NEW FACULTY EXPAND SCHOOL’S EXPERTISE

Six accomplished scholars join the team, bringing additional strengths to the school’s research and teaching programs as they home in on important nursing issues.
When I was recruited six years ago to become dean of the UCLA School of Nursing, I was impressed more than anything else by the quality of the school’s faculty. At the time, more than half were conducting research funded by the National Institutes of Health. The faculty’s enthusiasm for serving the surrounding community was obvious, as exemplified by the school’s nurse-run clinics such as the pioneering one at the Union Rescue Mission. And the fact that senior faculty members had become certified in advanced nursing practice – something no other faculty among the major nursing schools in the United States had done – was evidence of the enormous dedication of these scholars to teaching clinical excellence.

As this issue of UCLA School of Nursing News illustrates, the first-class faculty that originally drew me to the school continues to flourish – and expand (page 3). Six top-notch individuals have joined our full-time faculty, enhancing the school’s excellence in certain areas of nursing science, as well as expanding our body of knowledge by bringing in expertise in areas that weren’t previously represented. The proportion of our faculty with NIH research funding has continued to grow. The UCLA School of Nursing has moved up from 12th to 8th among schools of nursing that receive research grant awards from the NIH. Our efforts in the community have never been greater. And not only are many of our full-time faculty certified as advanced practice nurses, but we have superb clinicians working with our students in their capacity as lecturers (page 4).

I am proud to report that the foundation for this school’s excellence – our faculty – is stronger than ever, ensuring that we continue to educate the next generation of advanced practice nurses and push nursing science forward in a way that will contribute to a healthier society.

Marie J. Cowan, R.N., Ph.D., F.A.A.N.

NIH Touts Dean’s Research

Research headed by Dean Marie Cowan was chosen as one of 26 major recent advances touted by the National Institutes of Health in the FY 2003 Congressional Justification Overview.

In highlighting research from FY 2001, NIH chose one advance supported by its National Institute of Nursing Research – “Nursing Care Improves Survival Rate of Sudden Cardiac Arrest,” in which Cowan served as principal investigator: The study showed that a nursing intervention consisting of a physiologic relaxation training using biofeedback; a cognitive therapy aimed at self-management and coping for depression, anxiety, and anger; and health education focusing on cardiovascular risk factors could improve the two-year survival rate of survivors of sudden cardiac arrest by 86 percent.
Newest Faculty Members Add Expertise Across Spectrum of Aging, Health and Disease

Their expertise covers a broad spectrum of nursing science: leading killers such as cardiovascular disease and breast cancer, vulnerable populations including the elderly and the developmentally disabled, cultural considerations in caring for all patients and the statistical know-how to carry out scientifically rigorous studies on these and other issues.

In the past two years, six accomplished scholars have joined the UCLA School of Nursing faculty. Following are introductions.

Dr. Marie N. Fongwa's research focuses on quality of care and patient satisfaction – notions that will often differ across cultures. “Quality is an elusive concept,” says Fongwa. “Its meaning differs from one cultural group to another. I strongly believe that a person's background must be considered to provide that health care consumer with care that meets his/her needs and desires.”

Fongwa was born and raised in the west African country of Cameroon. After attending nursing and midwifery school there, she came to California, earning an M.P.H. from San Jose State University, a Ph.D. in nursing from UC San Francisco in 1998 and completing her postdoctoral training at UCSF in 2000. The importance of culturally competent health care hit home for Fongwa when, as a patient in a U.S. hospital, she was continually offered foods that were forbidden from her diet. She knows she isn't the only patient whose cultural background has been ignored – and that food is only one issue of concern.

“This country is very diverse, and it’s important that we begin to look at things in a diverse manner,” Fongwa says. “That’s why I believe in working with different cultures to explore their perspectives on quality of care. Without understanding these perspectives, it’s difficult to give patients quality care. And there is no doubt that quality care positively affects health outcomes.”

Fongwa is working on a Patient Satisfaction Instrument for Diverse Populations. Her research has explored quality viewpoints from African American and Latino American perspectives, and is currently examining the quality perspectives of Caucasian Americans. “Getting this information will help us to isolate the commonalities and the differences,” Fongwa says. “To be culturally sensitive is the first step in providing culturally competent care.”

When it comes to treating patients with advanced heart failure, acute myocardial infarctions and coronary artery syndromes, the nursing knowledge base has grown dramatically in recent years. But there is often a lag between new knowledge and changes in clinical practice. As both a member of the school’s renowned cadre of cardiovascular nurse researchers and a cardiovascular clinical nurse specialist at UCLA Medical Center, Dr. Anna Gawlinski is helping to bridge that gap.

“A lot of what has been done in the practice setting is based either on tradition or the best thoughts of the time,” says Gawlinski. “But with new evidence, we’re learning more about practices that might need to change based on the data. And once we know that, it’s important to create system changes that include education, protocol/guideline development, and competency testing so that every practitioner is aware of, and can practice, the new recommendations.”

Gawlinski helps to achieve this through her work as co-chair of UCLA Medical Center’s Acute MI Quality Improvement Team. A comparison of national benchmarking data has found that UCLA’s program has one of the highest utilization levels of secondary prevention strategies for acute myocardial infarction patients, leading to among the lowest mortality and morbidity rates in this high-risk population.
In addition to facilitating research-based practice in the care of the cardiovascular patient, Gawlinski herself contributes to the expanding body of knowledge through research on hemodynamic and oxygenation derangements in advanced heart failure patients. Among other things, she has assisted nurses in more accurately monitoring and intervening to maximize oxygenation and hemodynamic indices in this vulnerable patient population. Her overall contributions were recognized in 1996 when she received the prestigious Excellence in Clinical Practice Award, given to one nurse each year by the American Heart Association Council on Cardiovascular Nursing.

Gawlinski, who received her doctorate from the UCLA School of Nursing in 1993, has been an advanced practice nurse at UCLA since 1979. In 1999, she accepted an adjunct faculty position that divides her time evenly between the hospital and the school. “Because the patients are so complex and things move so quickly, sometimes it’s challenging in the practice arena to find the time to review the literature and determine what is the best practice, or to create a system change to incorporate research into practice,” she says. “My current position gives me better opportunities to put the research into practice.”

Traditional nursing education has offered little instruction on the needs of persons living with life-long developmental disabilities – individuals with conditions such as cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, and genetic disorders such as Down’s syndrome. DR. JOAN EARLE HAHN, a national authority on the health and aging issues of these individuals, has brought her expertise to the school. In addition to teaching and conducting research, she is also involved in national curriculum-development projects to impart health-promotion strategies to nurses working with developmentally disabled persons.

“I really enjoy working with this population,” Hahn says. “The people are great, and they appreciate someone who is paying attention to them and listening to their concerns. When we have the opportunity to educate staff about the health issues affecting people with developmental disabilities, they can become better advocates for these individuals. It’s nice to be able to make a difference in that way.”

Hahn, who received her doctorate from Rush University in Chicago, was a faculty member at the University of Cincinnati College of Nursing from 1996 to 1999, during which she also served as director of nursing for the Cincinnati Center for Developmental Disorders. Her affiliation with the UCLA School of Nursing began in 1999, when Hahn served on a study, headed by Dr. Mary Ann Lewis, to develop nursing care guidelines for older persons with developmental disabilities. With Lewis, Hahn went on to pilot a

LECTURERS’ CLINICAL EXCELLENCE BENEFITS STUDENTS

Faculty at the UCLA School of Nursing are known as leaders in nursing science and theory. But teaching and conducting research full-time can make it difficult to stay current with the nitty-gritty elements of the fast-changing world of patient care. Enter the school’s lecturers – nearly two dozen full-time practitioners who bring a wealth of clinical experience to the curriculum, helping to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

“To be a master clinician, you have to be involved with patients day in and day out,” says Dr. Mary Ann Lewis, chair of the school’s Primary Care Section. “Our lecturers ensure that the clinical content of our students’ education incorporates the latest advances in patient care and that the learning experiences are relevant. They are expert clinicians who help our students gain the beginning skills of advanced practice nurses.”

“Our lecturers are wonderful,” adds Dr. Gwen van Servellen, chair of the school’s Acute Care Section. “They add a level of expertise and detail that is very important for in-depth student learning and for ensuring that our curriculum and clinical courses are solidly based in current standards of practice.”

Indeed, van Servellen notes, the efforts and support of the lecturers have enabled the school to negotiate unique clinical teaching sites and establish liaisons with other outstanding health care providers, who serve as role models for the school’s students. Additionally, van Servellen says, the lecturers serve as an excellent resource for identifying, evaluating and disseminating research findings that affect care provided to patients and their families.

Says Lewis: “As full-time faculty, we learn from the lecturers about what’s most current in clinical practice. At the same time, the lecturers learn from the full-time faculty, and are able to put research results into practice. The benefits are mutual.”
continuing education curriculum for California nurses working with people with developmental disabilities, offered by the Developmental Disabilities Nurses Association.

As a faculty member, Hahn is continuing her work with Lewis, faculty member Dale Perry and the Frank D. Lanterman Regional Center on advanced practice nursing care and the prevention of unnecessary hospitalization for individuals with developmental disabilities living in community care facilities. Hahn is also the principal investigator of “Aging in Place,” a study of older persons with developmental disabilities, also at the Lanterman center.

As the only statistician on the school’s faculty, DR. DAVID ELASHOFF collaborates with faculty members who conduct quantitative research, whether it’s assisting with methodology development on grant proposals or helping to analyze the data from their research. “One of the things that attracted me to this position was the chance to consult with many faculty members on a wide variety of projects,” he says. Elashoff also assists doctoral students and teaches at the school, mostly in the form of guest lectures in various courses.

The faculty position — divided evenly between the School of Nursing and the School of Public Health — is Elashoff’s first. He earned his B.S. in mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was awarded a Ph.D. in statistics from Stanford in 2000.

Although Elashoff teams with faculty on a broad range of subjects, his primary research interest is in genetics, particularly the analysis of data from so-called DNA microarrays — technology that enables researchers to detect quickly the expression levels of thousands of genes within a particular tissue sample. “The science is very interesting and the potential applications are wide,” he says. “And the problem we’re trying to solve is hard — understanding what we should be doing with this avalanche of data. It’s a challenge that I enjoy.”

DR. JANET MENTES is examining risk factors for dehydration among residents of nursing homes. One of the most common physiological triggers of an acute mental status change (such as delirium) in this population is also one that is often overlooked. “Dehydration can probably be tagged as a precursor to a number of hospitalizations among nursing-home residents,” Mentes says. She notes that in addition to acute mental status changes, dehydration can lead to urinary tract and other types of infections, particularly given the fragile physical condition of many long-term care residents.

“These individuals need staff who are dedicated to making sure they drink adequately,” Mentes says. “A lot of them can’t help themselves to fluid like you and I could.” Many of these residents have cognitive impairments that cause them to forget to drink. While the majority will accept fluids when offered, some have physical conditions that make swallowing difficult, while others are what Mentes calls “sippers” whose lack of fluid intake places them in a chronic state of under-hydration that makes their health
Mentes is currently testing several oral hydration interventions for elderly nursing-home residents to determine whether consistent application of a hydration management plan produces improved health outcomes for this population.

Mentes’ interest in these issues was first piqued in the mid-1980s, when she was part of a consultative team of advanced practice nurses for the Robert Wood Johnson Teaching-Nursing Home Program in Binghamton, N.Y. “When nursing staff consulted us, it was often because a patient had suddenly become uncooperative or agitated,” she says. Mentes worked to improve staff’s detection of the factors precipitating acute confusion/delirium, and went on to develop a protocol to help nursing-home nurses recognize and intervene in delirium. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Iowa College of Nursing in 2000 and joined the UCLA School of Nursing faculty that September. Last year, she received a John A. Hartford Foundation Building Academic Geriatric Nursing Capacity Post Doctoral Scholarship in Geriatric Nursing.

Breast cancer will be diagnosed in more than 200,000 American women in 2002. For reasons that aren’t clear, a woman’s breast cancer risk increases if she doesn’t breastfeed her infant; it also rises if she postpones first pregnancy, and is higher still if she forgoes childbearing completely. As a pediatric nurse practitioner and women’s health specialist, DR. CHANDICE COVINGTON heard the concerns of many of her patients whom she had counseled for breastfeeding problems and, later, for concerns about their breast health. Covington, who came to the school last July from the nursing faculty at Wayne State University, resolved to address these concerns through her research.

“In countries where breastfeeding has fallen out of favor, we see breast cancer rates going up,” she says. “If we could understand, at a micro level, why earlier pregnancy and breastfeeding have this protective effect, perhaps nurse scientists can design new approaches that reduce women’s risk regardless of their breastfeeding or pregnancy status.”

Covington has hypothesized that the protective effect is related to an overturn of fluids in the breast ducts. “A lot of people don’t realize that 90 percent of breast cancer occurs in the ductal network,” she says. Building on research results that support her hypothesis, Covington developed a prototype device that she hopes will help detect breast cancer, and perhaps even markers for heightened breast cancer risk, by using released microdroplets of nipple aspirate fluid to evaluate, similar to the Pap smear test for cervical cancer. Covington is also exploring whether a nipple aspirator, if used regularly, could confer the preventive benefits of lactation without breastfeeding, by clearing out the ductal network and allowing it to be replenished with fresh fluids.

In other research, Covington is studying the impact of certain genetic polymorphisms on children’s susceptibility to neurodevelopmental problems from environmental toxins such as lead. A polymorphism associated with one particular enzyme, for example, appears to leave children more vulnerable to nervous system damage from lead exposure. This polymorphism is approximately four times more likely to be expressed in African Americans than in whites. “A greater percent of minorities live in urbanized areas with greater environmental lead,” Covington explains. “It could be that the very people who shouldn’t be living in the homes with lead paint and playing in the yards with lead toxicity are doing so.”

Covington is excited to be at UCLA, where she recently offered a seminar titled “What Do We Tell the Children?: Parenting Issues” in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attack. “There is a tremendous bioscience program here, both in the School of Nursing and across campus,” she says. “I can stand in the hallways and have scientific discussions with my peers that are sophisticated and creative. It is an exciting time and place for bioscience.”

While their research interests vary, the school’s six new faculty members share a devotion to nursing and a delight at being at one of the nation’s top nursing schools, located within a leading health-sciences center on the campus of an elite university. Says Fongwa: “My goodness, if you get an appointment to UCLA and you don’t come, what is it that you want?”
Two faculty members and a staff researcher from the UCLA School of Nursing have taken their pursuit of the answer to a key occupational and environmental health question to China. With a five-year grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) entitled “Male Reproductive Effects from Occupational Exposure to Boron,” Drs. Wendie Robbins (principal investigator) and Betty Chang (co-investigator) from the school’s faculty, as well as Dr. Lin Xun (project coordinator), a staff researcher at the school, are conducting an epidemiologic study in an effort to settle a question that is of concern in parts of the world where boron is mined and processed.

“Some studies have suggested that, at low levels, it may be essential for health,” Robbins explains. But animal studies have found that high levels of boron can cause testicular atrophy. Studies to determine whether boron is a reproductive toxicant in humans have been inconclusive. One reason, Robbins suggests, may be the limited range of human exposures that have been evaluated.

Robbins’ team is collaborating with researchers in China on a study of workers who mine boron in Liaoning Province, where exposure levels are reported to be significantly higher than in the only boron mining plant in the United States, U.S. Borax in California.

“If we can determine what the lowest observable toxic effect level is, NIOSH can use that information to protect workers all over the world,” says Robbins.

Robbins, Chang and Xun were welcomed on their initial six-day trip earlier this year with extraordinary hospitality that included gourmet meals prepared by the miners and their families. The first visit was designed to meet the collaborators and lay the groundwork for the data collection, which will begin in the spring.

“Workers mine for boron at Kuan-dian Boron Mine in Dandong City, located in northeast China’s Liaoning Province. Following a six-day period of heating in large land ovens, the ore is softer and easier to crumble for processing,” says Robbins.

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Student Carries Torch for Nursing

Linda Houser, a first-year master's-degree student at the UCLA School of Nursing, carried the Olympic torch January 16, as the symbolic flame made its way to Salt Lake City for the Winter Games.

Houser, who carried the torch down Main Street in Santa Maria, Calif., was one of 11,500 torchbearers selected for the honor from more than 200,000 nominations. Among the spectators was her sister Karen, a graphic designer who wrote to Chevrolet, one of the sponsors of the torch relay, to nominate Linda on the basis of her dedication to nursing, and her determination to return to the profession and continue her education after suffering a back injury that required a year of recovery.

Linda Houser calls her selection an "honor for the nursing profession."

Linda Houser is a nurse at UCLA Medical Center as well as a student in the school's Acute Care Nurse Practitioner program. She has worked in pediatrics, neonatal care and with adults; once she earns her degree, she plans to focus on providing care for adults with congenital heart disease.

"I can't believe I was chosen for this honor," she said. "More than being an honor for me, though, I see it as an honor for the nursing profession."

We’re Lost Without Our Alumni!

We need to update our files to make sure all our alumni are receiving this newsletter. Please let us know if you have a new address. Also, please jot down any professional or personal updates for use in future issues.

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