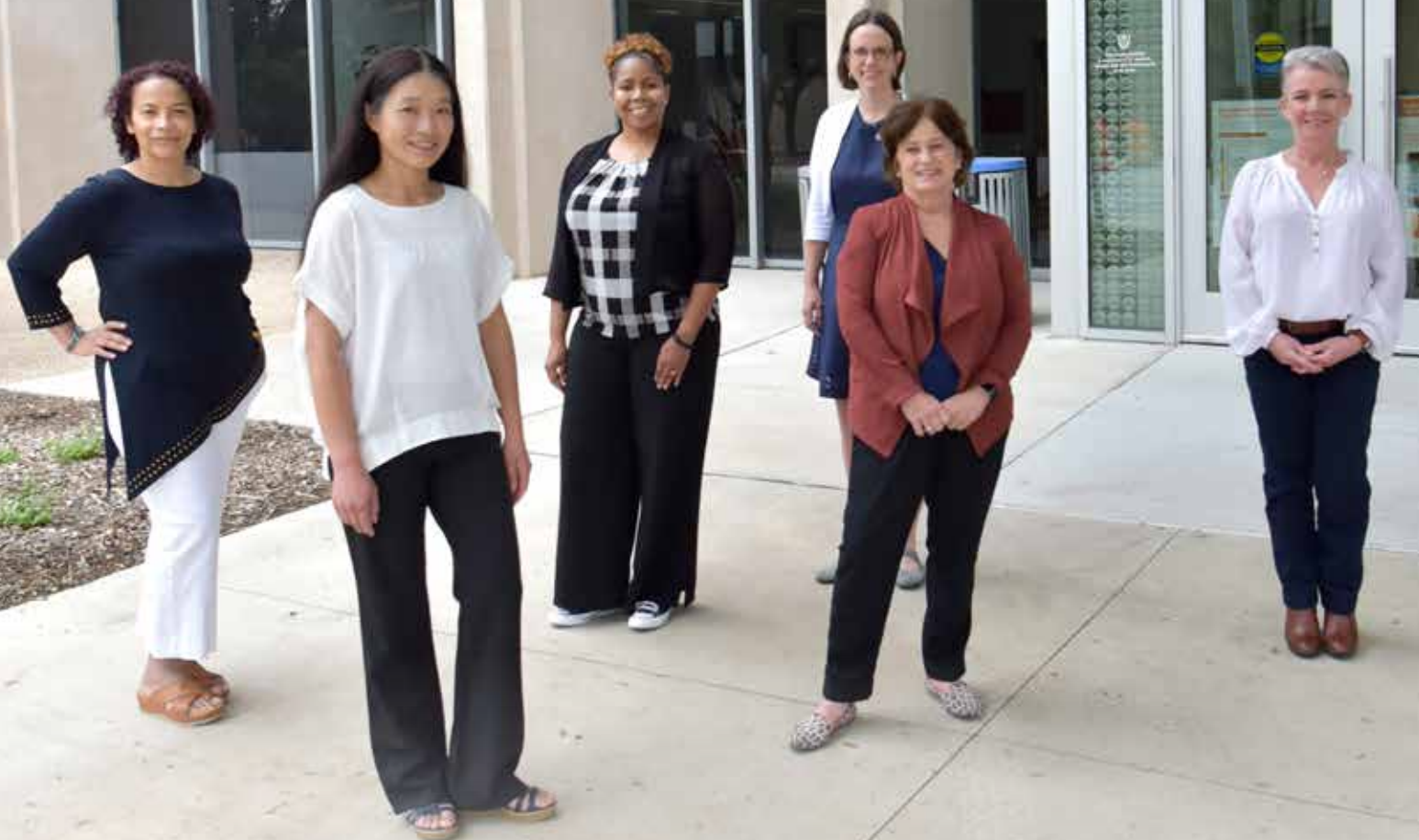


Longhorn Nursing

Volume Ten

THE FUTURE OF NURSING STARTS HERE

Fall 2021



Reaching the Hard to Reach: Texas Nursing leads innovative COVID vaccine community partnership



The University of Texas at Austin
School of Nursing

A message from Dean Alexa Stuifbergen



Can I say it one more time? This has been an unprecedented year. But perhaps I should amend that to *one and a half* unprecedented years.

In March 2020, when the pandemic was officially declared, The University of Texas at Austin School

of Nursing, like so many other institutions of higher learning, went into overdrive to transition from mostly face-to-face classes to mostly online classes. Faculty not only had to quickly learn new technology to keep education moving forward, they also pitched in and covered for colleagues and assisted students who had to quarantine. They worked doubly hard (and many extra hours) to ensure that those students on track to graduate could and those needing “in person” clinical hours got them.

Then, as 2020 began winding down, we began ramping up for the arrival of the first doses of the vaccine. In December, UT Austin was declared a vaccine hub, and one of our former students and current faculty made history by giving the first COVID-19 vaccine shot in Central Texas. Under the capable leadership of Dr. Stephanie Morgan, Dr. Shalonda Horton and the School’s UT Medical Reserve Corps and other faculty and students, we went from providing hundreds to thousands of shots daily.

But wait, that’s not all. Early on, School of Nursing faculty realized that only an intentional effort to reach underserved communities would curb the virus in Central Texas. Working with the UT Austin vaccine hub, we launched an innovative partnership with other university affiliates, nonprofits and community organizations, and several churches in East Austin to set up mobile clinics at local churches and other community sites and also provide the vaccine to home-bound individuals.

By the time this magazine went to print, we had given more than 140,000 vaccinations.

Today, as we focus on all we have learned through the dark days of the pandemic, we are beginning to see many silver linings, such as innovations in teaching, development of strong interprofessional relationships and practice, and amazing respect for students who took the responsibility of protecting themselves and their patients seriously.

I can’t thank our faculty enough for all they accomplished even as they dealt with their own family and safety issues and concerns. They never complained (or not very much!) and always “showed up” — whether virtually or in a safely distanced class situation.

Now, here’s to welcoming a new term, a new normal and a new hope that never again do we have to talk about unprecedented times.

Alexa K. Stuifbergen

Alexa K. Stuifbergen, PhD, RN, FAAN

Dean, The University of Texas at Austin
School of Nursing
Laura Lee Blanton Chair in Nursing
James R. Dougherty, Jr., Centennial Professor in Nursing



EDUCATION, RESEARCH, SERVICE

LONGHORN NURSING
Volume 10

The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing
1710 Red River Street, Austin, TX 78712
512.471.7311
nursing@nursing.utexas.edu

EDITOR
Kathryn Wiley

ART DIRECTION AND PRODUCTION
Janet Ehle

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Brian Birzer, Brian Birzer Photography;
Janet Ehle; Alyssa Lorfing, Edwin Chavez,
Hen's Bread Productions

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
SCHOOL OF NURSING**

DEAN
Alexa Stuifbergen, PhD, RN, FAAN

ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH
Sharon Horner, PhD, RN, FAAN

SENIOR ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
Gayle Timmerman, PhD, RN, CNS, FAAN, FNAP

ASSISTANT DEAN FOR ADMINISTRATION
Margaret Hill, MA, MDiv

ASSISTANT DEAN FOR STUDENT SERVICES
Vinh Nguyen, PhD

ASSISTANT DEAN FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS
Ana Todd, PhD, RN

ASSISTANT DEAN FOR GRADUATE PROGRAMS
Gayle Acton, PhD, RN, CS

**DIRECTOR, LEARNING ENHANCEMENT AND
ACADEMIC PROGRESS CENTER**
Leigh Goldstein, PhD, RN, ANP-BC

DIRECTOR OF PRACTICE INNOVATION
Stephanie Morgan PhD, RN, FNP-BC

CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
Sergio Delgado, MEd

Visit us online at nursing.utexas.edu

Longhorn Nursing magazine is a publication of
The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing.
It is produced once a year using private funds.

Feedback welcome. Please contact us at
nursing@nursing.utexas.edu to let us know what
you think about this issue of *Longhorn Nursing*.



In this issue

2
Reaching the Hard to Reach:
Texas Nursing leads innovative
COVID vaccine community
partnership

8
Prescience, Skill or Simply Luck?
Forward-thinking faculty and
staff smooth online teaching
transition

10
Talking Circle Intervention Helps
Prevent Adolescent Substance
Abuse

12
The Myrtle E. and Earl E. Walker
Lobby

14
In Support of a Community
of Learners and Researchers

16
Academic Partnerships
Ascension Seton Endows Chair
for Clinical Nursing Research

18
Generating a New Future:
Forty Acres scholars discover
their potential

20
Despite Pandemic,
Research Goes On

22
School of Nursing Receives
Two Professorships

24
Around the School

Reaching the Hard to Reach: Texas Nursing leads innovative COVID vaccine community partnership

Ask any number of faculty members or students at the UT Austin School of Nursing about the day the first delivery of COVID-19 vaccine arrived on campus, and you will see broad smiles and hear heartwarming stories about how this dedicated community of health care workers began to see a light dawning in the darkness. They will tell how, after months of fear, uncertainty and isolation, they were finally able to offer hope to people in communities across Central Texas.

Since then, health care providers, including students and faculty at the School of Nursing-led vaccination clinics, have administered more than 140,000 doses of the vaccine. The seemingly smooth rollout of the vaccination clinic, however, belies the Herculean effort involved in arranging staffing, storing vaccine at sub-zero degrees, and maintaining COVID-19 pandemic safety guidelines for both individuals seeking the vaccination and staff providing it.


Over 140,000
doses administered


1,535 volunteers


16,200 hours provided by
volunteers across multiple
schools in the university

The Kickoff

Stephanie Morgan, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, director of the School of Nursing Wellness Center and co-leader of UT Austin's COVID Vaccination Task Force, recently described the intense effort to ensure the clinics would be up and running and ready for the first patients.

"Planning began shortly after receiving a call on Friday, Oct. 30, informing task force members that UT Austin had been designated one of the first sites in Texas to receive the vaccine, and delivery could be any day following the vaccine's approval,"

she said. "I, along with School of Nursing faculty Dr. Shalonda Horton, Dr. Ana Todd and Dr. Li-Chen Lin, began rehearsing with colleagues from the Dell Medical School and College of Pharmacy how the clinic would be set up and the flow of patients managed."

When the vaccine finally arrived on Dec. 14, the team of faculty, alumni, and students was ready, and the clinic opened the following day. On that historic day, Erika Tabke, DNP, RN, MA, and clinical assistant professor and alumna of the School of Nursing, made history by administering the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to an individual in Central Texas.

"That was without doubt the most important thing that has happened in my nursing career," she said. "It has been so inspiring to watch our faculty as they got the effort rolling. We all wanted to do something, so when the vaccine arrived, we were eager to pitch in. We were almost giddy with excitement."

Dr. Tabke credits her experience giving shots at Austin-area flu clinics for enabling her to be the first to administer the vaccine. After quickly setting up and arranging the bandages, needles and other supplies at her station, she was the first to raise her hand when the team was asked who was ready to begin.



Dr. Erika Tabke administered the first COVID-19 vaccine in Central Texas.

"That day, I was surrounded by some of my students and former classmates. Dr. Morgan, one of my former instructors, was there. Later that day I gave a shot to one of my students. Then she gave me mine," she said. "My past, my present, my future were all there in that room in a common cause."

Describing the smiles she could detect behind the masks, Dr. Tabke said everyone was so thrilled to be a part of slowing the pandemic down, of turning the corner.

"The word that kept coming into my heart was 'hope,'" she said. "After months of sheltering in place, the hope was palpable."

Advantages of Preparedness

To further help meet the challenge of providing thousands of vaccinations daily, on Jan. 1, the School of Nursing mobilized the UT Austin Medical Reserve Corps (UTMRC), a volunteer program which was generated by the School after the events of Sept. 11, 2001, to address the university's need to organize and maintain a group of volunteers who are willing and prepared to assist in public health emergencies. Part of the group's role has been to ensure that clinics have sufficient clinical staff to administer the vaccine but also enough individuals for a variety of tasks, such as checking in patients and manning the observation room, where patients are monitored for potential adverse reactions to the vaccine.

One unexpected benefit of the clinic has been the team's interdisciplinary interactions that have developed seamlessly over the months. Team members receive support from each other across the board, and students are able to observe firsthand and participate in the interdisciplinary professional education they have received in the classroom.

"Our success would not have been possible without the interprofessional collaboration of medical, social work and pharmacy faculty, students and alumni. It's been beautiful to see everyone work together to make this vaccination effort

possible," Dr. Morgan said. "Everyone still practices within their scope, but where those skills overlap, such as mixing or administering the vaccine, the team covers for each other as needed and have shown great concern for any possible burnout. We have never done anything like this before, but we are in for the long haul."

Changing Gears to Serve the Wider Community

In February, the number of vaccine-hopeful individuals grew large enough to necessitate a move from the smaller UT Austin Health clinic in Dell Medical School's Health Discovery Building to Gregory Gym. Despite the crowds, it was also becoming obvious to the team that many Austin-area residents weren't showing up at the campus-based clinic.

"A group of us had been concerned from the beginning about who we might be missing using the mass vaccination hub model," said Karen Johnson, PhD, RN, FSAHM, FAAN, and associate professor. "We started talking about the need to do something to identify and reach those groups with limited or no access to requesting online appointments or who were unable to travel to large vaccination sites. They are often the same groups at the highest risk of contracting the virus and experiencing serious complications."

"We knew we needed to get creative



Dr. Shalonda Horton visits the elderly population in their homes to administer the vaccine.

and so we came up with a new initiative," agreed Shalonda Horton, PhD, MSN, and clinical assistant professor.

Working with UT Austin vaccine hub partners, the School of Nursing and the UTMRC launched in March 2021 an innovative partnership with several churches in East Austin and nonprofits and community organizations to improve access to the vaccine. This collaborative effort resulted in two vaccination delivery programs: Vaccine Administration Mobile OperationS (VAMOS), a mobile clinic set up at local churches and other community sites, and Vaccinate, No Waste (VaxNow), in which extra vaccines prepared in excess of scheduled appointments are taken to individuals who are homebound or have difficulty accessing vaccination appointments.

Relationship and Trust Building

When deciding on community organizations to partner with to set up the mobile clinics, Dr. Horton said her team initially chose two African American churches with whom they already had established relationships. They knew that reliability, accountability, and trust were vital to addressing the issues of vaccine equity in individuals and communities and wanted to offer the vaccines in a familiar and safe space.

"Our relationship over the years with these churches helped us get in the door and say, 'Hey, can we partner with you to vaccinate your congregation?'" she said. "Relationship is huge to establishing trust.



Alternate Entry MSN Student Jordan Benavides (left) and volunteers at a mobile clinic outside Mt. Zion Baptist Church in East Austin administer COVID-19 vaccinations.

It's about follow-through. Not just showing up when we need something from them but showing up when our community partner wants us to participate in their outreach. It continues to let them know that the entire nursing community is committed and invested."

The mobile clinics are now helping to reduce barriers to vaccination by offering a tailored outreach and a trusted and personalized registration experience, as well as information, education, and logistical convenience to people who can most benefit from the vaccine. For instance, two of the community entities, Mt. Zion Baptist Church and Rehoboth Baptist Church, are already partners with AMEN, an African American mental health and wellness program led by Dr. Miyong Kim and other School of Nursing faculty that supports the mental and physical health of African American residents.

"The AMEN team is assisting VAMOS and VaxNoW by providing vaccinators, support staff, and security staff to ensure the mobile clinics run safely," Dr. Horton

said. "In addition, the AMEN team provides informational sessions to address concerns that community members may have about the vaccine."

Angela Bigham is a health ministry leader at Rehoboth Baptist Church and a wellness coordinator for church community outreach efforts. She also works as a lay health worker with the AMEN program and a community health network leader for the Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas, providing community outreach. Because of the work she does through the church and a local community garden, a lot of people know her and trust that she would help them through the vaccination process. The skills she developed providing education and support to her community were invaluable when she transitioned to working at the vaccination mobile clinics.

"The AMEN program has been a big support to our community garden and has helped me bring education and resources to community members in a safe space," she said. "Many people who came to be



Angela Bigham won the SoN Star Award for outstanding service and dedication to the School of Nursing's mobile vaccine clinics.

vaccinated were anxious and worried, and I tried to put them at ease, answer their questions and let them know we would provide really good care to keep them safe. I shared my own experience of being anxious about needles and assured them the needles were small, the shot would go superfast, and they could take some pain relief medicine afterwards, if they needed it."



“In addition to the campus clinic, through VAMOS and VaxNow, we are using our limited resources to help the highest-risk groups who otherwise would go unvaccinated. Thanks to School of Nursing faculty and students, and campus partners and community volunteers, we are succeeding.”

Dean Alexa Stuifbergen.

One individual was especially afraid about getting vaccinated. “He had lost a family member to COVID and had his own health issues, which made him concerned that the vaccine would make his health worse,” Angela said. “A mutual friend asked me to talk with him, and I was able to reassure him about the vaccine’s safety and encourage him to get vaccinated to protect himself and his family. He received the vaccine and confirmed that it went well. For the second shot, he was anxious again, but I showed up to give him a hug afterwards and assure him he was safe.”



Janet Morrison, Ana Loera, Stephanie Morgan and Dean Alexa Stuifbergen at Gregory Gym

For her tireless efforts with the AMEN program and the mobile vaccine clinics, Angela received the School of Nursing SoN Star Award for summer 2021. Next steps for the mobile team is to address other barriers, such as language, and they hope to incorporate translation services in the field soon. “This effort requires so much collaboration among so many organizations and partners. It took a lot of effort to adapt to the needs of the people, to be flexible and meet them where they are,” Dr. Horton said. “It takes a village to

vaccinate a village, and our village is coming together.” Because we continue to see fluctuations in coronavirus positivity rates, vaccinating more of the population is vital,” said Alexa Stuifbergen, PhD, FAAN and dean of the School of Nursing. “In addition to the campus clinic, through VAMOS and VaxNow, we are using our limited resources to help the highest-risk groups who otherwise would go unvaccinated. Thanks to School of Nursing faculty and students, and campus partners and community volunteers, we are succeeding.” 🐮



BSN Student Yasmin Mendez volunteers her time.



Ana Todd, Karen Johnson with community member Louis Scott



For their highly successful vaccination effort, the UT Austin School of Nursing received two 2021 Tower Awards from UT Austin. Dr. Morgan was recognized as the “Outstanding Faculty/Staff Volunteer” for her strong leadership and effective

work as the co-lead of the COVID Vaccination Hub through UT Health Austin. The School of Nursing was honored as “Outstanding Campus Partner” for work supporting the vaccination efforts in the community, in particular the VAMOS/VaxNow leadership team of faculty

members Ana Todd, Stephanie Morgan, Shalonda Horton, Nancy Guillet, Li-Chen Lin, and Karen Johnson. The Tower Awards are held annually to honor individuals and organizations who have made an impact on the Austin community through service.

Prescience, Skill or Simply Luck?

Forward-thinking faculty and staff smooth online teaching transition



"We had only two weeks to fully transition from mostly in-person to entirely online classes."

As the School of Nursing has emerged from the initial shock and chaos resulting from the rapid transition to online classes due to the pandemic, faculty and staff began taking stock of the situation and, like nurses do, assessing how well the operation went. What worked, what didn't? Was success the result of excellent planning or simply luck?

On Friday, March 13, 2020, UT Austin announced the closure of campus for the foreseeable future. Despite the ominous date, faculty and staff hoped that because the following week was spring break, there would be an opportunity to make the necessary adjustments to switch to online teaching. That time frame was quickly extended an additional week.

"We had only two weeks to fully transition from mostly in-person to entirely online classes," said Sean White, instructional designer for the School of Nursing. "The process was pretty chaotic, with some faculty better positioned than others to deal with the changes they needed to make to their teaching methods. Fortunately, all faculty members were already extensively using

Canvas, a learning management software, so the transition was not as challenging as it could have been."

The School had earlier begun a pilot program using the videoconferencing application Zoom to make meeting and recording easier, which prepared several of the faculty ahead of the pandemic. Initially, 20 licenses were purchased, and White was able to get 15 faculty members up and running so they could use the new tool to conduct meetings, record lectures and invite guests.

"Once COVID-19 came along, this turned out to be a godsend," White said. "Having several faculty and staff already familiar with this new tool that would quickly become ubiquitous made the transition much less stressful for all of us."

The University was able to finalize a contract with Zoom so that everyone on campus could use it. "This, coupled with the School of Nursing's pilot program, gave us a bit of a head start and meant that some faculty would be able to help teach other faculty how to use it rather than relying on tech staff for support," White added. "This made them a little more confident in using it as a teaching tool."

White also created open office hours to make sure faculty could "drop in" and ask questions at any time. He emailed faculty on

a nearly daily basis with updates and information and let them know he was available to work one-on-one. He explained that one of the things that seemed insignificant at the time but turned out to be enormously useful and important were web cams.



Sean White

"Luckily, the School had purchased a dozen or so cameras the previous semester to allow students an easier, less stressful online testing experience," he said. "But with the pandemic, everyone suddenly needed a webcam, and even people with laptops didn't necessarily have a camera. And as the demand went up, so did the price. Because of our stockpile, we were able to equip quite a few of our classrooms with webcams that made it possible for faculty to teach, conduct office hours, join meetings, and record lectures from our actual classrooms. It's a small thing, but it turned out to be very good timing, much like our Zoom pilot."

Some instructors were more comfortable with online teaching than others, but the learning curve was still intense.

"I had done some live online teaching at another institution, but before we could get to that, we needed to do so much initial logistical planning, which was difficult,"



Donna Rolin

said Donna Rolin, PhD, APRN, PMHCNS-BC, PMHNP-BC, clinical associate professor. "For instance, we started out with quizzes being open for 12 to 24 hours, but that wasn't tenable, and so we switched to testing everyone at the same time. We now have a better idea about what needs to be in person and what works meaningfully virtually; what we want to redeem from the pre-pandemic curriculum, and what made us more efficient that we might continue."

The advanced health assessment clinical courses have traditionally been taught by "frontloading" the lecture content and spending the last half of the semester in a clinical setting. When the move to online-only coursework happened that semester, the lecture material had been completed but questions remained about how faculty would deliver the clinical component of the course since students would no longer be able to be in clinical sites.



Brittany Christiansen

"These changes had to be made fairly quickly since we were already halfway through the semester," said Brittany Christiansen, DNP, MSN, APRN, CPNP-PC/AC, FNP-C, AE-C, clinical assistant professor. "In one course, we were able to deliver clinical experiences through real-life case studies and discussions about assessment techniques for an individual patient highlighted in the case. In another course, we were able to offer clinical experiences through a virtual learning platform. Students were still required to practice documentation and reflection skills in these courses with the virtual patient findings."

While professors and instructors were scrambling to transition to online classes and meetings, students also had questions and safety concerns. Because nursing is a hands-on discipline and requires a certain number of hours in clinical practice to graduate, the skills and simulation labs were hard pressed to develop a safe environment to teach and test clinical skills.



Gayle Acton

"All along, our number one priority was to ensure that all baccalaureate and master's students could graduate," said Gayle Acton, PhD, RN, CS, associate professor. "Some hospitals and clinics couldn't take

students due to strict COVID protocols, so telehealth for advanced practice classes was vital and case studies were put online. The Family and Children's Wellness clinics provided some of the needed clinical hours, and the School's Simulations and Skills Center (SSC) did a great job of providing a safe learning environment."



Leigh Goldstein

Leigh Goldstein, PhD, RN, ANP-BC, director of the Learning Enhancement and Academic Progress Center, was able to secure a contract within one week with Shadow Health, a digital clinical replacement program, to aid students in making up missed clinical time. She also designed a practice pelvis, and the lab staff operationalized the models so students could practice Foley catheter insertions at home.

"We used these models with the new alternate entry-MSN students in the second session of summer 2020 and purchased UV HEPPA air purifiers for each lab room and auto temperature screeners," she said. "I also established a personal protection equipment (PPE) protocol for all skills classes and added a Zoom option for every skills class so that any students in quarantine could still participate."

Once the pandemic was declared, Dr. Goldstein immediately locked down available PPE within the School and arranged for the supply vendor to send her what they had available until the University was able to help supply items such as gowns, face masks and shields.

"The School supplied all student PPE for clinicals and also supplied clinical faculty with full PPE and lecture faculty and staff with face masks," she added.



Laura Murphy

"Having the PPE during those early days and enforcing social distancing meant we were able to bring students back to the labs in July," said Laura Murphy, MSN, RNC-OB, clinical instructor. "Although the smaller, less dense groups of students doubled lab hours for faculty and staff, it ensured that all students received adequate time to practice nursing skills. One of the biggest challenges was making sure the cameras could be adjusted to make certain body parts or equipment visible, but the SSC staff worked their magic and made it possible."

Over the year, the situation improved in terms of increased creativity and

facility with Zoom and other technology to raise student engagement in virtual settings.

"We have said for years that we need to increase our virtual simulations and other technology-enhanced learning," said Danica Sumpter, PhD, RN, clinical assistant professor. "The pandemic caused us to accelerate actualizing

these innovations and provided an incubator for creativity."

Behind much of this success was the collaborative spirit of the faculty and staff.

"Faculty collaboration was key to surviving that first spring and fall," Dr. Sumpter said. "Not being able to see colleagues in the break-room or down the hall minimized impromptu brainstorming sessions, so we had to find ways to replicate that via Zoom. Several of us got together over the summer (some in person and some via Zoom) to do trial runs of what it might be like to teach with students in person and some at home. It was an invaluable experience to anticipate problems and troubleshoot, but it was also good just to be able to share our common experiences — the good, the bad and the ugly."

Delivering online coursework in the midst of other pandemic issues remains a challenge, but faculty members report feeling much more comfortable and adept using alternative educational technology they had not previously used.

"Although we have all been working at about a 200-percent level for over a year now, we're finally in a good place with a virtual curriculum worked out and have solid backup plans that we don't have to redevelop," Dr. Rolin said. "It gives me a lot of peace, at last."

What began in chaos was tamed through trial and error, swift assessment and change, and, in some cases, just plain good luck. And the results have been surprisingly successful in more ways than one.

"Even though it was difficult to make a rapid transition to online learning, I believe it has improved my teaching and communication skills by allowing me to explore alternative ways of presenting material to students," Dr. Christiansen said. "With the move toward more telehealth delivery, students have obtained technology skills that will be highly valued. Faculty and students alike have had to balance work, school, and family life and modify situations created by the pandemic. As a result, we are all stronger nurses. Our students have experienced a situation we never dreamed possible, and they will be more than ready to go out and change the world!"

Who
Are You?

Where
Are You?

Where
Are You
Going?

Talking Circle intervention helps prevent adolescent substance abuse

Modeled after the ancient Native American tradition of talking circles, John Lowe, RN, PhD, FAAN, Joseph Blades Centennial Memorial Professor, has had considerable success using an early substance use intervention for Native American and Indigenous populations.

“Talking circles provide support through the process of coming-together in a place where stories are shared in a respectful and accepting manner,” Dr. Lowe explained.

Native Americans have long used the circle to celebrate the sacred interrelationship that is shared with one another and with their world. Like the unbroken chain of a circle, Dr. Lowe’s intervention is an essential link strengthening the chain of Indigenous experience that relies on the theoretical framework of Native-Reliance. This framework describes the holistic worldviews, values, beliefs, and behaviors characteristic of Native American culture.

The Talking Circle program is the first manualized talking circle with a written format and curriculum and is based

on three Native-Reliance components: being responsible, being confident, being disciplined. Each of the three components includes three sessions. The program was developed by Dr. Lowe, a Native American nurse scientist, and his tribal elder Chief Henson more than 20 years ago.

“Data shows that many adolescents initiate substance use by age 11, so our focus is on prevention by early intervention

“Talking circles provide support through the process of coming-together in a place where stories are shared in a respectful and accepting manner.”

of substance use and its associated health risks among children 10 through 12,” he said. “This approach has been very successful because we take a strength-based approach.”

To begin, the students gather in a circle and are each asked three questions: Who Are You? Where Are You? Where Are You Going? They are then handed a feather in turn, which indicates it’s their turn to speak. They

are assured everything said will be held in confidence. As they take turns listening and talking, the youth learn to use the support and insight of their tribal brothers and sisters to move away from harmful ways of coping, such as substance use or self-harm, and toward something else. In this way, the school-based and culture-based talking circle has served a sacred function of healing or cleansing, while also serving as a way of bringing people together.

The circle symbolizes an entire approach to life in which each one participates and each one serves an important and necessary function that is valued no more or no less than that of any other. The traditional sense of belonging and comfort provides healing for all, and the circle speaks to the Native American youth of life and their place in it.

“Afterwards the kids often say, ‘Finally, someone is listening to me.’” Dr. Lowe said. “The circle changes the dynamic and peels the layers away. It’s very powerful.”

Dr. Lowe’s team is currently waiting for funding for the project “Optimizing the Talking Circle,” which will test the three components to determine which, if

Dr. Lowe hopes to establish the first national and international nurse-led Native American and Indigenous research center at UT Austin, with the goal of increasing the critical mass of Native and Indigenous nurse scientists.

any, of them is more effective when used singly and in use with each of the others as opposed to all three.

“The circle is important because it takes into account Native and Indigenous people’s experiences of colonization and genocide,” he said. “The trauma of genocide left Indigenous populations with some of the highest health disparities and inequities of any people. My goal is to address these so that future generations will experience health equity and healthier lives.”

Dr. Lowe hopes to establish the first national and international nurse-led

Native American and Indigenous research center at UT Austin, with the goal of increasing the critical mass of native and Indigenous nurse scientists.

“Out of a world population of over 7.8 billion people, there are 476 million Indigenous people spread across more than 90 countries, but fewer than 100 Native-Indigenous nurse PhDs. In the U.S., there are only 25,” he said. “Three of those are now at UT Austin.”

In addition to Melessa Kelley, RN, MSN, PhD, a new assistant professor who is working with him at UT Austin, Dr. Lowe will be joined by Cynthia Greywolf, PhD,

DNP-PMNHP, BC, APR, a provost post-doctoral fellow, for the next two years.

The Talking Circle has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Justice programs as a “Promising Evidence-based Program” for the well-being of youth. It was featured as an American Academy of Nursing “Edge Runner,” an initiative that recognizes nurse-designed models of care and interventions that impact cost, improve health care quality and enhance consumer satisfaction. For more information about this program, visit aannet.org/initiatives/edge-runners.

The Myrtle E. and Earl E. Walker Lobby

Thanks to a large financial gift from the estate of the late Earl E. and Myrtle E. Walker, much-needed renovations have been made to the School of Nursing’s main entrance and lobby, turning it into a tribute both to nursing and to the generosity and vision of the Walkers.

The couple were long-time benefactors of the School of Nursing, and Earl served on the School’s Advisory Council at the request of Dean Emerita Billye Brown. Over the years, their scholarship fund has benefited hundreds of School of Nursing students.

One of the reasons for their generosity to students is because Myrtle, who had received a scholarship to study art,

couldn’t afford the \$468 room and board and so was unable to get a degree. As she often said, “No one should be barred from college because they don’t have the money.”

“We strove to incorporate the nursing ethos and symbols in the new Myrtle E. and Earl E. Walker Lobby,” Dean Alexa Stuijbergen said. “You’ll see these in the entry, windows, lighting, and the School’s seal embedded in the floor emblazoned with ‘Quo Ducat Officium,’ or ‘Wherever Duty Leads.’”

Even the bronze bust of Florence Nightingale is ensconced in its own lighted niche, and a large video screen continuously displays the students, faculty, alumni, and friends who embody the

compassion and excellence of the School of Nursing.

In addition to the foyer, renovations were made to the terrace (now the Walker Terrace) on the west side of the building, where Myrtle’s Turtles, two 600-pound bronze turtles, have found a permanent home. Created by Myrtle Walker as public art, they are a solid reminder of the generosity of the Walker family.

Earl E. Walker died in 2011

and Myrtle E. Walker in 2016, but the couple’s generosity lives on through their eldest child and alumna Mary (PhD 1976), who was one of the first two students to receive a doctoral degree from the University of Texas System School of Nursing, which eventually became the UT Austin School of Nursing. Dr. Walker has also endowed scholarships in honor of faculty and colleagues at the School of Nursing.



Myrtle E. and Earl E. Walker



In Support of a Community of Learners and Researchers

The rapid growth of science and the need to prepare the next generation of nurse scientists call for innovative approaches in education and support as scholars work on solutions for complex health care challenges facing the nation. Dedicated to teaching excellence in research, graduate programs at the UT Austin School of Nursing embrace the values of learning, innovation and creativity. As they develop expertise in select areas of nursing, students are prepared for advanced practice, research, and leadership roles.

The following personal accounts from alumni and friends of the School of Nursing describe how they value the strengths and possibilities of graduate programs — whether at master's or doctoral levels — by opening opportunities for scholars as they become the nurse leaders of tomorrow.

Joe and Pat Blandford

Patricia R. Blandford Skills Lab



Joe and Pat Blandford and family

I am very supportive of the School's skills labs because I know how important it is for health care practitioners to have confidence and proficiency in the technical aspects of the clinical setting. If skill sets have been mastered, other aspects of nursing can take a prominent part in delivering care.

In Austin, there is a scarcity of clinical rotations available due to all of the medical programs vying for clinical exposure. Having access to the School of Nursing's labs can help give students opportunities to gain experience in different medical situations that might not be available once they are in the clinical setting. Confidence in practice and proficiency are applicable to any student, regardless of the educational level. There are always things in the skills labs to build up the experience levels which are transferrable to patient care. A simple analogy: It is like being able to skip a grade in school because one has mastered the basic knowledge.

I think there would be a consensus that the skills labs enrich students' learning experience, sharpen their confidence in decision-making situations, and help to create a better understanding of the patient from the caretaker's point of view.

Ferne Kyba

The Drs. Ferne and Evan Kyba Endowed Excellence Fund in Nursing

Because the fastest growing segment of our population is those over 85, the need to promote healthy aging, maximize function, and improve quality of life becomes more critical. To support elders' wishes to retain independence ("aging-in-place"), we need to develop innovative models of care delivery to improve outcomes, promote

safety and address the disproportionate economic impact of an increasing burden of chronic disease.

When I entered the UT Austin Master's of Science in Nursing program, I was fortunate to enroll in the first gerontology class taught by Dr. LaVerne Gallman. Her passion for this specialty was infectious and focused the rest of my professional career.

Following graduation, I joined the School's clinical faculty, teaching in the older adults section of an across-the-life-span assessment course. As an active member of the Texas Nurses Association, I became involved in programs to improve the quality of care in Texas long-term care facilities. This broadened my interest into ethical issues in aging and end-of-life care. After receiving a PhD from Texas A&M, I taught gerontology and enhanced community aging services at UT Arlington.



Ferne Kyba and LaVerne Gallman

The best aging care requires inter-professional collaboration, and nursing's unique focus has been in addressing the social determinants of health and elders' holistic needs. Nursing provides evidence-based care management, and through specialized clinical expertise, offers cost-effective delivery in multiple settings. The mission to enhance care for underserved and vulnerable populations has proven to be invaluable, especially in providing better access for aging minority females.

My late husband Evan and I believed in "paying it forward." We have acknowledged our debt of gratitude to many persons and programs that supported us. There are few situations where one can repay that gratitude to one's mentors or benefactors. My strong support for the Billye Brown Professorship and the Billye Brown Excellence Fund has been driven by that unique opportunity.

Our endowment is dedicated to providing flexibility for the School of Nursing to support evolving and innovative needs for education, research, and service; supporting students or faculty; and advancing nursing science for evidence-based care of aging persons across the spectrum of care settings, including palliative and end-of-life care.

L. Lee Ogburn-Russell and Kerry Russell

The Dr. L. Lee Ogburn-Russell and Kerry Russell Endowed Emergency Fund in Nursing

Even before the pandemic, it became evident to my husband and me that unexpected events sometimes happen to students that could prevent their progression through the program. We know that UT Austin provides a number of scholarships and grants, and we did not want to try to replace those. It was those unexpected events, such as finding that one needed one more course to graduate, having car trouble that prevented one going to clinicals, or sudden medical expenses and book prices that were beyond the budget. The COVID-19 experience compounded all of these needs.

Undergraduate and graduate students plan for the expected, but life happens



Kerry Russell and L. Lee Ogburn-Russell

while they are going to school. In many cases, they don't have parents to call on for the unexpected. They may be the ones helping to support the parents. We did not want any student to be unable to proceed due to an unexpected financial need.

We know that our nation's nursing shortage has not resolved. There are two main obstacles to graduating more nurses: providing opportunities for clinical experiences and hiring more faculty. Schools of nursing were very creative during the pandemic in finding alternate clinical experiences as many facilities did not allow students onsite during the initial stage of the pandemic. This did not lessen our need for qualified faculty. We need nurses with master's and doctoral degrees to provide the education and nursing research that our future nurses need for practice.

When we initially planned for this fund, I felt that the main need was for undergraduate students. In talking with Dean Stuifbergen, I became aware of the financial needs of our graduate students as well. The alternate entry master's students are in a very fast-paced program and don't have the time or the RN licensure to work. Many of the other graduate students have

families that need their financial support. It is because of this need that we made all nursing students eligible to receive the funding.

The Dr. L. Lee Ogburn-Russell and Kerry Russell Endowed Emergency Fund in Nursing will provide immediate outright emergency support funds for graduate students in the School of Nursing. Example uses include, but are not limited to, health services, medical bills, housing costs, food, clothing, school supplies, travel and safety needs.

Mary K. Wakefield

The Mary K. Wakefield Endowed Graduate in Nursing Fellowship

Achieving a doctoral degree in nursing was always my career aspiration. I was fortunate to earn both my master's (1978) and PhD (1985) from the School of Nursing. These degrees were the jumping-off point for the positions to which I aspired, and I wanted to ensure I had the degrees and associated knowledge to be competitive for positions both in nursing and more broadly in health care. It was also important to

Continues on page 23

Academic Partnerships

Ascension Seton Endows Chair for Clinical Nursing Research



President Jay Hartzell and Dean Alexa Stuijbergen are joined by Ascension Seton leadership, President and CEO Andy Davis (far right) and Chief Nursing Officer Steven Brockman-Weber (second from right).

If nothing else, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the important relationship between nursing education and research and clinical practice. Now more than ever, academic-practice partnerships are fundamental to advancing effective health care, especially during times of crisis.

One of the School of Nursing's longtime practice partners, Ascension Seton, recently made a generous gift to the UT Austin School of Nursing that will create the sort of mechanism by which academic research and clinical practice can work together to improve the health of communities in Central Texas. The gift will permanently endow a faculty chair and support a faculty position that will strengthen the School's leadership in clinical research.

"We are excited to partner with the

School of Nursing through this Endowed Chair of Nursing Research," said Steven Brockman-Weber, chief nursing officer at Ascension Texas. "The endowed chair will strengthen nursing education, science and research for both the School of Nursing and Ascension Texas. Additionally, this endowment will build a stronger foundation to enhance the prestige of nursing locally and nationally as we advance the practice of nursing science and improve the health of the patients, families and communities we serve."

Ascension Seton has a long history of support for the UT Austin School of Nursing, including financial support for the Pediatric Acute Care Nurse Practitioner and the RN-BSN programs, funding scholarships for students with financial need, and providing placements for students requiring clinical experience. They have also provided a setting for two collaborative efforts — vital research and data collection — described here.

COVID-19 Research Partnership

COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease associated with respiratory illness that ranges from mild to severe, depending on the individual. Most people recover, but emerging reports suggest that a subgroup may experience significant, long-term effects including cognitive deficits. The COVID-19 and Cognition Research Study is a partnership of the School of Nursing and Ascension Seton to increase understanding of potential cognitive as well as psychosocial outcomes of the disease.

The UT Austin School of Nursing faculty and alumni team of Shelli Kesler, PhD, associate professor; Ashley Henneghan, PhD, RN, FAAN, assistant professor; and Kimberly Lewis, PhD, RN, (formerly nurse scientist at Ascension Seton) recently concluded a study examining and characterizing potential cognitive symptoms in up to 100 people who tested positive for COVID-19.

Over the past year, Dr. Kesler and Dr. Henneghan, who have studied cognitive disorders in cancer survivors, began noticing many of the same cognitive symptoms, such as "foggy brain," in COVID patients.

"That's when we decided to use our cancer expertise with COVID survivors," Dr. Henneghan said. "The findings were compelling and suggest that young people with mild or moderate COVID may have some cognitive problems compared to the general population."



Shelli Kesler

Ashley Henneghan

Kimberly Lewis

Because practitioners tend to think of respiratory symptoms and problems rather than cognitive issues, the researchers hope their findings will inform and better prepare practitioners who treat COVID survivors so they can educate patients in terms of what they might expect as a result of having had the virus.

"The partnership with Ascension Seton facilitated timely research in terms of recruitment and data collection in record time," Dr. Henneghan said. "It closed the loop on research and practice."

Nurse Residency Program Partnership

It takes many skills to practice nursing successfully. In addition to the clinical skills that every nursing graduate must be able to demonstrate, there are many other competencies they also need to master in order to succeed in today's health care settings. Because good patient outcomes depend on nurses having the knowledge skills and attitudes necessary to provide high-quality patient-centered care, several larger hospitals developed residency programs to reinforce these competencies for new nurse hires.

Ten years ago, Ascension Seton revamped their nurse residency program to include additional training and education. To determine if the program was helping them meet their mission to serve all persons, with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable, they needed a way to validate its efficacy and reached out to Heather Becker, PhD, research scientist, at the School of Nursing.

"My expertise is in research and

program evaluation," Dr. Becker said. "I help organizations answer questions important to them about their functioning, so my job in this case is to help Seton staff understand what the numbers in their data collection are telling them."

Ascension Seton has three cohorts annually entering their year-long residency program, and data are collected shortly after entry into the residency, and at six and 12 months.

"We helped them get an evaluation system up and running and then used some of the information provided to modify what they were doing and gauge improvement," Dr. Becker said. "For instance, we determined that competence to take care

of patients who are dying was an area of concern for new residents. Based on this information, the residency education staff developed additional seminar content in that area. Over time we have seen improvement in that competency."

Dr. Becker says Ascension Seton staff also value this input because the data contribute to their accreditation process. The most recent visit by the American Nurses Credentialing Center, an organization that evaluates the quality of nurse residency/fellowship programs, resulted in an accreditation with distinction for their residency program.

Dr. Becker and her colleagues at the School of Nursing and Ascension Seton have jointly published the articles "Change Over Time in Ratings of New Nurses on the Appraisal of Nursing Practice" (2019) and "The Appraisal of Nursing Practice Instrument Development and Initial Testing" (2018) in the *Journal of Nursing Administration*.

"Ascension Seton has been able to retain new nurses and build their confidence because of the excellence built into their residency program that is informed by their quality assurance and continuous improvement data," Dr. Becker said. "This is a very good example of how academia can work with partners and accomplish such good work together."



Heather Becker and Ascension Seton colleague Elaina Diaz

Generating a New Future

Forty Acres scholars discover their potential

It would be an understatement to say that 2020 was a difficult year, and 2021 has already presented its own challenges. But students at the UT Austin School of Nursing are nothing if not resilient. The following five students, who also happen to be Forty Acres scholars, recently shared how the School of Nursing and the scholarship program provided the academic rigor and compassionate community necessary to survive — and thrive — during a season of massive change and uncertainty.

Even though Helen Kalleb and Sara Kothia, both freshmen, have experienced only online university classes, they give the School of Nursing top marks for how well the change to virtual coursework and the introduction to the campus was handled. “I was very pleased with the transition to online classes,” Sara said. “It’s been a unique experience, but I never felt my education was compromised. The School opened my eyes to how broad the field of nursing is. They ignited my desire to look outside the Texas ‘bubble’ to see how health

care can be applied around the world.” Sara eventually plans to complete a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree. According to them both, the Forty Acres Scholarship team (supported by the Texas Exes) kept activities going, such as the weekly Freshmen Dinner Series, and managed to instill a sense of community in their cohort.

“The Forty Acres Scholars program places an emphasis on community, and that community has created a family that has provided a source of stability for me as I entered my first year on the Forty Acres.”

Helen especially enjoyed Dr. Lorraine Walker’s class “Global Health” and after graduation plans to pursue graduate school with a primary focus in working in a pediatrics-associated field. Tobechukwu Phillips and Marrisona Rawls, both sophomore Forty Acres scholars, eagerly explained how the School of Nursing has helped build their character. “Classes are more than about grades,” said Tobechukwu, a graduate of Alvin High School in the Houston area and its first African American valedictorian. “What’s more important is what we’re learning and how we’re impacting lives. The quarantine also showed me where my values lie. I learned that connecting with people and how you make them feel is important.” Marrisona, who hopes to become a nurse anesthetist, attributes the Forty



40 Acres Scholars Class of 2023
Tobechukwu Phillips, Stamps Forty Acres Scholarship, supported by the Milam and Tory Newby Family and **Marrisona Rawls**, Stamps Forty Acres Scholarship, supported by the Henry and Ann Seals Family

Acres program with much of her success in steering her way through the year. “I brag about it a lot,” she said. “I was raised to respect people’s differences, and the Forty Acres team’s emphasis on the community aspect respects our different backgrounds so that we’re able to develop better relations with peers and alumni.” Marrisona especially appreciates the Nursing School’s skills labs and credits Larissa Brungot, clinical instructor, for her accomplishments. “She makes the material digestible, and I can text her with any questions I have.” Marrisona and Tobechukwu are concerned about the health care disparities that exist among minority populations and have taken courses in African and African Diaspora Studies to better understand the past. “You have to learn from history to be able to generate a new future,” Marrisona said. As a junior, Emily Slaughter had more experience under her belt than the younger nursing scholars, but still found the pandemic challenging. “The entire world changed,” she said. “In my clinicals, I wore full personal protective equipment and have never done clinicals without it. It’s colored my clinical perception but has given me more respect for nursing.” When asked about the School’s transition seemingly overnight to online classes while ensuring that undergraduates received the necessary clinical experience, she gave it an A+. “It’s been trial and error with lots of hurdles, but the professors have

done an awesome job to make sure that everyone had access and felt safe.” Since her freshman year, Emily has been drawn to nutrition, and the class “Disability Over the Life Course” with Dr. Tracie Harrison only reinforced that interest. “A lot of my patients in hospital are obese and have poorly controlled diabetes, which is a powerful disease process that can degenerate eyes and kidneys and result in the loss of limbs” she said. “But proper nutrition and exercise can prevent these adverse events. Dr. Harrison helped me become a better student.” It has been an unusual year for

“It is an honor to help support these aspiring nurses as they prepare to enter the most trusted and vital of all professions. These students have an unmatched level of commitment and we have found them to be the most caring and warmest of people we know.”

—Jeanne and Mickey Klein, Forty Acres Scholars Donors

this exceptional group of students who nevertheless remain undaunted by the upheaval and grateful for their opportunities. As Tobechukwu explained: “I decided to submerge myself in the bright, burnt-orange mindset and am so happy to be a part of a Forty Acres cohort who consistently work on all aspects of themselves. Since coming to UT Austin, my priorities have shifted a lot.” The Forty Acres Scholars Program is the premier full-ride, merit-based scholarship for UT Austin. Administered by the Texas Exes, the scholarship program offers a rich college experience by providing academic, leadership, professional, and cultural opportunities within an intimate cohort of fellow scholars.



40 Acres Scholars Class of 2024
Helen Kalleb, Elizabeth Shatto Massey Forty Acres Scholarship and **Sara Kothia**, Jeanne L. and Michael L. Klein Forty Acres Scholarship



40 Acres Scholar Class of 2022
Emily Slaughter, Jeanne L. and Michael L. Klein Forty Acres Scholarship

Despite Pandemic, Research Goes On

Seeking Solutions to Diabetes-Associated Cognitive Impairment

Cognitive impairment is a common, under-diagnosed complication of diabetes that can interfere with many individuals' ability to adequately care for themselves. Even though management of diabetes involves a high degree of patient involvement and daily performance of several self-management tasks, many people with diabetes have never had a conversation with a care provider about how to cope with the cognitive impairment associated with the illness.

Heather Cuevas, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, assistant professor, who is building on her clinical nurse specialist experience in endocrinology and working to rectify this, recently received a new grant from the National Institutes of Health to test a cognitive rehabilitative approach and its effect on diabetes self-management. Problems in cognitive performance, or cognitive deficits, are common in people with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes, evidenced by a slowing of mental processing speed, psycho-motor speed, executive function and attention. In some cases, learning and memory problems also exist.

"We know diabetes has devastating effects on multiple organs in the body, and there could be several reasons why it affects cognitive function," Dr. Cuevas said.

After completing a small study funded by the School of Nursing's Cain Excellence Fund that surveyed diabetes self-management, Dr. Cuevas

"Despite the damage caused, however, there hasn't been much research on how to improve cognitive function in people with diabetes."



received funding from the School's NIH-funded Center for Transdisciplinary Collaborative Research in Self-Management Science for a pilot study that adapted Memory, Attention and Problem-Solving Skills for persons with multiple sclerosis (MAPSS-MS), a successful computer-assisted cognitive rehabilitation intervention.

This intervention, developed by co-investigator Dean Alexa Stuifbergen and Dr. Heather Becker, has shown great promise as a means of improving memory, use of compensatory strategies, and performance of cognitive and instrumental activities of daily living for individuals with MS. Dr. Cuevas found that an adapted version was equally helpful for people with diabetes who suffer similar impairments.

The eight-week MAPSS-DM program includes two components: four weekly group sessions focused on building efficacy for use of cognitive compensatory strategies and a computer-assisted cognitive rehabilitation program with home-based training. Participants complete a self-report questionnaire and are asked if they are having trouble remembering to take medications and check sugar levels, all of which are critical to their well-being. They also complete a questionnaire regarding memory, executive function and self-efficacy.

In the group sessions, Dr. Cuevas teaches strategies to improve day-to-day cognitive function, such as reducing noise levels when trying to improve attention. Participants are given weekly goals and encouraged to maintain a healthy diet and exercise regimen. In addition to helping rehabilitate their cognitive abilities, the study seeks to assess the role self-management plays in improving cognitive function and vice versa, so participants are issued continuous glucose monitors that measure blood sugar levels. The data will be visible only to the researchers.

"Participants in the study are very interested in doing what they can to improve or prevent cognitive impairment. They want to know what steps they can take to improve their situation," Dr. Cuevas said. "Many have even told me that they are so glad to hear about it. They often say, 'No one talks to me about cognitive function and how my brain works'."

In early 2020, she fortuitously put the sessions online to decrease barriers of time and transportation, little knowing that by spring everything would have to go online as a result of the pandemic. Her next steps include a larger scale, multi-site study in which classes are adapted to determine how the intervention can be used in a clinical setting with patients referred by providers.

"The class isn't just about cognitive function; it's about diabetes self-management," Dr. Cuevas said. "And what's good for diabetes self-management is good for your brain."

Digital Games May Improve Outcomes for Individuals with Heart Failure

It's long been known that poor self-management contributes to the poor health outcomes for individuals with heart failure (HF). Finding successful ways to encourage and monitor how patients care for themselves once they have been discharged from a hospital, however, hasn't been easy.

"Although there have been big advances in cardiac treatment, the real impact on quality of life is when patients know how to take care of themselves at home," said Kavita Radhakrishnan, PhD, MSEE, RN, FAAN, associate professor. "They aren't in the clinic or seeing their physician often, so once they are discharged from the hospital, the question becomes: How can we keep them safe?"

The answer, she believes, may lie in sensor-controlled digital games (SCDGs). These are devices that integrate data from behavior-tracking sensors to trigger progress, rewards, and positive feedback in a digital game to motivate real-time behaviors. Her latest studies with HF patients featuring these devices are beginning to bear fruit.

Dr. Radhakrishnan's first grant, awarded by the School of Nursing's Center for Transdisciplinary Collaborative Research in Self-Management Science (TCRSS), funded the first study, a collaborative effort with the UT Austin Simulation and Gaming Application Lab, to test the feasibility of creating a device to improve the health of HF patients.

"We developed a casino slot game using very low-level literacy-tailored knowledge. And even though the study's sample size was only 19, we saw a significant improvement in knowledge in individuals who had been diagnosed with HF. Still, at that point, there was nothing to motivate the desired behavioral changes."

Encouraged by the results, Dr. Radhakrishnan and her team of Christine Julien, professor, and Edison Thomaz, assistant professor, in the Department of Computer Science, and Matthew O'Hair with Good Life Games, a game development company in Austin, refined the device. The team also includes Tom Baranowski, PhD, professor, and a health game expert at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, and Miyong Kim, professor, and director at the Center for TCRSS, who helped with the conceptual design of the study.

The idea was to see if a digital tool would help people with chronic conditions by delivering contextually relevant information to prompt behavior

changes, such as exercising and weight monitoring, by earning game rewards.

"Our goal was to harness the data from patient activity sensors to provide contextual relevance," she said. "For example, if the patient isn't exercising, the digital tool senses it and sends them a message. They can see the outcome for themselves in the game."

In 2018, the team received a grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research to conduct a feasibility randomized control trial with HF patients in their home to see if SCDGs would work as expected and successfully transfer the data. One group received the SCDG with the game while the control group received only the sensors. As the trial was getting underway, the COVID-19 pandemic was announced, and the team had to rethink how to continue patient recruitment. Up to that point, recruitment included only individuals from Austin. Restricted to a virtual platform, the team could now reach out and recruit from across Texas and Oklahoma, which was a boon in that individuals from more remote locations miles from a hospital or clinic could be included.

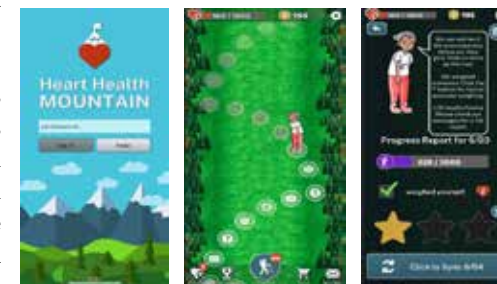
"The results were very encouraging," Dr. Radhakrishnan said. "There was a 46% difference between the groups in weight-monitoring behavior and also showed some improvement in the amount of physical activity in the group with the game. The problem with chronic disease is that patients have to do multiple behaviors. So, when we saw the one group improve in two behaviors because of the game, we were pleased."

Because these results still need to be validated, the team will next test with a larger sample. An upcoming four-year trial proposal will include 200 people in seven states that have the highest disparities in HF. Dr. Radhakrishnan is also hoping that the study will be culturally adaptable to meet the needs of other underserved populations.

"At the very least, we are going to get a daily snapshot of how active HF patients are at home," she said. "Recommendations for this population tend to be too idealistic. We need more data about their lifestyles so we can develop meaningful interventions relevant to their lives."



Sensor-Controlled Digital Game – Climb a heart health mountain



Weight Scale



Activity Tracker



School of Nursing Receives Two Professorships

Donation Establishes School's First Distinguished Professorship

Efforts to provide exceptional education for future nurses were greatly enhanced at UT Austin by a recent gift from School of Nursing supporters Maureen and Robert Decherd. The gift will be added to a previous gift given in 2019 by daughter Audrey Decherd, who received a Master of Science in Nursing degree from UT Austin, to establish the Maureen Healy Decherd '73 Distinguished Professorship in Nursing, the first-ever distinguished professorship for the School.



Maureen and Robert Decherd with daughter Audrey Decherd

The gift from the Decherds is based on their belief in the importance of the role nurses play in recovery from illness or injury, both from personal experience and from the enormously positive impact great nurses have had on family and friends in serious medical situations. Their daughter's decision to pursue a career in



Miyong Kim,
Maureen Healy Decherd '73
Distinguished Professor
in Nursing

nursing has been especially uplifting for them.

Miyong Kim, PhD, RN, FAAN, FAHA, professor and director of the Center for Transdisciplinary Collaborative Research in Self-Management Science at the School of Nursing, and associate vice president for Community Health Engagement, has been appointed to the professorship.

"Great teachers define exemplary educational institutions. Professors at this rank will help establish the school's importance as the United States increasingly embraces the idea of making quality health care available to everyone," Robert said. "Maureen and I, along with Audrey, are truly pleased to be able to help establish the first distinguished professorship at the UT Austin School of Nursing. We have a strong conviction about the importance of nursing care across all dimensions

of our society, as exemplified by the School of Nursing."

"As the primary providers of bedside care, it's absolutely critical to provide world-class training by exceptional nursing faculty to prepare and inspire our future nurses," Audrey said. "Nursing education is certainly more important than ever before. Today's students will be uniquely trained for a range of global health problems — particularly in the areas of infection control and crisis management — to an extent that previous generations of nurses simply were not. My hope is that the Maureen Healy Decherd '73 Distinguished Professorship will help fund research and teaching opportunities for top nursing faculty at the School of Nursing."

Faculty Member and Family Create Professorship

During the 20 years she served as chair of the Executive Committee at UT Austin, Lynn Rew, EdD, RN, AHN-BC, FAAN and Denton and Louise Cooley and Family Centennial Professor, often wished the group could recruit more senior faculty members.

"But we just didn't have enough endowed professorships," she said. "I feel very privileged to hold a professorship in the School of Nursing, which has allowed me to do so many things, such as travel to conferences and focus on research. I want to see more people enjoying the same opportunities."

With a long-term interest in philanthropy, Dr. Rew and husband, Dick, have donated to several local charities and organizations over the years. More recently they began

discussing the possibility of creating a professorship at the place where Dr. Rew had spent so much of her career.

"The School of Nursing has been good to me, and I wanted to give back," she said. "The place where you work shapes you. Your career isn't just about you and your credentials and research program. It's about the people and colleagues around you."

The couple's two children Richard and Carina are UT Austin alumni and have built successful careers in their own



Lynn Rew

right: Richard as an attorney and Carina, who received her Master of Science in Nursing degree from UT Austin, as a clinical nurse specialist in adult gerontology. Because of their support of their mother's career from their childhood on, the new professorship will be called the Rew Family Professorship in Nursing.

"Our family thinks nursing is an essential and critical profession for promotion and preservation of the world's health," Dr. Rew said. "The nursing profession, while large, has a very small number of highly qualified faculty members, and we hope this professorship will attract a highly competent nursing scholar to either come to or remain at UT Austin."



Continued from page 15



Mary Wakefield

me that at any table where I sat, my academic credentials, including this terminal degree, would be comparable to others.

I have deep appreciation for the faculty and great enthusiasm about the programs offered at the School of Nursing. The top-flight educational experience I received was a key catalyst for the rest of my career. I've spoken with innumerable School of Nursing graduates who have said the same. It was a privilege to study and learn there, and I want to help ensure that others are given the same opportunity. At the end of the day, the health of our communities and our nation will be better for it. What better investment could one make?

I hope these fellows contribute in ways that fuel their passion to make a difference in the health and well-being of individuals, communities and even countries. There are myriad ways PhD-prepared nurses can make this happen, but if they engage their work by also advancing health policy, I'll be especially appreciative.

Dr. Wakefield, a visiting professor at the UT Austin School of Nursing, was chosen by President Barack Obama in 2009 to head the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Following her tenure as administrator of the HRSA (2009-2015) she

became acting deputy secretary of the HHS (2015-2017) and was named by President Joe Biden to his transition team for the HHS in 2021 and served as counselor to the HHS Secretary, summer 2021.

The Mary K. Wakefield Endowed Graduate in Nursing Fellowship will be used to provide fellowships to students in the PhD program.

Susan and Joe Wilkinson

The Susan and Joe Wilkinson Graduate Fellowship in Nursing



Susan and Joe Wilkinson

We chose the Alternate Entry-MSN program for the fellowship because in my experience as Nursing Department chair at Angelo State, second degree students, especially in their first year, were the nursing students that typically had the most difficulty finding scholarship support. They frequently do not qualify for undergraduate funding support because they already possess an undergraduate degree. They also have not yet started taking graduate level classes so sometimes do not qualify for graduate-level funding. They also carry a full-time course load, so it is difficult to work during the program. I also find them, typically as a group, to be very mature and serious students, and there is usually a special or personal reason that they have left their prior training/educational focus and chosen nursing as a profession.

The Susan and Joe Wilkinson Graduate Fellowship in Nursing will be used to provide graduate fellowships for students who have demonstrated financial need, with preference to be given to students in the Alternate Entry Master of Science Program.

We hope that as they progress through the curriculum, these students will fall in love with the profession and practice of nursing and possibly find a way to bring their rich prior life experiences or training into the profession and make a lasting contribution. It is an honor to support such a talented and dedicated group of students who will make a difference in the lives of their patients.

Susan Wilkinson received a PhD (2003) from UT Austin. She recently retired as a professor at Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas. Joe Wilkinson received his MD from the UT Medical Branch at Galveston and is a practicing orthopedic surgeon in San Angelo. 🏠

Around the School

Faculty



Richard Brown, PhD, research professor, had the manuscript “Sustained Care Smoking Cessation

Intervention for Individuals Hospitalized for Psychiatric Disorders,” published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry*.



Karen Johnson, PhD, RN, FSAHM, FAAN, associate professor, has received the University of

Colorado College of Nursing’s Distinguished Alumni Award.



Jung Kwak, PhD, MSW, FGSA, associate professor, was selected as one of the Texas Exes’

Texas 10. Since 2011, *The Alcalde*, the official publication of the Texas Exes, has honored Longhorns’ favorite professors with the annual Texas 10 awards. Dr. Kwak was also elected to the office of Social Research, Policy, and Practice Section Chair of The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) beginning Jan. 1, 2022. The GSA is the oldest and largest interdisciplinary organization devoted to research, education, and practice in the field of aging.



Li-Chen Lin, PhD, RN, CNRN, clinical assistant professor, received a research grant award from

Sigma Theta Tau: Epsilon Theta Chapter.



Cara Young, PhD, RN, FNP-C, FAANP, associate professor, was selected for the 2021 class of fellows of the American Academy of Nursing.

Alexa Stuifbergen, PhD, RN, FAAN, and dean of the School of Nursing; **Heather Becker, PhD**; alumna **Carolyn Phillips, PhD** (2019), RN, ACNP-BC, AOCNP; **Shalonda Horton, PhD**, RN, clinical assistant professor; and **Janet Morrison, PhD**, RN, MSCN, had their manuscript “The Experience of African-American Women with Multiple Sclerosis” published in the *International Journal of MS Care*.



Verónica (Ronnie) García Walker, PhD, RN, NE-BC, CNE, clinical assistant professor, received the

School of Nursing’s Transformational Online Instruction Contributions (TONIC) Award, which recognizes educational creativity and excellence in instruction. The program is sponsored and funded in partnership with the UT Austin Provost’s Office.



Mary Wakefield, PhD, RN, FAAN, visiting professor, was named a volunteer member of the Joe

Biden Presidential Transition Agency Review Team to support transition efforts related to the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

New Faculty



Tanya Coakley, PhD, MSW, is the School of Nursing’s inaugural associate dean for Diversity, Equity and

Inclusion (DE&I). Dr. Coakley was formerly a professor of social work at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.



Megan Hebdon, PhD, DNP, RN, FNP-C, joined the School as an assistant professor.

Dr. Hebdon completed a PhD at the University of Arizona and a T32 post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Utah.



Carolyn Phillips, PhD, RN, ACNP-BC, AOCNP, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Future of Nursing Scholar, joined

the School as an assistant professor. Dr. Phillips completed a PhD in Nursing at UT Austin and a post-doctoral fellowship at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Massachusetts.



Hyekyun Rhee, PhD, RN, PNP, FAAN, joined the faculty as the La Quinta Centennial Professor in Nursing.

Dr. Rhee was formerly a professor at the University of Rochester.



Mary Kathryn (Katie) Sanders, DNP, RN, CNE, joined the School as a clinical assistant professor. Dr. Sanders

was formerly assistant professor and director of the RN-BSN program at Texas A&M.

Around the School

Promotions



Carol Delville, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, was promoted to clinical associate professor.



Danica Sumpter, PhD, RN, was promoted to clinical associate professor.



Julie Zuniga, PhD, RN, FAAN, was promoted to associate professor with tenure.

Alumni



Nina Almasy, DNP (2017), MSN (2002), RN, CNE, has been appointed dean of Health Sciences for

Austin Community College. Dr. Almasy, formerly department chair for Professional Nursing, will now oversee and coordinate 20 health-related programs ranging from nursing (vocational and professional) to pharmacy technician, occupational therapy assistant and EMS programs.



Alyce Ashcraft, PhD (2001), RN, CNE, ANEF, FNGNA, associate dean for Research and Scholarship at

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing is serving as president of the National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence.



Terry A. Badger, PhD (1986), RN, received the Jimmie Holland Lifetime Achievement

Award from the American Psychosocial Oncology Society (APOS), the highest honor conferred by the APOS. Presented annually, it recognizes an individual who has made outstanding contributions to the field of psychosocial oncology in leadership, training, research, clinical practice and service to the APOS.



Julie Barroso, PhD (1993), RN, ANP, FNAP, FAAN, was named to the Julia Eleanor Blair Chenault Endowed

Chair of Nursing at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing. Barroso is a distinguished nurse scientist whose research focuses on people living with HIV and long-term survivorship.



Veronica Buitron-Camacho, BSN (2004), MSN, RN, has served in multiple positions and care settings

providing inpatient care, emergency care and home health care services for Ascension Seton Healthcare Family. She is currently director of Medical Management for Central Health in Austin, Texas, where she oversees case management, transitions, utilization management and social services for the Travis County MAP population.



Christy Hicks, RN (2011), MSN, and a board-certified women’s health nurse practitioner in

the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Division of Female Pelvic Medicine and Reconstructive Surgery at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, has been named president of the local DFW chapter of the Society of Urologic Nurses & Associates (SUNA) and director-at-large with the national SUNA Board of Directors.



Carolyn Phillips, PhD (2019), RN, ACNP-BC, AOCNP, and staff member **Janet Ehle** received a University Excellence in Communications award from UT Austin for their

work in producing “Songs for the Soul: A Call and Response During COVID-19 for Graduating Nurses,” a musical presentation created for the 2020 virtual commencement ceremony. A link to the video can be found here: youtu.be/klekmrPgnDU

Students

Holly Ainsworth, BSN (2021) and graduate of the Honors Program, received a Texas Parents Outstanding Student Award.

Katherine “Kat” Britt, BSN, RN; **Tonychris Nnaka, BSN**, RN, MPH, and **Angela Preston, MSN**, RN, CEN, were selected as Jonas Nurse Leader Scholars for 2021–2023. The award was made possible by a grant from the Jonas Center for Nursing and Veterans Healthcare, a scholarship program dedicated to building the effectiveness of America’s professional nurses, and matching funds by School of Nursing donors.

Students in Karen Johnson’s public health classes, who performed a rapid community health needs assessment in an underserved area of Central Texas during the severe winter storm in February 2021, received a Texas House Resolution. **Karen Johnson, Ana Todd** and **Nicole Murry, PhD**, RN, clinical assistant professor, were also instrumental and recognized with their own house resolution.



The University of Texas at Austin
School of Nursing

1710 Red River Street Austin, TX 78712

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Austin, Texas
Permit No. 391

A HEARTFELT GIFT

Thanks to her education at the School of Nursing, Kim Chapman knew she wanted to work as a cardiovascular surgery nurse. Through her and her husband Jeffrey's gift to support nursing education, tomorrow's health care future looks much brighter.



To learn how you can support the future of nursing, visit utexas.edu/nursing/support or contact Sergio Delgado, chief development officer, at sdelgado@nursing.utexas.edu or call 512.694-8751 or Katy Fendrich-Turner, director of development, at kfendrich@austin.utexas.edu