School of Nursing to increase nurse practitioners in rural, underserved areas

Vanderbilt University School of Nursing (VUSN) received two awards from HRSA in 2019 totaling more than $5 million that will increase the number of nurse practitioners working in rural and underserved communities where there aren’t enough primary care providers. In response to the growing need for mental health services, the two awards will also have a psychiatric/mental health component that integrates behavioral health into the primary care setting.

VUSN received a $2.7 million award to support the school’s development of a learning track within the family nurse practitioner program that will focus on serving rural and underserved populations and build collaborations with health agencies, such as community-based and federally qualified health centers, that provide clinical training for the program’s students.

The school also received a $2.4 million grant to develop VUSN’s first nurse practitioner residency program. After graduation, nurse practitioner residents will work in community-based health clinics for 12 months and learn to care for rural, underserved patient populations. They will also learn best practice strategies for caring for vulnerable populations, such as incorporating telehealth, social determinants of health, and integrated behavioral health into primary care.

Empowering nurses to support survivors of sexual assault

The majority of women, children, and men who are sexually assaulted have to travel elsewhere for treatment from someone with specialized training. Although one in six women and one in 33 men will experience an attempted or completed rape, there are only about 1,500 sexual assault nurse examiners (SANEs) in the country.

With a $1.43 million HRSA grant, VUSN has developed and launched a SANE education program, which will increase the number of SANE-trained and -certified advanced practice registered nurses practicing in emergency departments in rural or underserved U.S. communities. Students will obtain clinical experience in Middle Tennessee. Partners in this initiative include Vanderbilt University Medical Center; Our Kids, which currently provides pediatric/adolescent SANEs in 47 Middle Tennessee counties; Nashville’s Sexual Assault Center; and EmCare, a national organization that is one of the largest staffing organizations for emergency departments.

SANe-trained nurses have specialized education to conduct forensic examinations that have been shown to provide better physical and mental health care for assault survivors, deliver better evidence collection, and support higher prosecution rates. They treat patients holistically, with compassionate and comprehensive care that takes into account the patient’s current acute care needs and the possible long-term effects of sexual assault.
Integrating needed mental health care in a primary care setting

In Nashville's arguably most economically depressed areas, VUSN and nonprofit housing organization Urban Housing Solutions provide consistent and accessible health care through a community health clinic, the Clinic at Mercury Courts. Launched in 2012 with a Title VIII grant focusing on interprofessional collaborative practice, the nurse-managed clinic has made significant strides in improving the health of its community.

Within the first few years, the clinic's health care team realized that the community suffered from a significantly higher rate of substance use and mood disorders than the general public. VUSN believes that adding mental health services is essential to caring for Mercury Courts’ highly vulnerable population and provides early intervention for anxiety, PTSD, depression, substance use, and adult ADHD.

In 2019 alone, 632 patients received integrated mental health services at the Mercury Courts clinic site. Of those patients, 93 were enrolled in the clinic's intensive behavioral integration program for depression and anxiety. The other patients were seen for various mental health conditions, often in collaboration with the clinic's primary care provider, a family nurse practitioner. These patients were closely managed by the clinic, with 78 percent showing a minimum of 50 percent improvement in symptoms. In the past, the patients would have had to be referred to specialty psychiatric care.

Overall, 1,077 patients were screened in 2019 for depression, anxiety, suicidality, PTSD, and substance use at each primary care visit. Over 12 months, primary care, mental health, and social service assistance totaled 4,859 patients. Approximately 67 percent of the patients were uninsured for all of the 2019 calendar year.

Adding behavioral health services to Mercury Courts also allowed Vanderbilt psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner students to begin clinical training at the site, provide patient care, and participate in the clinic's innovative interprofessional team-based training model.

HRSA awards $1.3 million to School of Nursing for future faculty

VUSN is using a $1.3 million HRSA Nurse Faculty Loan Program grant, awarded in 2018, to support Doctor of Nursing Practice students who plan to become nursing faculty. Over the past 10 years, VUSN has received $9.38 million from the program. Health care experts nationwide have warned that, with the growing and aging needs of our population, the demand for nurses will only intensify. Yet, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing reports that nursing schools turn away thousands of qualified applicants each year, often due to lack of faculty. Vanderbilt is responding to the need for increased numbers of doctorally prepared faculty by growing its Ph.D. in Nursing Science program and its DNP program.

Accomplishments through Title VIII since 2009

In the last 10 years, VUSN has produced 440 DNP graduates and 38 Ph.D. graduates, with 364 graduates participating in HRSA's Title VIII Nurse Faculty Loan Program. VUSN started the DNP program in 2008 to increase the number of doctorally trained nurses who can serve as faculty in nursing schools, part of the solution to the increasing demand for more nursing students. Since the school began the program, 88 persons of color have earned DNP degrees from Vanderbilt.

Since 2009, 4,849 Master of Science in Nursing students have graduated from VUSN. School of Nursing graduates can be found in rural and urban areas, with alumni in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and U.S. territories. More than 40 percent of VUSN alumni provide health care in rural and underserved areas.

Other Title VIII grants helped VUSN launch its Nurse-Midwifery specialty in 2000. That program is ranked as the No. 1 Nurse-Midwifery education program in the U.S.

For more information, please contact Vanderbilt’s Office of Federal Relations: Christina West (202) 216-4370 - Heather Bloemhard (202) 216-4368 federalrelations@vanderbilt.edu 2020