



RESEARCH ASSISTS NURSING STUDENTS

Reducing caregiver stress

By Patty Pitts

Stress stalks nurses long before they begin working in the province's hospitals. Tension and pressure are also the frequent companions of nursing students—an American study of stress among health care professions ranked them at the top.

That study was one of many that Dr. Lynne Young, an assistant professor with UVic's School of Nursing on the Lower Mainland, and nursing students reviewed after an instructor noted that the stress level seemed especially high in her class.

"We were amazed, when we got into the research literature, at the high level of stress reported among nursing students. But we only found two examples of stress reduction intervention programs for student nurses reported in the literature," says Young.

Her inquiries led to discussions with the Healing Touch Centre of the Vancouver Hospital Health and Science Centre. Nurses there wanted to evaluate the effectiveness of its mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program. Young wanted a program to help her stressed-out students. They agreed that the centre would waive its usual program fee for the third-year students in exchange for an evaluation conducted by fourth-year students. UVic's Innovative Teaching Grants program funded the evaluation.

Students were given credit for the time spent at the eight weekly sessions. They learned meditation, yoga and relaxation techniques and wrote a journal as part of the program. The results were very positive, and the MBSR program offer was extended to a second group of nursing students last fall. Young reported on the program's effectiveness at the International Conference on Women, Heart Disease and Stroke held earlier this year in Victoria, and she hopes to expand her research on stress-reduction among nursing students.

Young's primary research interests include health promotion and the influence of family members on individuals' health-related decisions and experiences. She is currently the only nurse and the only individual from British Columbia holding a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Washington school of nursing in Seattle, where she is researching the risk for heart disease among low-income single women.

While attending rounds of a heart transplant care team as a graduate student, Young witnessed the complexity of issues related to



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family-focused care. She subsequently learned that the vast majority of B.C. heart transplant recipients were men, with women (usually wives) providing post-operative care at home. A shortage of gender-specific large scale data has stymied further investigation.

"Often science is conducted on men and then related to women" says Young. "When researchers do not report on the outcomes for women, it sets things in motion where men may be getting more transplants because we don't have sufficient scientific information on women to support practice.

"What's central and easy to lose

is that women's care-giving work is usually invisible. Often decisions are made on the basis that a woman will care for a post-operative man, sometimes to the detriment of her own health."

When both nurses working in hospitals and family caregivers in the home are stressed out, all parties are put at excessive risk. Thanks to Young's interest in reducing stress among nursing students, more graduates of the school will have the skills to handle the inevitable pressures they'll face when they become part of the health care system; and that will mean better care for all.

Nursing curriculum encourages activism

The recent announcement by Canada's nurses that they will make improved health care a major election issue is no surprise to the director of UVic's School of Nursing Dr. Jan Storch. "Nurses have always been pretty active lobbyists. The Canada Health Act turned out the way it did because of nurses' input." Storch is also proud of the fact that the school's curriculum teaches its students to be activists for quality health care.

"Our curriculum really teaches nurses to change the health care system if their work environment doesn't allow them to nurse properly, and to change society if current conditions contribute to poor health," says Dr. Marjorie MacDonald who, along with colleagues Drs. Rita Schreiber and Rosalie Starzomski, teaches the fourth-year course "Nurses Influencing Change."

FACTS FROM THE EDGE

- Each year, scores of UVic post-diploma students earn their bachelor of science in nursing degrees without ever stepping on campus. They're part of the nursing school's distance education program, which celebrated its 20th anniversary last year. Currently, 650 students from across North America are enrolled in third- and fourth-year courses.
- Half of the program's distance students are from the Lower Mainland; a further 25 per cent are from Vancouver Island; nearly 60 are from outside B.C.; and a handful come from as far away as Florida and Vermont.
- Since 1996, UVic's School of Nursing has offered degree program completion on the Lower Mainland at Langara College. There, students take the required third- and fourth-year courses for their UVic BSN degree. The Lower Mainland campus has a faculty of seven full-time and two part-time members and more than 100 students.
- The highest level of education among Canada's nurses is: diploma, 77 per cent; baccalaureate, 20.8 per cent; master's, 1.5 per cent; and doctorate, 0.1 per cent.
- The majority of Canada's nurses work in hospitals (62.4 per cent). The rest work in nursing homes (11.8 per cent), community health (7.1 per cent), home care (4.4 per cent), educational institutions (2.2 per cent), physicians' offices or clinics (2 per cent) and other venues (9.5 per cent).
- Of the 227,651 nurses employed in Canada in 1998, 95 per cent were female. Of the male nurses in Canada, 48.1 per cent worked in Québec, 20 per cent in Ontario, 10.7 per cent in B.C. and 5.2 per cent in Alberta.
- Nurses in Ontario have the highest wages in Canada—between \$35,685 and \$55,302. In B.C., nurses' salaries range from \$39,275 to \$48,635. Nurses in Newfoundland have the lowest wages in Canada, ranging from \$32,819 to \$40,599.

ON THE EDGE OF YOUR SEAT

Valuing the Culture of Peace Conference August 9–12, UVic

Renowned peacemakers, local activists and educators examine the attributes and values of peaceful homes, schools, communities and worlds and explore ways to implement a peace curriculum in the classroom. Register on line at: www.uvcs.uvic.ca/conf/peace/registration.htm or call UVic conference management at 721-8703 for more information.

President's Distinguished Lecture: Dr. Jeremiah Ostriker, Princeton University August 25, 7:30 p.m.

University Centre, Farquhar Auditorium
Dr. Ostriker is Provost of Princeton University and former director of the Princeton Observatory. He is considered one of the world's leading theoretical astrophysicists and co-authored the first study to advance the theory of "dark matter," now a major topic in cosmology. Free. Info: 721-7700.

EDGE/WISE Langford dementia care facility studied

Early results of an evaluation of the Heritage Woods care facility for residents with dementia by School of Nursing faculty member Dr. Lucia Gamroth are encouraging. For the past year, Gamroth has held focus groups and conducted interviews with the Langford facility's staff, volunteers, residents and their family members to determine how well Heritage Woods is achieving its

goals of supporting independence, individual preferences and choices, privacy and dignity, and meaningful living for its residents.

"It's rich data; wonderful data," says Gamroth, who will present a preliminary report in the fall.

At the Heritage Woods facility, residents live in self-contained cottages in a specially designed environment.

The choices they make determine their daily routines.

"What was meaningful to them before becomes part of their lives at Heritage Woods, if possible," says Gamroth, a former long-term care facility administrator and gerontology research specialist. She has also worked with other extended care facilities in the Capital Health Region to improve the quality of life for residents.