D., and Ashjan Babegi, Ph.D. student. Khalil received a $2,000 research grant for her proposal, “Postpartum Stress and Depression and Telomere Length among Syrian and Iraqi Refugees,” and Babegi for her proposal “Exploration of Help-Seeking Behavior Among Arab American Women Who Have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence.”

The conference received generous sponsorship from Beaumont, Health Partners, Health Providers Choice and Henry Ford Health System (gold level); Bayer and St. John Providence – Ascension (silver level); and Michigan Area Health Education Center and Sigma Theta Tau International Lambda Chapter (sponsor level).

Planning is underway for next year’s Urban Health conference, which will be held Wednesday, April 17, 2019.
Once Pohl completed her master’s degree, she continued at Wayne State as a faculty member in the college’s adult nurse practitioner program and as a nurse practitioner at the University Health Center Primary Care Nursing Service, the state’s first nurse-managed center and one of the first in the country. Caring for the medically underserved populations was important to the Wayne State community, especially to many underserved, uninsured populations. Pohl notes that in nurse-managed centers, students find what they learn in the classroom actually practiced in the clinical setting. Primary Care Nursing Service was one model of primary care in the University Health Center and there was rich collaboration among the disciplines during those years (1979-90).

In 1981, Pohl took a leave from WSU and Primary Care Nursing Service to go with her husband on a sabbatical to the Philippines, bringing then-young children along. It was during this time that Pohl began to understand primary care needs within a developing country. While there, she taught psychology and sociology courses, practiced in a rural family practice (in a room attached to the physician’s house), and — most importantly — learned to trust her clinical skills when, for example, technology was not available to conduct such basic things as X-rays and laboratory work. Between her education at Wayne State and her global service, a critical lesson Pohl learned is that, “No one discipline can do it alone. Working together, and with the community, makes it better for whomever you are serving.” She also learned that primary care and strong public health departments are the foundation of a robust health care system.

The critical years at Wayne State set her professional course. When she left to join the faculty at Michigan State University, Pohl kept the community aspect of her vocation a priority and — working with the local health department — opened a clinic serving the homeless population in Lansing with federal funds. The key, Pohl notes, was interprofessional teamwork. The clinic in Lansing ultimately became a large Federally Qualified Health Center that still exists today.

After completing her Ph.D., Pohl joined the faculty at the University of Michigan where, for the next 20 years, she served on the Washtenaw County Board of Health. She also served on many boards that develop and effect nursing and public health policies. Pohl noted, “Dean Clabo and President Wilson’s work on urban health is so important. I am so honored to receive the distinguished alumni award and recognition from WSU. But even more than being thankful for this award, I am most thankful that WSU College of Nursing was here for nurses, and committed to the community, primary care and urban health.”

“Throughout her career, Dr. Pohl has reflected a deep sense of community engagement as well as a commitment to improving the health of people locally and globally. She is everything we could want for our alumni to be.”

— College of Nursing Dean Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo
Life and death conversations

Research focuses on young patients and their readiness to talk about serious illness.

By Chris Williams

The teenage and emerging adult years are associated with beginnings — first dates, driver’s licenses, prom, graduation and career. They are a time to look to the future and dream big. They are not thought of as a time for adolescents and young adults to consider the end of their lives.

Yet, for young patients with cancer and other terminal illnesses, that’s often the reality. While their peers are getting ready for prom, they’re enduring chemotherapy. Instead of college applications, they’re having difficult conversations with doctors and loved ones. Rather than looking ahead to career, marriage and parenthood, they’re worried about making it through the next month.

Understanding adolescents’ and young adults’ acceptance of their situation and willingness to discuss it is important, both for caregivers and for family members who are often unsure of the emotional support their loved ones need.

Research conducted by the Wayne State University College of Nursing could help caregivers and families understand when adolescents and young adults with advanced or terminal cancer are ready to talk about their situation. The research is a collaboration between WSU assistant professors Cynthia Bell, Ph.D., research scientist, and Jessica Spruit, D.N.P., an acute-care nurse practitioner specializing in pediatric oncology.

“When I worked with pediatric oncology patients before going back to school, what bothered me the most were when patients were processing the fact that they were going to die and didn’t have someone to talk to and were afraid to burden their family,” Bell said. “They’re trying to protect each other from the emotional pain of death and separation.”

Moved by these discussions, Bell focused her dissertation on understanding how young patients engage in end-of-life conversations and whether those discussions help improve quality of life. Her conclusion? The conversations were not readily happening and to foster these difficult conversations, it was necessary to understand when patients were ready to discuss their illness, treatment, fears and other concerns.

“They go in and out of this open-and-closed awareness. When they are openly acknowledging their incurable disease, then they will process more emotional conversations. And when they’re in closed awareness, they want to talk more about their hopes, dreams and future and what they want to do with their life,” explained Bell.

Bell and Spruit discovered that while discussions about end-of-life concerns with adolescent and young adult patients were helpful, the discussions were often not happening between patients and those around them, including medical caregivers, family and friends.

“In my D.N.P. project, we surveyed health care providers in pediatric oncology, and over 99 percent said that pediatric palliative care helps patients and families,” said Spruit. “We believe palliative care facilitates these critical conversations, yet over 50 percent of those surveyed said palliative care was ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ involved in pediatric oncology cases. We are not consistently getting these resources to the patients, so this research is filling that gap of how we talk to them and learn what their goals are. How do we empower them to live until they die?”

Bell developed a tool to measure adolescent and young adult readiness to talk. It captures concerns such as their awareness and acceptance of their life-threatening illness and their ability to talk about their condition and the associated grief and emotion with family or professional caregivers. Using an interactive, game-styled system, the young people describe whether the statements resonate with them and are applicable to their situation.

“They share their stories and that helps us see what barriers are involved and what facilitates the conversation,” said Bell. “Our goal is to develop an intervention within clinical practice that can help engage patients and health care providers in conversations to help them move along with this iterative process of becoming more prepared.”

Speaking with young patients about such sensitive topics requires empathy and an ability to understand how much they are willing to open up. The researchers use a card system where the adolescents discuss how much various statements apply to them, if there are statements that the participants are not ready to talk about, they can place them in a “stresses me out box” and choose not to discuss them.

“We’re very mindful of the ordering of the questions,” said Bell. “We sequence the questions carefully, ask permission when it gets to the sensitive items and then proceed based on their response.”

Bell and Spruit said the participants have been open and honest, often willing to discuss their concerns and fears beyond the allotted time. Spruit said that, for many participants, this is their opportunity to make a difference.

“We empower them by saying, ‘You’re the expert in this. You can teach us,’” she said. “They want to build a legacy, they want to do something and make their mark. One of the leading motivators is that people in the future will benefit from their participation. We have so much to learn from them.”

Often, Bell said, the patients are more than willing to talk, historically, it’s often been care providers who have been hesitant to bring up end-of-life issues with young patients in a desire to focus on healing and positivity. One goal of the research is to better understand patients’ willingness to talk so that nurses and other care providers feel comfortable initiating conversations.

“As health care professionals, we are so afraid if we talk about it then we’re taking away their hope,” Bell said. “There’s this overwhelming fear that we’re going to do harm if we talk. But we’re learning that if the adolescent or young adult knows that it’s okay to talk to us, they will. It’s in the not asking that we’re left without answers.”

Spruit’s experience as a nurse practitioner has shown the need for this research firsthand. When parents, caregivers and others do not engage in these conversations with young patients, caregivers cannot always give them the best care or prepare them for difficult — literally, life and death — conversations and decisions.

“One of the most challenging situations I’ve encountered is when life support is withdrawn and we haven’t even discussed end-of-life care and wishes with the adolescent or young adult. Those stories fuel us because they continue to highlight this gap and an opportunity to enhance the care we deliver to these patients,” she said. “I’m very passionate because I see that there’s an area for improvement. Clinically, I recognize this barrier and because I know of Cindy’s work, I can help families understand what the opportunities are and help integrate that into the care we provide.”

In addition to enhancing how providers might enhance clinical care for adolescent and young adult patients, the research also demonstrates the emotional benefit these conversations might provide to patients and families by allowing them to voice their fears and hopes.

“You fight so hard for a cure — and we should — but at the same time, we should allow patients to process the emotional burden and help facilitate some of their hopes and dreams,” Bell said. “I have seen where a young person is in their hospital bed at home, dying, but their principal and others come and have a graduation service in their living room. I had one patient whose mom came to me after her son died and said, ‘It was just like he wanted it to be, all because we talked about it.’”

“It’s all about living until you die. It’s not ‘Let’s talk about death and dying because you’re dying’; it’s ‘Let’s talk about what you want out of life with the time that you have left.’”

I would like to discuss my end-of-life care in the event my cancer isn’t cured.

RESEARCH

UNDERSTANDING READINESS

Bell and Spruit discovered that while discussions about end-of-life care and wishes with adolescent and young adult patients were helpful, the discussions were often not happening between patients and those around them, including medical caregivers, family and friends.

“We empower them by saying, ‘You’re the expert in this. You can teach us.’”

— Cynthia Bell, Ph.D.
Bringing family members into the conversation is essential — and will be a larger focus of future research. One of the reasons adolescents and young adults often don’t initiate end-of-life conversations is not because of their own reticence but because of concern for their loved ones.

“One of the items we discuss is, ‘I need to be strong for me and my family.’ When we get to that, the patients generally say ‘that’s absolutely true.’ But then the conversations go into ‘I don’t want my family to be sad’ and there are a few who say, ‘I’m doing this because I have to be strong for my family because I don’t want them to see my sadness, but it’s hard on me because I’m not sharing that,’” said Bell. “It’s figuring out if the family can handle it and if the patient knows that the family can indeed handle it, then maybe we all could be on that page.”

“As a clinician on that side of tiptoeing around things and being cautious and reluctant to talk about it, this is what I love about partnering with Cindy,” said Spruit. “I believe that she will create something that gives us all the strength to approach these conversations. I think these conversations need to happen but we don’t currently have the right tools and resources. If you can arm providers with a tool and give them a guide, I think the care we deliver will be so much better.”

Research on such a sensitive topic requires not only deft clinical care and empathy but also the ability to communicate with patients in a way that leads to conversations that further knowledge and enhance care. The College of Nursing, with its commitment to interdisciplinary research and collaboration, provides an ideal setting for this study. Not only is the college located near health care centers with renowned pediatric oncology units, but the breadth of knowledge within the college also makes a unique partnership possible.

Spruit’s clinical connections will be of assistance as the research expands. The team is currently awaiting news regarding potential funding of an NIH grant that would expand their research to include patients, clinicians and parents to gain their perspectives about readiness to engage in conversations. The research team is also collecting valuable insight from patients at the Children’s Hospital of Michigan and Karmanos Cancer Center in Detroit and Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital in Grand Rapids. In the coming months, they will also expand the project to C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital in Ann Arbor. This additional site means that data is being collected from all three freestanding children’s hospitals in the state of Michigan and provides greater access to a limited population of patients from different socioeconomic statuses.

Spruit’s clinical expertise provides a pathway to patients as Bell’s Ph.D. research provides a ground-level understanding of their patients’ needs. When dealing with persons with terminal illnesses, Spruit’s D.N.P. background is essential to assuring families and patients of the investigation’s merits and building trust between researchers and caregivers.

“Jessica provides the hands and feet to get us into this very sacred area. I feel like there are so many gatekeepers because the clinician doesn’t want their patient to be harmed. They’re already going through enough, so you don’t want just anyone coming off the street and asking questions,” Bell said. “Jessica knows I’m legit and she’s respected by her fellow clinicians, so she helps open those doors. She plays an important role in accessing the population, which is half the battle in palliative care research, especially in pediatric palliative care.”

The two work in a “head and hands” collaboration, in which Bell’s research background identifies the need and develops the questions that will help create a solution. Spruit, with her clinical background, is key to implementing the findings, working closely with nurse practitioners, patients and family members to translate the solution in a real-world setting. However, Bell is quick to acknowledge that the differences are not so clear-cut. She also has a background in clinical care, and Spruit has adapted quickly to the research side.

“What’s unique with our relationship is that Jessica wants to know how to do the qualitative analysis. She goes beyond what her role is and says ‘I want to learn, so teach me this,’” Bell said. “And when she helps code, she brings this other hat, this clinical perspective, so it becomes a very rich analysis. If these data were analyzed only by Ph.D.-prepared researchers, you wouldn’t have that piece.”

Having an “in” with the clinical arena also means the solution developed through the research can be implemented much quicker, a major benefit to patients.

“What happens traditionally with research is that it takes 20 years until you’re affecting the population,” said Bell. “It’s so frustrating and there’s such an urgency that we both feel, so with this research, it’s like real-time translation, which makes me feel like, at least for the small population in our study, that some people are benefiting already.”
A MODEL TO FOLLOW

Spruit and Bell believe this partnership could serve as a model for other nursing schools.

“It’s this really powerful collaboration that we’ve formed,” said Spruit. “I’ve learned so much from Cindy; I never thought I would learn this much. I came here to teach and coordinate a program, I had no idea I would get the chance to participate in research like this and actually make a difference in the way we care for these patients.”

The clinical connection also ensures that researchers keep human faces in mind. Both researchers are committed to caring for patients with life-threatening illnesses and their families. The next study will provide a better understanding of how to initiate and sustain developmentally appropriate end-of-life and palliative care conversations across time among patients, their parents and clinicians within clinical settings. The research team will also gain valuable insight on patient, parent and family perceptions of optimal quality-of-life and end-of-life outcomes.

“We have seen the suffering and we want to make it better,” said Bell. “That passion fuels us to step out of our own traditional, standard roles that society has set for the D.N.P. and the Ph.D. This collaboration has led to exciting and unexpected clinical research opportunities.”

I’m afraid to know what will happen if my disease gets worse.

WHITE COAT CEREMONY

Incoming bachelor of science in nursing students participated in the College of Nursing’s White Coat Ceremony at the end of August. The third annual event, held at St. Andrew’s Hall on Wayne State’s main campus, served to emphasize humanistic and compassionate care as the foundations for professional nursing practice, while welcoming 157 B.S.N. students to the college.

Following remarks by Associate Dean for Academic and Clinical Affairs Ramona Benkert and Dean Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo, students were invited to the stage and cloaked with an embroidered white lab coat by members of the undergraduate faculty. The students then recited an oath dedicating themselves to the provision of person-centered, compassionate care. The ceremony was followed by a reception.
Tomorrow’s nurse scientists begin here

College of Nursing recognized by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for third straight year.

By Chris Williams

The need for nurses continues to grow — and shows little sign of stopping. The Bureau of Labor Statistics lists registered nursing among the top occupations in terms of job growth, projected to increase 16 percent in the United States by 2024. And, in 2010, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) called for increasing the number of baccalaureate-prepared nurses in the workforce to 80 percent. Currently, only 55 percent of registered nurses nationwide are prepared at the baccalaureate or graduate degree level. Vital to this growth is increasing the number of nursing researchers and scientists, who will go on to transform health care delivery.

In 2010, the Institute of Medicine recommended that the United States double the number of nurses with doctorates. While enrollment in doctorate nursing practice (D.N.P.) programs has increased exponentially, Ph.D. enrollment has seen less growth. To help make this happen, the RWJF created the Future of Nursing Scholars Program, which is committed to educating and training future clinicians and researchers.

This year, Wayne State’s College of Nursing was again awarded Future of Nursing Scholars funding and joined a prestigious cohort of only 31 schools nationwide. This award allowed the college to fund two newly admitted Ph.D. students, allowing them to pursue their degrees in an expedited three years.

“It is an honor to be selected to participate in the RWJF Future of Nursing Scholars Program for the third consecutive year — and to be awarded two scholars this year, a clear recognition of our success in the past two cohorts,” said Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo, Ph.D., RN, Wayne State University College of Nursing dean and professor. “This prestigious award will allow our selected scholars to complete Ph.D. studies in a timely manner and to make substantive contributions to the discipline as leaders and researchers even earlier in their careers. We are fully committed to helping to achieve the Institute of Medicine’s goal of increasing the number of doctorally prepared nurses in the United States. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and for the recognition of our commitment and success in the preparation of nurse researchers at the Wayne State College of Nursing.”

The 58 students across the nation participating in the program’s fifth and final cohort will receive financial support — including a $75,000 scholarship from RWJF matched by $50,000 from WSU — mentoring and leadership development over the three years of their Ph.D. programs. When the program concludes, more than 200 Ph.D.-prepared nurses will have graduated through the program.

“This prestigious award will allow our selected scholars to complete Ph.D. studies in a timely manner and to make substantive contributions to the discipline as leaders and researchers even earlier in their careers.”

— College of Nursing Dean Laurie M. Lauzon Clabo
A commitment to research

Both students said the College of Nursing’s dedication to urban health and its reputation as a leading research school made their decision to apply an easy one.

“In my master’s thesis, I focused on decreasing the barriers that women experience in accessing prenatal education due to determinants of health. My study found that support from a significant other was positively correlated to women’s intent to breastfeed. Interestingly, women had reported receiving more breastfeeding support from their family than their significant others,” said Manlongat. “There was also a significant finding in the educational intervention increasing women’s breastfeeding attitudes and knowledge; literature has shown that positive breastfeeding attitudes and knowledge increase breastfeeding rates. I hope to continue my research in women’s health and the social determinants of health through my dissertation.”

“I want to create programs for the community and for women and men who are going through infertility that can help them through a lot of the psychosocial aspects,” said Abdelnabi. “I feel like it’s another taboo thing that people don’t talk about, and there aren’t many programs I’ve seen in Michigan where a researcher or social worker is focusing on men and women in the Muslim culture. It’s really difficult if you say ‘Here are the programs that can help you,’ but they have nothing to do with your religion or culture. It won’t be a benefit.”

The RWJF Scholars program requires students to complete their Ph.D. studies in three years, keeping them on track in their research and ensuring it moves quickly. It also provides an online community for scholars to meet with throughout the year, both in person and online, opening avenues for collaboration and partnership. The end result is research that changes the face of nursing and an increased number of Ph.D.-educated nurses in the field.

“With the 2018 funds, the college named two Wayne State Ph.D. students RWJF nurse scholars: Samia Abdelnabi and Donna Manlongat enrolled in classes in fall 2018 and began the three-year journey toward their Ph.D. in nursing — and careers that could make major impacts on urban health.

For Abdelnabi, pursuing her Ph.D. at Wayne State was a no-brainer. A Detroit native, the university’s location in a diverse urban area provides an opportunity to work closely with Middle Eastern women as a midwife and help educate them about infertility.

“A lot of the women in an urban population — and a lot of Middle Eastern women — don’t really know a lot about health. I feel like we’re a little marginalized,” she said.

“There are reasons for that. One is cultural and the other is that there’s a language barrier. A lot of women who are immigrating from other countries come here and are unable to speak the language.

Growing up in Detroit and adjacent to a large Middle Eastern population gave Abdelnabi a glimpse at the need for diversity in the nursing workforce and a firsthand understanding of the need for nursing educators who can help residents better understand the issues impacting their health.

“I think women will find comfort in people who have been in that same situation or who can relate in any other way. People who don’t grow up here don’t always realize how diverse Detroit is,” she said.

Manlongat’s decision to pursue a Ph.D. arose from her clinical work. She has 11 years of experience working as a maternal newborn nurse, most recently at Windsor-Essex County Hospital in Canada, and said her time with patients opened her eyes to the need for further research to enhance the clinical practice.

“Being a staff nurse on the main maternal newborn unit of Windsor-Essex County provided me the skills to care for antenatal, laboring and postpartum women,” she said.

“As a bedside nurse, I became interested in seeking recent evidence-based literature to guide my practice and realized I wanted to become an advocate for policy changes within our health care system.”

“Our fifth cohort of scholars will join an impressive group of nurse researchers who are already making significant contributions to the field,” said Julie Fairman, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Future of Nursing Scholars program co-director and the Nightingale Professor of Nursing and the chair of the Department of Biobehavioral Health Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing. “This program is designed to empower nurse leaders to progress efficiently.”

“Both Abdelnabi and Manlongat will engage in rigorous research, interact with College of Nursing faculty, and have access to the college’s partnerships with local hospitals and clinics. The results of their research and collaboration will have an impact on health in the local community and, eventually, in cities across the nation. Both scholars hope to put what they learn at Wayne State into action in nursing, pursuing research that will impact practitioners and patients, changing education on prenatal breastfeeding education and Muslims’ knowledge of infertility, respectively. As they pursue their doctorates at the College of Nursing, both students expressed gratitude for the opportunity provided through the RWJF Nurse Scholars program and a desire to help their communities.

“This is the city for me. This is the community I like to work with,” said Abdelnabi. “I love research; I’m a little nerd. I wanted to go back and do more research on some of the women’s issues we have that there isn’t that much research on. A lot of it is related to women’s health in the Middle Eastern population and some of it’s related to infertility in the Muslim population.”

For Manlongat, the nursing faculty reinforced her decision to apply.

“I attended a Ph.D. in nursing information meeting last winter and left excited that I was being considered as a potential Ph.D. student candidate for this program. The faculty members I met that day were so welcoming and made me feel as if WSU would be a great fit,” she said. “I feel that I have been blessed in being given this opportunity to learn from such a supportive faculty team.”

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Wayne State College of Nursing 2018 Jonas Veterans Healthcare Scholar

Vivian N. Ngwa
Wayne State D.N.P. student Vivian N. Ngwa (B.S.N. ’07) discovered her passion for caring for others following her migration to the United States in 2003. Born in southern Cameroon, West Africa, she earned a bachelor’s in library and information science from Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria. However, Ngwa decided to pursue a different career path and earned a nursing degree at Wayne State.

Following graduation, she began her career as a registered nurse at St. John Providence Hospital and practiced in many departments.

She currently works with geriatric patients at the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit’s Hospice and Rehabilitation unit.

Ngwa says that being both an undergraduate and graduate student at the college taught her to be focused and goal-oriented to achieve her greatest potential. “I opted for Wayne State College of Nursing because the population is very diverse,” she said. “It’s an amazing experience to be a part of a family of many cultures and languages. The College of Nursing is committed to providing a world-class educational experience.”

Ngwa’s D.N.P. scholar project focuses on comparing urinary infection rates between hospitalized women who use indwelling urinary catheters as compared to those who use external urinary collection devices to determine which device is the most appropriate, cost effective, and has the best patient outcomes. She plans to apply the evidence-based practice for this project not only to hospice and rehabilitation patients at the VA Hospital, but also in institutions where urinary tract infections are on the rise. “Being in an urban environment, my research is impacted by the fact that there are more and more research studies addressing varying health problems that come with urbanization,” said Ngwa.

Currently president of the Cameroon Nursing Association, Ngwa also serves as an ambassador for the UPC council at the VA. In addition, she is a church minister and a nurse mentor. She is married and has four children and one grandchild.

Wayne State D.N.P. student YanYan Wang recently was chosen as a Jonas Scholar for their academic and professional excellence. The awards are funded by the Jonas Center for Nursing based on the potential of their graduate studies to affect the nursing profession.

The Jonas Nurse Leaders Scholar program is dedicated to developing outstanding nursing faculty and clinical leaders to improve health care. This investment in high-potential doctoral nursing students whose research and clinical foci specifically address the nation’s most pressing health care needs also aims to expand the pipeline of future nursing faculty, researchers and advanced practice nurses.

Through the program, Ngwa and Wang will receive scholarships, leadership development and networking support.

Barbara Jonas, co-founder of Jonas Philanthropies, passed away in October 2018. College of Nursing Dean Laurie Litas said, “We at Wayne State’s College of Nursing are so grateful for Barbara Jonas’s vision and leadership in support of advanced education for nurses in the United States. Barbara and Donald Jonas have made immeasurable contributions to nursing education, including their development of the Jonas Nurse Scholars program, having funded doctoral education for over 1,000 nurses. Mrs. Jonas was a true visionary and her loss is substantial.”

Wayne State D.N.P. student YanYan Wang is currently a Wayne State B.S.N. to D.N.P. student with a psychiatric-mental health clinical specialty.

His career choice was shaped as an adolescent in Shanghai, when a family member with severe autism required immediate psychiatric hospitalization and physical restraint. This event and the bicultural health care experiences of acute psychiatric crises in China and Detroit stimulated Wang’s passion to improve the care of mentally ill individuals and advocate for the best care possible.

Wang moved to the U.S. from Shanghai in 2006 and began a pre-nursing program at Western Michigan University. He overcame language barriers and cultural dissonance, and was on the dean’s list at both Western Michigan and Michigan State; he earned his B.S.N. in 2011 from the latter.

For graduate work, Wang said he chose Wayne State because, “The college has a distinctive focus on issues of urban health. Its commitment to student success and the quality of its D.N.P. education is recognized nationally.”

Wang has worked in geriatric, emergency room, emergency and inpatient psychiatric settings. Currently, he practices as an RN in the inpatient psychiatric/medical unit at St. John Hospital and Medical Center in Detroit and the inpatient psychiatric unit at Henry Ford Macomb Hospital in Mount Clemens. Working with vulnerable populations in an urban setting inspired him to strive to reduce aggressive patient behaviors and the use of coercive measures in the acute psychiatric care environment.

Now halfway through the D.N.P. program, Wang intends to address health disparities among the vulnerable populations in the urban settings—especially mentally ill ethnic minorities—in his final project. He credits his nursing classes for helping him develop a blend of clinical, leadership, economic, political and organizational knowledge and skills. “These skills are essential to the role of a D.N.P. who is capable of critiquing nursing practice and designing programs of care delivery to significantly impact health care outcomes and transform the health care system,” he said. “Being in the urban environment allows me to have a greater understanding of the vulnerable populations who are at risk for disparate health care access and outcomes because of economic, cultural, ethnic or health characteristics.”
Aberle, B. was an abstract reviewer for the June 2018 Association of Community Health Nursing Educators annual conference.
Dr. Wonda Gibson-Spacio was recently inducted as a fellow of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP). Gibson-Spacio is a WSU nursing assistant professor-clinical and co-program director of the Michigan Health Care Center. Her research focuses on the reduction of health disparities among youth with chronic disease.


Launzo Claudio, L. M. (P). Jones Nursing and Nursing Education Center for Nursing and Veterans Healthcare. 8/8/2017-7/2020. $20,000.


Launzo Claudio, L. M. is an Advisory Committee member for the College of Nursing and the Wayne State University Center for Growth and Development, 2014-present, and Southeast Michigan Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative (SEQICP), 2017-present.

Launzo Claudio, L. M. is Chair of the Council on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) Task Force on APRN Residencies, 2015-present.

Launzo Claudio, L. M. presented the Virginia Commonwealth University, Department of Nursing Annual Endowed Lectureship series. Competency-Based Education: Implications for Nursing in Perioperative Practice. VCU School of Nursing Lectureship Series. Richmond, VA, July 11, 2018.

Launzo Claudio, L. M. serves as a member of the APRN Competency-Based Education Workgroup and is Chair of the Task Force on APRN Clinical Training. 2017-present. 2018-present. Accreditation of Colleges of Nursing (ACCN).


Launzo Claudio, L. M. was president of the Michigan Association of Colleges of Nursing (MACON) overseeing membership that will serve as past-president, 2018-2020.


McEwen, M. A. is currently using clinical experience for SBIRT training with RN to BSN students. Doctorate of Nursing Practice Conference, New Orleans, LA, 2017.

Walker, T. serves as Treasurer of the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing Lambda Chapter, 2016-present.


Williams, B. is President of the Greater Michigan Institute for Faith Community Nurses and Health Ministers, 2016-present.


Zimnicki, K. (PhD) Nursing Workforce Diversity grant “INCLUDE” focused on recruitment, retention, and cultural competence of second-degree nursing students at Wayne State University. Health Resources & Services Administration. 2016-2017. $350,000.

Zimnicki, K. (PhD) Pipeline fellow to the Professional nurse in the Metropolitan Detroit region. Health Resources & Services Administration Nursing Workforce Diversity grant. 2017-2021. $1.7 million.

Zimnicki, K. The case for proactive teaching and slma marking. Bay meets Deming. The 2017 Bay Adaptation Association International Workshop and Conference, Boston MA. June 2017. Zimnicki was awarded received the Carol Baer Award for this presentation.

Zimnicki, K. Translating the evidence into practice in your clinical setting. WCNCC’s 49th Annual Conference Rooted in Reality, Salt Lake City, Utah, May 2017.

Zugic, M. is on the editorial board of the Journal of Infusion Nursing.
Wayne State University College of Nursing

ALUMNI

Marilyn J. Dodd, RN, Ph.D. ’81, FAAN, was appointed to the Board of Trustees for the Oncology Nursing Society’s Foundation.

Jackie Kendall, a current U.S. Air Force VNA student, was a recipient of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Michigan (BCBSFM) student award program grant for her project, “Does Nutrition Education Matter? A Study of the Effectiveness of the Cooking Matters Program on Health Outcomes and Food Security.”

Sekelita Lewis-Johnson, a current Wayne State D.N.P. student, was named an American College of the Decade in recognition of the impact of her diligent work as an advocate for breastfeeding by the Black Mothers’ Breastfeeding Association in fall 2017. She is currently employed by Henry Ford Health System, where she provides clinical management of lactation, develops lactation curriculum, performs quality improvement projects and serves on the Baby-Friendly Collaborative Committee.

Robert Duke, B.S.N. ’93, was recently named fire chief for Orion Township Fire Department. Duke previously held the rank of assistant chief for the city of Sterling Heights, Michigan. He holds a bachelor’s in nursing from Wayne State University and a master’s in public administration from Walden University. He is a graduate of the executive fire officer program at the National Fire Academy.

Sherry Farra, B.S.N. ’79, Ph.D., RN, CNE was selected by The American Colleges of Nursing to receive its prestigious 2018-19 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Excellence Award. Farra is an associate professor in the Wright State University College of Nursing and Health, the director of the National Disaster Health Course, and the college’s director of research. She was one of only two recipients recognized nationally for this year’s award.

Ada Jacox, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, former Wayne State College of Nursing professor and alumna (M.S.N. ’65) was named a 2018 American Academy of Nursing Living Legend.

Mavis Jones, B.S.N. ’91, recently obtained her oncology nursing certification from the Oncology Nursing Society.

Constance Roweley, B.S.N. ’60, M.E.D. ’78, recently retired from the Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority.

Jaquelin Taylor, B.S.N. ’99, M.S.N. ’02, Ph.D. ’04, FNP-BC, RN, FAHA, FAAN, was named the inaugural Vernice D. Ferguson Professor in Health Environment at the NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing in January 2018. Taylor’s work focuses on the interaction of omics and social factors that contribute to health disparities for common chronic conditions, with particular attention paid to underrepresented minority populations in the United States and abroad. She is also conducting a study on the genomics of lead poisoning in Flint, Michigan.

Shahrazad Timraz, Ph.D. ’18, RN, received a 2017 nursing research award from the American Nurses Foundation for her study, “Coping with childhood sexual abuse and its psychological outcomes among African American survivors: A mixed method study.”

Ashleigh VanBlarcom, D.N.P. ’16, RN, AGACNP-BC, along with WSU nursing faculty member Mary Anne McCoy, Ph.D., RN, ACNP-BC, published “New Nutrition Guidelines: Promoting Enteral Nutrition via a Nutrition Bundle” in the June 2018 issue of Critical Care Nurse (CCN), which addresses all components of nutrition, including assessment and interventions. VanBlarcom wrote the article while earning her D.N.P. at Wayne State. “Malnutrition in hospitals is often overlooked, underdiagnosed and untreated,” VanBlarcom said. “The ASPEN nutrition bundle offers bedside nurses, registered dietitians, providers and other members of the interprofessional team a comprehensive, step-by-step approach to early recognition and intervention.”

Linda S. Weglicki, B.S.N. ’88, M.S.N. ’90, Ph.D., RN, was named dean of the Medical University of South Carolina College of Nursing, effective July 1. She began her academic career at Wayne State University as a tenure-track professor in adult health.

Janet Fredal Wyman, M.S.N. ’91, D.N.P. ’13, RNCS, AACN, currently works at Henry Ford Hospital. She received the 2018 Distinguished Associate Award from the American College of Nursing in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the ACC and the field of cardiology.

IN MEMORIAM

Norma Christina, M.S.N. ’69, Ph.D. ’80, (Oct. 25, 1940-Oct. 22, 2017) earned her RN and B.S. at Ball State in 1962, where she remained in a teaching capacity for two years following graduation. She then relocated to the Detroit area. After working for a few years at William Beaumont Hospital, Christman enrolled at Wayne State University to earn an M.S.N. and then returned to nursing at Beaumont. Ten years later, she returned to Wayne State, this time to earn a Ph.D. in nursing. Over her career, Norma taught at the University of Arizona, the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Kentucky until her retirement in 2005.

Sharon A. Vairo, B.S.N. ’58, Ph.D. ’93, (Oct. 20, 1943-Oct. 26, 2017) was a beloved faculty member in both the undergraduate and graduate nursing programs at Mount Saint Mary’s for three decades. She found great joy in providing support to nursing students as a teacher, role model and mentor. Vairo joined the university in 1972 as a faculty member and enjoyed teaching until she retired in 2003 as a full professor. She was an officer and flight nurse in the U.S. Air Force in 1960 and was proud of her service during the Vietnam War, bringing wounded soldiers back to the United States on medical evacuation flights. After her active duty tour, she joined the Air Force Reserves and remained on active status for 32 years, retiring in 1992 as a colonel.

Adrienne Sue Stephen, B.S.N. ’75, (Aug. 13, 1952-Nov. 3, 2017) had a long career as an RN starting at Columbia ICU and ending at Providence Family Practice where she ran the Coumadin Clinic and was loved by the community. Her zest for life was contagious. She is survived by her husband James, children and their spouses, grandchildren, and her sister.
Save the date
APRIL 17, 2019
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN URBAN HEALTH: BUILDING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES THROUGH NURSING SCIENCE