“Thanks to One Man and His Generosity”
Celebrating the 20th anniversary of a life-changing scholarship

A Life, Coaching
Retiring Women’s Basketball head coach reflects on building a team that's become a family

Heartful Life
The artistic legacy of a friar who made our campus, and our world, a more beautiful place

Villanova Magazine
SPRING 2020

Mission Possible
Villanova nurses take the lead in health for the common good
In early January, we selected this feature as our cover story. We wanted to highlight the innovative nursing leaders and programs in Villanova’s M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing who make an impact at all levels of health care. As we prepared to publish this issue in early April, the COVID-19 virus had unleashed a pandemic across the globe that left no community unaffected. So much has changed. And yet what’s at the heart of care for Villanova nurses has not changed.

In the pages that follow, we explore just a few of the many initiatives that exemplify how Villanova’s faculty and students lead the way in nursing research, education and innovation. They devise real-time solutions to improve health care access. They apply evidence-based findings through outreach programs and educational tools. They develop targeted, skilled interventions, and they care deeply about the patients and communities they serve.

Now more than ever, health care is a field that’s in continual flux. But these very same skills, values and approaches to providing innovative and compassionate care always prove useful on the front lines, no matter what Villanova nurses are up against.
Nurses are natural innovators and collaborators. We look at things holistically and constantly reassess and reinvent. The science generated by nurses opens the door for further innovations in service to the vulnerable and in the promotion of health. At the macro level, the work of nurses informs how the system works and the care that people receive. In short, nurses are the glue that holds the health care system together,” Dean Havens says.

“At the Fitzpatrick College of Nursing, we are proud to lead in many areas. The initiatives of our faculty and staff reflect our strategic plan where we are a relentless, brave and brilliant voice for nursing and in the promotion of health. Throughout her tenure at Villanova as she supported the groundbreaking work of faculty, staff and students.”

PHOTO: JOHN SHETRON

Areas of focus: women’s health, children, prenatal care

Her own rich Puerto Rican heritage inspired Linda Maldonado, PhD, RN, assistant professor of Nursing, to pursue an eye-opening exploration of health disparities. Puerto Rican women, she learned, have the highest rates of infant mortality of all U.S. Latina subgroups and poor maternal outcomes. To understand the “why” behind this phenomenon, Dr. Maldonado went to the source, interviewing 24 Puerto Rican women at a Temple University OB/GYN clinic to learn how they prioritize health needs and if their needs are being addressed at all. The women all reside in the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia, plaguing by crime and an epicenter of the opioid crisis.

“I discovered women scrambling to care for their families, unable to prioritize their own needs while worrying if their children would be shot walking to school,” Dr. Maldonado says. “There’s a stunning lack of community support for them, as well as loneliness and social isolation.”

“I know our problems will eventually be dealt with correctly because these Villanova Nursing students are the next generation, and they’re here for us.”

Linda Maldonado, PhD, RN, assistant professor of Nursing

A single sentence from a 2009 article in the Journal of the American Medical Association made an indelible impression on Suzanne C. Smeltzer, EdD, RN, ANEF, FAAN. “It may have been a throwaway line, but it was profound for me: ‘Disability is a universal experience that will affect every single one of us without exception at some time in our lives,’” she recalls.

Dr. Smeltzer, the Richard and Marianna Kreider Endowed Professor in Nursing for Vulnerable Populations and evaluation coordinator, now dedicates her career to ensuring nurses will be able to care for the 60 million people living with disabilities in the U.S., as well as those who follow.

Toward that end, she was instrumental in the development of the Advancing Care Excellence series on disability (ACE). Created in collaboration with Villanova colleagues and the National League for Nursing, it provides vital information for nurses, nursing faculty and students, nationally and internationally, about caring for persons with disabilities. “The materials have been accessed from NLN’s website over 71,000 times in less than a year,” says Dr. Smeltzer. She also partnered with Elizabeth Blatt, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, the College’s clinical professor and coordinator of Nurse Practitioner Programs, to create an indispensable resource in the form of an informational toolkit for Villanova faculty, as well as nursing programs and faculty across the country.

How to champion individuals with disabilities through nursing care

Areas of focus: disabilities

One of the women said, ‘I know our problems will eventually be dealt with correctly because these Villanova Nursing students are the next generation, and they’re here for us.”

Linda Maldonado, PhD, RN, assistant professor of Nursing

Partners in prenatal care

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Food is a vital part of every culture, building community and solidifying identity. Nursing faculty, staff and students are helping women who frequent a local food pantry to capitalize on that natural connection, and they mentor others in making nutritious choices for themselves and their families.

The Community Cooks program, launched by the Fitpatrick College of Nursing’s MacDonald Center for Obesity Prevention and Education, engaged 10 clients at Martha’s Choice Marketplace, a food choice market at a Catholic Social Services location in Norristown, Pa. The women learned the basics of nutrition and cooking during six months of classes and workshops, with the goal of becoming peer mentors to other food market clients.

“The underlying premise of our project was that individuals who face food insecurity would be more receptive to learning from community peers who share similar cultural beliefs and experiential knowledge, and who are going through similar budgetary and healthy food access struggles,” says COPE Director Rebecca Shelnman, MPH, RDN, LDN. When developing the program, Shelnman and her colleagues found little research had been done in this area. They designed Community Cooks as an innovative nutrition education pilot program to address this gap in the research and the need in the community.

The Villanova team led discussions on such topics as protein in healthy eating, vegetables’ role in a diet, the benefits of fruit, and more. “Then the peer mentors presented demonstrations on whatever food category we discussed. We guided them, but they led the classes,” Shelnman says.

The workshops have been well-received and now are being integrated into CTS parenting classes. They have expanded a years-long partnership between CTS and Villanova Nursing students, who have collaborated with the agency on health fairs, education and parenting groups. Given increasing ratios of food insecurity in American communities, the sustainable evidence-based Community Cooks program demonstrates that nutrition education delivered by peer mentors can reach individuals with simple healthy-eating messages and skills for cooking on a budget otherwise unavailable to them. “This educational program provides relevant and empowering information to patrons — and to the peer mentors themselves — empowering them to take charge of their health and food choices in ways that are realistic, culturally relevant and mindful of food choices and budget,” says Shelnman. “The peer mentor model may be a key component to engage hard-to-reach community members.”

\[Image 677x394 to 1059x726\]

An opportunity to learn and serve at the monastery

AREA OF FOCUS: geriatrics

Final older adults are among the most vulnerable populations for poor health outcomes. They have unique needs that are critical to their ability to continue living healthy and independent lives.

“But ask sophomore Nursing students, ‘Where do you expect to end up in nursing?’ and few, if any, will say, ‘Working with older adults,’” says Melissa O’Connor, PhD, MBA, RN, FNSA, associate professor of Nursing, who started Villanova’s Gerontology Interest Group in early 2019. “We wanted to expose students to the idea of working with and for older adults.” Traditionally, in their sophomore year, Nursing students gain hands-on practice through four days of in-hospital clinical exposure. But now, through a pilot program launched by GIL, sophomores have a fifth day devoted specifically to older adults.

In the program’s first iteration, senior Augustinian friars living in the St. Thomas of Villanova Monastery

\[Image 373x367 to 599x163\]

\[Image 677x394 to 1059x726\]

Villanovans team up with pantry clients to teach and learn

AREA OF FOCUS: nutrition

“Caring for people with disabilities is not ‘specialty’ practice—it is general practice, for all health care professionals.”

Suzanne C. Smeltzer, EdD, RN, ANEF, FAAN

Dr. Smeltzer was inducted into Sigma 2019 International Honor Midwifery Hall of Fame in recognition of her research and advocacy for health care access and quality care for people with disabilities.

Such standardized competencies had not been established prior to this effort. Funded by a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, Dr. Smeltzer and Dr. Blunt worked with national experts and people with disabilities to put this toolkit together. Concise and precise, the toolkit offers curricular content that nursing faculty can integrate into existing curriculum and provides a detailed practice guide for NPs and RNs serving patients with disabilities.

In the course of her research, Dr. Smeltzer interviewed health care providers for pregnant women with disabilities. “I asked, ‘Did you have any training to care for people with disabilities anywhere in your education?’ she recalls. ‘Not a single person said yes.’ For Dr. Smeltzer, this experience further validated the need for the kind of resource they need for the kind of resource they had not been established prior to this effort. Available online, it identifies the Health Resources and Services Administration, Dr. Smeltzer and Dr. Blunt worked with national experts and people with disabilities to put this toolkit together. Concise and precise, the toolkit offers curricular content that nursing faculty can integrate into existing curriculum and provides a detailed practice guide for NPs and RNs serving patients with disabilities.

Students have reported that the experience was incredibly valuable.
This opened my eyes to older adults. ‘I think I want to go into geriatric care—that’s their life, who they are, and what they have so much wisdom to share. Nursing students might be a perfect fit. The monastery has different levels of care; we were on a skilled nursing unit where nursing and ancillary staff support health care needs for the oldest friars in their 80s and 90s,’ says Christine Pariseault ’95, RN, CEN, clinical instructor for the program. Students provided full care—including personal safety plans to cut risk of falls—to friars living in that unit. The program will be expanding to include all sophomores going into nursing,” says Dr. Pariseault. One student wrote of her experience: “This opened my eyes to older adults. They have so much wisdom to share. I enjoyed learning about each person and their life, who they are, and what they’ve done.”

Nursing students focus on improving global health

In an ever-more-connected world, global health is paramount. As people find their way around the globe, so do superbugs, infectious diseases and the imperative to stop them. The Fitzpatrick College of Nursing has grown its educational options for its students to explore the ripple effect of health issues around the globe, and to consider the diverse needs of the populations they will care for throughout their careers.

Since 1996, various Villanova Nursing courses have allowed students to apply theoretical nursing knowledge in other countries, including the Dominican Republic, Peru, Ghana and South Africa. Elective courses also educate students about health systems in selected countries—Poland, Ireland, Japan and China, among others—within the context of their culture, politics and history, and then send students to that country to see the system in action. Travel to developing countries can be challenging, especially when amenities like drinkable water are scarce. “But sacrificing modern amenities places us in solidarity with those we hope to serve,” says Ruth McDermott-Levy ’96 Min, ’98 PhD, MPH, RN, FAAN, director of the College’s Center for Global and Public Health.

In South Africa, Villanova Nursing students are working at an orphanage for children who are HIV-positive and at a school for children with disabilities. Jennifer Yost, PhD, RN, FAAN, has collaborated with the orphanage staff to develop health assessment tools that she and her students use to meet the needs of the agency. Additionally, students have begun making assessments at host sites to determine what is needed and how to meet those needs. In the Dominican Republic, for example, over-the-counter medications were needed, but international laws prohibited students from bringing them there. Instead, students of Sherry Burrell, ’15 BSN, ’16 MSN,.adjunct professor in the M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing, to head up the charge as CEO of the COVID Surge Facility at the Liacouras Arena. The former president and CEO of Temple Hospital, Gomberg is one of many Villanova nurses who have responded en masse to the call of duty. When undertaking this momentous endeavor, she said she drew on the strength and fortitude of the many Villanova nurses who did not have the chance to say yes or no to their assignments. She says, “It is to honor their struggle, their grief and their relief when staff remains well and patients get to go home.”

To learn more about Villanova nurses on the front lines, visit villanova.edu/nursesresponse.