

SPRING 2025

# heartbeat



UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF NURSING AND HEALTH STUDIES

## Nurses Unite

to find a way out of  
human trafficking





UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

The School of Nursing and  
Health Studies celebrates the U

— HAPPY —  
100<sup>TH</sup>

BIRTHDAY

HONORING A CENTURY OF EXCELLENCE

## A NOTABLE NURSES MONTH

Three of my favorite occasions as Dean converge in May: International Nurses Month, Spring Commencement, and the launch of our spring issue of *Heartbeat* magazine. In recognition of Nurses Month, I'm happy to announce two exciting new initiatives: This year, for the first time, we'll present a DAISY Award to a nurse who provides above-and-beyond compassionate care to patients and families. In another school first, we've outfitted 155 soon-to-be nurses with white coats this semester. These specially branded white coats represent the excellence our newly minted Cane Nurses bring into the community and the nation's most trusted profession, according to perennial Gallup polls.

As I write this, we are celebrating the University of Miami Centennial. For over three-quarters of those 100 years, our school has made significant contributions to this institution's growth and development. These pages highlight the school's ongoing impact and innovation—from the invaluable leadership insights of my new Dean's Board of Advisors co-chairs Vahan and Danielle Gureghian (page 4), to our school's rise in national research rankings for nursing schools (page 7), to our visionary launch of a post-master's oncology program (page 9), and beyond.

Our cover story (page 14) addresses collaborative efforts aimed at curbing human trafficking's devastating toll through health care education and awareness. In "SPARK for Science" (page 18), you'll meet four gifted undergraduates selected to help with research being conducted at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center. And in "Titans of Teamwork" (page 20), you'll read of a game-changing partnership



between S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education® and UHealth – University of Miami Health System to increase confidence and skills among newly practicing RNs (page 20). All of these stories illustrate the important ways faculty, students, and alumni alike are pushing boundaries, asking bold questions, and pursuing promising futures. This Nurses Month, as always, I thank you for being a vital

part of our mission to transform lives and health care through education, research, innovation, and service across the hemisphere.

**Hudson P. Santos, Jr.**  
**Ph.D., RN, FABMR, FAAN**  
*Dean, Professor, and Dolores J. Chambreau, RN Endowed Chair in Nursing*



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At the School of Nursing and  
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and health care through education,  
research, innovation, and service  
across the hemisphere.

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# Dean’s Advisory Board Named

## Q&A with co-chairs Vahan & Danielle Gureghian

Interview by Robin Shear



Palm Beach power couple and Cane parents **Danielle** and **Vahan Gureghian** will chair the School of Nursing and Health Studies’ Dean’s Board of Advisors. They will head a team of well-connected thought leaders eager to evaluate, elevate, and celebrate the school. Like the Gureghians, David Bassuk, Dr. Cathleen Wheatley, and Raymond Zomerfeld are new to the board. Returning members include Pamela Garrison, Jayne S. Malfitano, and Dr. David Zambrana, a distinguished school alumnus. “I am grateful for Vahan and Danielle’s generosity and leadership in support of our school, and I am confident that together with the board we will accomplish remarkable things for the community,” said Dean Hudson P. Santos Jr. From 2023 to 2024, the Gureghians awarded scholarship support for 15 nursing students graduating from the rigorous accelerated B.S.N. program. This year, they established the Gureghian Family Endowed Nursing Scholarship for students with financial needs. The \$500,000 endowment is part of a \$2.5 million donation to the University that includes funds for Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center and the Miller School of Medicine. “We are excited to support scholarship opportunities for deserving students,” said Danielle Gureghian. “The future of medical care, especially home health care, depends upon dedicated and empathetic health care professionals, and UM students are the epitome of professionalism, dedication, and knowledge.” She and her husband are the founders of Independence Home Health, a company aimed at “improving the quality of life for all in need of home health care.” “Vahan and I feel proud of and honored by our association with the School of Nursing and Health Studies,” she said. “We hope our many years of experience in health care and education will allow us to be assets on the

Dean’s Board of Advisors. We are dedicated to the school’s success, just as we know Dean Santos and the rest of the school’s faculty are.” In this Q&A, the Gureghians discuss their vision as leading lights for the school’s bright future.

### What inspired you to start Independence Home Health?

**DANIELLE GUREGHIAN:** When we built our home 20 years ago, we attached a home for Vahan’s parents so they would be able to live their final years with us while maintaining their independence. We experienced how great their quality of life could be just by having people nearby who cared for them, rather than being confined to an institution that left them feeling alone. Not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to do that, so we were inspired to try to bring a high quality of life to other seniors through home health care.

**VAHAN GUREGHIAN:** Our home health company is built around the mission of serving people who are homebound and dependent while allowing them to maintain the best physical, mental, and emotional quality of life. We are rewarded by seeing and hearing about the positive outcomes our clients experience.

### What interested you in connecting with the school?

**DG:** South Florida has been a home to us for decades and we see firsthand the region’s huge senior population, so we know how important health care is for our community. Vahan spent more than a decade as a trustee of an Ivy League



Front row, l-r: Mrs. Gureghian, Ms. Garrison, Dr. Wheatley; back row, l-r: Mr. Bassuk, Mr. Gureghian, Dean Santos, Mrs. Malfitano, and Mr. Zomerfeld. Not pictured: Dr. Zambrana.

# What excites you most about co-charing the DBA?

**DG:** First, it is an honor to be appointed to the Dean’s Board of Advisors for the top-ranked private nursing program in a state as big as Florida—and to be ranked in the top 6% of all programs nationwide further demonstrates this school is the best of the best. We are excited by the vision we have heard from Dean Santos and believe in his plan to achieve it. We are also excited to support his focus on global health, the Pan American region, and the local South Florida community. We look forward to learning more about the school while sharing our decades of educational, health care, and business experience through the advisory board.

**VG:** It is impressive that the school is already ranked 11th in NIH funding for nursing schools nationwide, and we are excited to help Dean Santos get it into the Top 10. It would be difficult not to be inspired after seeing the incredible S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education®, Biobehavioral Lab, and other high-tech labs and instructional facilities. The leadership here is topnotch. The school can be proud of the Dean’s leadership. We look forward to helping any way we can and will support the Dean and other leaders wherever and however they need us.

# How can the school achieve its goal of becoming the nation’s top nursing school?

**VG:** Becoming the nation’s top nursing school is an ambitious goal, but one I believe is very achievable. Looking to the Dean’s core tenets of *Administrative Excellence, Education for Life, Mission-Driven Research, and Hemispheric Leadership*, I believe the school is off to a great start. The current strategic plan puts forth a well-thought-out, well-organized roadmap for future success. Of course, nothing ever goes exactly according to plan, which is why the dynamic leadership already in place at the school is so important. Leaders need to be ready to pivot and exercise a willingness to deviate course when circumstances dictate. Strong, open-minded leadership will be key.

**DG:** I couldn’t agree more. Leadership is key, and this school has it. We have faced many hurdles in our businesses and the institutions we support. Those most successful in overcoming obstacles are the ones whose leaders keep their eyes wide open and anticipate challenges before they arise. This school’s key to success is much the same as it is for so many organizations: strong, smart, agile leadership.



The Gureghians present Jason Inerarity, B.S.N. '24, with the Compassionate Heart Award.

university and was involved in the medical and nursing schools there, so that gave him the opportunity to really understand the impact of these premier institutions.

**VG:** We are big believers in the power of education. We have spent the last 25 years immersed in public education in some very challenged communities. In addition to my time as a UPenn trustee, Danielle spent many years as a trustee at the Episcopal Academy in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania. The University of Miami is renowned nationally and internationally, and we are proud to be affiliated with it, particularly with the School of Nursing and Health Studies. As parents of a Miami student, we have made a family commitment to this University.

# What are your impressions of the school so far?

**DG:** The institution is incredibly impressive. The administration and faculty are of the highest caliber and it really shows. We had an immediate sense that this is a mission-driven organization devoted to its students, and not only to their training but also to the professionals they become. It is impossible not to be blown away by the commitment of the faculty, the alumni, and all the professionals who keep this engine running.

**VG:** I have been involved in so many types of organizations, schools and businesses. Every one of them is a product of its people. This school’s faculty and students are devoted and it shows. For us, it is a true pleasure to work with these professionals, and we look forward to a partnership that allows us to further support them all.



# Dean to Join International Nurse Researcher Hall of Fame

Dean Hudson Santos has been selected as an inductee into the 2025 International Nurse Researcher Hall of Fame for Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (Sigma). He will be honored during Sigma's 36th International Nursing Research Congress, slated to take place this July in Seattle. "I am truly honored to be inducted into Sigma's International Nurse Researcher Hall of Fame," said Dean Santos. "This recognition is not just a reflection of my work, but of the countless mentors, colleagues, and students who have inspired and challenged me along the way."

Thanking Dean Santos for continued support of Sigma and contributions to nursing science, Dr. Sandra C. Garmon Bibb, president of Sigma, and Lucas M. Davis, CEO, wrote, "Sigma is pleased to recognize you for your lifetime achievements in and contributions to research, as well as your mentoring of future nurse researchers. Your exceptional work in research is an inspiration to nurses everywhere."

Dean Santos—also the Dolores J. Chambreau, RN Endowed Chair in Nursing and a professor at the school—is the International Society of Nurses in Genetics' immediate past president and a Fellow of both the American Academy of Nursing and Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research. As principal investigator of multiple funded studies focused on developmental health trajectories for at-risk populations, he has helped advance knowledge about how adverse life events affect maternal-child health and developmental outcomes among at-risk children.

He is currently among the nation's top 3 most-funded nurse scientists and is lead principal investigator for a \$23.57 million interdisciplinary grant from the



National Institutes of Health to establish "Miami-ECHO: A Cohort of Mothers, Children and Fathers in Miami-Dade

"Research has the power to transform lives, shape health policy, and drive meaningful change in our communities,"

**"Nursing research has the power to transform lives, shape health policy, and drive meaningful change in our communities."**

County." Through pioneering biosocial studies, longitudinal cohorts, and clinical interventions, Dean Santos bridges biological and social domains in nursing science, addressing developmental origins of health and disease. He is devoted to mentoring future nurse scientists and other health professionals.

said Dean Santos. "I hope this recognition serves as an inspiration for the next generation of nurse scientists to push boundaries, ask bold questions, and lead with impact. I look forward to celebrating this moment with my fellow honorees and continuing this important work together."

# Research Is a Strongpoint



The School of Nursing and Health Studies was in the Top 5 for National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding awarded to private nursing schools in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024. The others in that Top 5 included Columbia University (1), University of Pennsylvania (2), Emory University (3), and Johns Hopkins University (4). In the list ranking all nursing schools nationwide, both public and private, the School of Nursing and Health Studies came in at 11, up 5 spots from its No. 16 placement in FY 2023. Further, the school has been Florida's No. 1 private NIH-funded nursing school every year since 2006, when the nonprofit Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research (BRIMR) began publishing annual NIH funding ranks based on official year-end data from

reporter.nih.gov, the NIH's searchable electronic repository of research projects and access publications and patents.

NIH FY 2024 funding totaled \$8,263,402 at the school. The support is invaluable in helping faculty, students, and postdoctoral fellows advance studies that impact health and well-being at local, state, and national levels, such as by improving maternal and child health, stemming drug use among adolescents, and reducing the toll disease takes on individuals, families, and society.

Dean Santos is principal investigator on several grants, including the school's largest in its 75-plus years. "Our faculty and students are

accelerating the school's already-outstanding research momentum through their expertise in the social determinants of health, commitment to team science, and passion for ending health disparities," he said. "The NIH—in concert with countless community and clinical collaborators—helps us nurture a vibrant research ecosystem with unlimited potential to improve health through the region for generations to come and empower emerging scientists."

## STAY CONNECTED!

Follow school news updates online at <https://news.miami.edu/sonhs> and on social media via @UMiamiNursing.

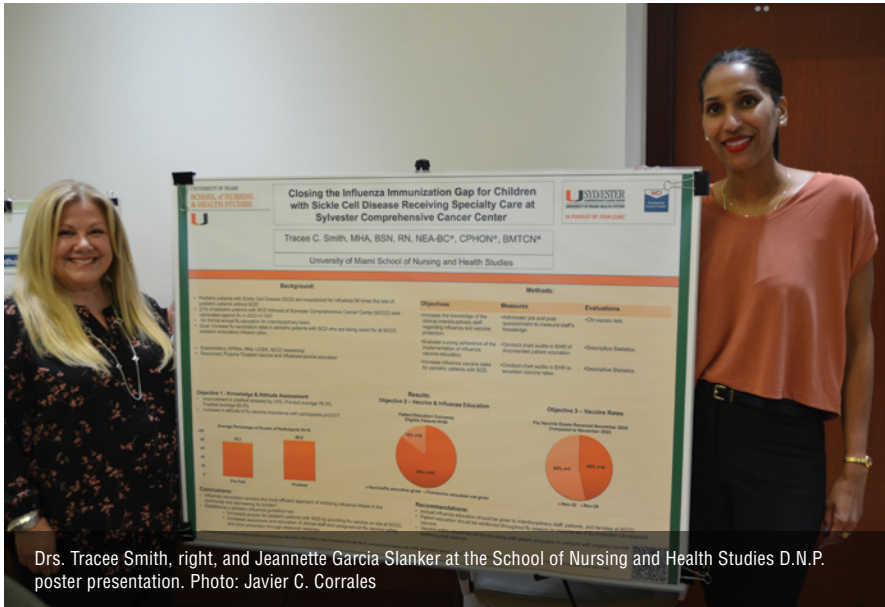


# The Flu Fighters

*There has to be another way.* This plea from a Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center physician propelled Tracee C. Smith, D.N.P. '24, to act. “She was like, “Tracee, we have to do something about all of our patients. We need to be able to give the flu shot in the clinic.”” It was 2022, and immunocompromised patients had already suffered disproportionate complications from the COVID-19 crisis. Now Ofelia Alvarez, M.D., the director of Sylvester’s Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) program, was worried about the approaching influenza season. Evidence in literature supported her concern. Pediatric patients with SCD, noted Smith, “are hospitalized for flu at 56 times the rate of pediatric patients without SCD.”

As director of Sylvester’s Pediatric Services, Smith set out to help. On the surface, her aim was simple: vaccinate more young patients, and educate families and interdisciplinary team members. “It wasn’t rocket science. It was just, there’s a need; these children are suffering,” said Smith. Complications from SCD, an inherited blood disorder, can begin from birth. “The clumping of ‘sickled’ cells and lack of blood flow can be catastrophic. In addition to terrible pain, patients with sickle cell are prone to strokes and lung complications like acute chest syndrome, so a serious infection like pneumonia or flu can land them in the hospital for an extended period. They can go into distress very quickly.”

But insurance wouldn’t cover flu shots at Sylvester because of its “specialty/facility” status, Smith discovered. “Insurance was a straight no. But most of these pediatric patients don’t go see their primary care provider; they come to their hematologist or oncologist,” she said. “If you send them somewhere else to get the flu shot, they often don’t because they’re already juggling a chronic illness with their life. So, there was a gap. I didn’t know how I was going to get the flu shot at no cost.” Another potential barrier was vaccine hesitancy and mistrust. “Even



Drs. Tracee Smith, right, and Jeannette Garcia Slanker at the School of Nursing and Health Studies D.N.P. poster presentation. Photo: Javier C. Corrales

though it is a proven prevention method, some people just don’t like it, they don’t want it,” shared Smith. “But we try to reinforce scientific research.”

Smith felt so strongly about this initiative that when she started the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies Doctor of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.) program, she focused her scholarly project on “Closing the Influenza Immunization Gap for Children with Sickle Cell Disease Receiving Specialty Care at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center.” Her literature review documented the evidence that the influenza vaccine is effective at preventing flu and stopping its spread, and that education is key to improving vaccine compliance. Still, Smith found that just 21 of 100 pediatric patients with SCD being treated at Sylvester had received flu vaccinations in 2023. Working with an interdisciplinary team of colleagues and leaders, she set out to change that.

Smith’s mentor, Dr. Jeannette Garcia Slanker, UHealth Associate Chief Nursing Officer, connected her with Dr. Elizabeth Smith, UHealth’s Chief Nursing Officer. “Dr. Smith was very supportive,” she

recalled. Their request for 300 doses of flu vaccine to cover all pediatric patients with SCD treated by Dr. Alvarez went to Dr. Blanca Rivera, Associate VP of Pharmacy Services, as well as senior legal counsel, and the pharmacy and therapeutics committee. “The hospital approved the amount not just one time, but annually,” said Smith. “That was a huge win. It’s fantastic.” The first vaccinations rolled out November 2024, in time for flu season and a month before Smith’s graduation. Now, when pediatric patients with SCD arrive at Sylvester’s alex’s place, staff can offer a flu shot at no charge.

Education outcomes improved too. In her two-week audit of alex’s place Registered Nurses, Smith found that 85 percent of patients received evidence-based flu vaccine education. “It was good to see us move the dial,” she said. Since earning her D.N.P., Dr. Smith has looked for ways to make flu shots more accessible to all pediatric patients at Sylvester. “It’s good for all immunocompromised patients who have any chronic illness to be immunized,” she said. “Influenza vaccination remains the most efficient approach of inhibiting influenza illness in the community and

# School Launches Novel Oncology Program

In Fall 2025, the School of Nursing and Health Studies will roll out one of this nation’s few accredited Post-Master’s Certificate in Oncology programs. The program is the brainchild of the Oncology Nursing Society’s current president, Dr. Jessica MacIntyre, B.S.N. ’00. “This is a unique program,” said Dr. MacIntyre, assistant vice president of advanced practice providers at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, South Florida’s only National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center. “Through our collaboration as a school, cancer center, and health system, we are poised to transform patient care and enhance its quality by offering this post-graduate certificate program.”

The 18-credit hybrid program not only offers much-needed specialized education and training for advanced practice nurses to care for cancer patients and assist their families; it prepares graduates to pass the national board certification exam for advanced oncology certified nurse practitioners (AOCNP) as offered by the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation. In addition to Dr. MacIntyre, prestigious school faculty such as Drs. Debbie Anglade, Carmen Presti, and Deborah Salani will teach the curriculum with a focus on evidence-based, patient-centered practices, including management of physical, psychological, and social problems from cancer; prevention, early detection, current treatments, survivorship, and end-of-life issues; cellular and biological changes; genetics, the immune system, and lifestyle choices; epidemiology, pathology, and more.

“This school is truly forward-thinking,” said MacIntyre. “Being one of the few in the nation to offer this program sets us apart. Plus, we have an incredible



Oncology Nursing Society President Dr. Jessica MacIntyre, of Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, will lead the school’s newest certificate program.

network of experts here at Sylvester and across the country to provide guest lectures.” MacIntyre’s own passion for oncology nursing came from witnessing the high level of care and compassion her grandmother received. “I was drawn to oncology even before nursing school because my grandmother had metastatic breast cancer,” she said. “Watching the nurses care for her, especially during the end of her life, I realized that was my calling—to build that kind of connection with patients and support them through difficult times. I wanted to make a difference in cancer care.”

When MacIntyre began her own nursing career 25 years ago, there were zero educational programs like this one, so she worked on the oncology floor of another hospital for a couple of years and earned her master’s degree in nursing before getting a nurse practitioner position at Sylvester, part of the UHealth - University of Miami Health System. At Sylvester since 2002, she was promoted to director of clinical operations in 2015, executive director of clinical operations in 2018, and her current role in 2024, the same year she began her ONS presidency.

With Dr. Frank Penedo, director of Sylvester’s Cancer Survivorship Program, MacIntyre established Sylvester’s cancer survivorship program and served on an expert panel to develop National Standards for Cancer Survivorship Care with the National Cancer Institute’s Office of Cancer Survivorship. Additionally, she created Sylvester’s first oncology fellowship program for advanced practice providers, which incorporates simulation exercises at the school’s S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education®.

“Nurse practitioners are bridging gaps in oncology care, making specialized education and training essential,” said MacIntyre, an AOCNP with a dual D.N.P./M.B.A. degree. “Oncology nurses and nurse practitioners forge unique bonds with patients, their families and caregivers. We are present for every phase of a patient’s care, from diagnosis through survivorship and end-of-life care, becoming an integral part of their extended family.”

She credits Dean Hudson Santos (School of Nursing and Health Studies); Dr. Stephen Nimer, Dr. Frank Penedo, and Lazara Pagan (Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center); Drs. Elizabeth Smith, Jeannette Garcia-Slanker, and Douglas Houghton (UHealth); and nurse scientists Drs. Cindy ToftHagen and Cindy Munro “for making this collaborative program a reality.”

*Apply for the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education-accredited Post-Master’s Certificate in Oncology at <https://nursingcas.org>. Learn more at <https://www.sonhs.miami.edu/academics/certificate-programs/post-masters-certificate-in-oncology-nurse-practitioner>.*



# Nurse Scientists Inducted into Bouchet Graduate Honor Society

In 1876, Edward Alexander Bouchet became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. in physics. In 2005, Bouchet's alma mater, Yale University, honored his legacy by founding the Edward Alexander Bouchet Graduate Honor Society, which promotes excellence in academic achievement at the doctoral, postdoctoral, and faculty levels. This April, doctoral nursing students Tericka "Teri" Cesar, Ph.D. '25, and Alexa Parra, B.S.N./B.S.P.H. '16, Ph.D. '25, traveled to Yale from the University of Miami for induction into the ranks of this prestigious society.

Society membership is available to doctoral students in good standing who have "shown outstanding promise as a scholar, as evidenced by independent investigation or current work on a dissertation project," states the University of Miami web page about the Bouchet Society and Conference. Both nurse scientists, who were scheduled to defend their dissertations a month after the induction ceremony, certainly fit this description.

Cesar's research has several aims, with the primary two being to validate the Family Health Scale for African Americans and to analyze the relationship between family health and obesity based on the parent study by public health researcher Dr. Ali Crandall, of Brigham Young University. Parra's research focus is on identifying the impact of social determinants of health on Afro-Latina maternal morbidity and birth outcomes in Florida.

Having a diversity of professors helping with research expanded my



view of what is possible," said Parra, whose dissertation was on "The Effects of Intersecting Identity and Social Determinants of Health on Afro-Latina Maternal Morbidity and Infant Birth Outcomes in Florida." She was nominated for the Bouchet Society by Dean Hudson P. Santos Jr. and her program mentor, Dr. Cynthia Lebron, an assistant professor. Because Dr. Lebron is already a member of the society, said Parra, "sharing this accomplishment with her has been especially meaningful."

Dr. Arsham Alamian, associate dean for Health Studies, and Dr. Victoria Behar-Zusman, director of the school's Ph.D. in nursing science program, nominated Cesar. "Membership in the Bouchet Graduate Honor Society provides a source of inspiration and energy that will enable me to empower others,

serving as an endless and renewable resource," said Cesar. "Being a part of the Bouchet Society represents scholarly ambition, advocacy, and collective advancement of the missions of the society's key thrusts of Scholarship, Character, Leadership, Service, and Advocacy."

Cesar and Parra were inducted with three University of Miami doctoral students from different disciplines and dozens of other nominees from institutions around the nation during the Annual Yale Bouchet Conference on Graduate Education. Organizers also invited Cesar to present her research poster "Valid and Valued: A Validation Study of the Family Health Scale in a Subpopulation of African Americans."

# Spring Sightings at SONHS



Dean Santos and Dr. Crenshaw welcome students to the State Attorney's Office Human Trafficking Forum



Business of Healthcare: Student Anaya Iglesias, center, connects with ANA President Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, left, and Dean Santos



Britney Simon, president, Multicultural Nursing Student Association, shares info at the University Spring Involvement Fair



Spring Academic Fair in full swing



CRNA Days: Nurse anesthesia students go to Tallahassee



Giving Day Thank You Breakfast: 73 donors raise \$263,710



Dean's Spring Lecture Series: Dr. Jerome Adams, former US Surgeon General



Celebrating Public Health Week, April 7 to 13



Suturing course and St. Paddy's Day fun at S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education®



## Dean on the Scene

Q: What ONE word describes how you feel going into the Spring 2025 semester?

Photos by C. Gonzalez



"Grateful."



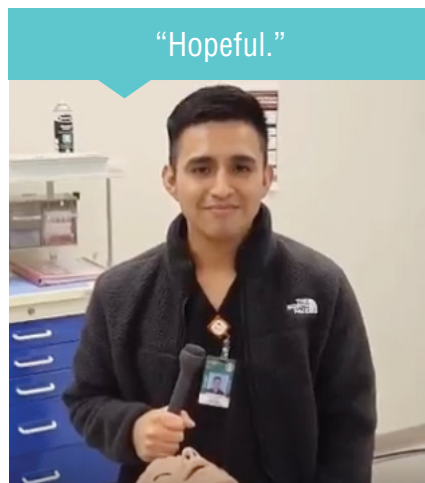
"Nervous."



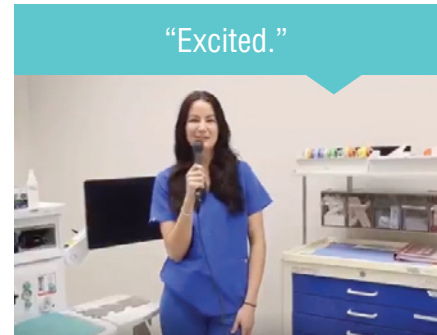
"Motivated."



"Hopeful."



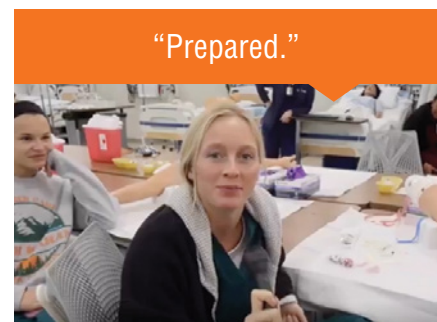
"Excited."



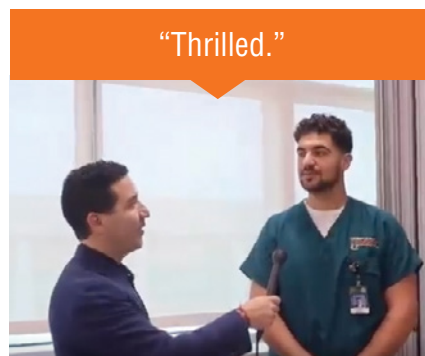
"Open—to learning and new opportunities."



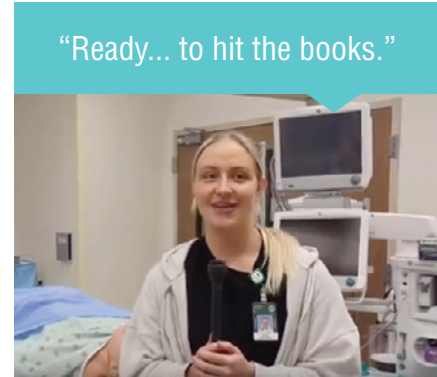
"Prepared."



"Thrilled."



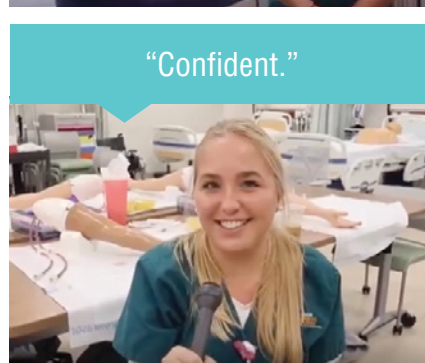
"Ready... to hit the books."



"Ready...for spring break."



"Confident."



## Feeding Hope

Public health student Emily Lo took a class assignment to heart, launching Lunch Box of Love for her community.

By Robin Shear

"Thank you for assigning the 'Make the World Better' project." That's how Emily Lo's email to School of Nursing and Health Studies faculty member Dr. Andrew Porter began. "I want to share an update on what turned out to be a truly life-changing experience. It inspired me to finally bring to life a project I've dreamed of for a while—Lunchbox of Love."

After Dr. Porter, associate professor of clinical, asked students in his global health class to create a community engagement project as a small portion of their overall grade, Lo decided to raise money for hungry and unhoused members of her Greater Chicago community during the holiday break this past November. "I originally anticipated just a few donations," recalled Lo, a junior public health major. Instead, she raised \$2,000. After researching, she found a shelter that was understaffed and running low on food, and set a date with them for a Lunchbox of Love delivery. "They trusted me entirely, and I felt so honored and grateful to fulfill my promise," said Lo, who was up till 1 a.m. on Thanksgiving making turkey and cheese sandwiches and writing heartfelt letters of support to people she'd never met.

"My dad helped load the car, and my parents joined me at the shelter to watch as I greeted each of the 200 homeless individuals and handed them a meal as they came in from Chicago's freezing temperatures," Lo recounted. "The experience brought me to tears. From the children excitedly clutching extra Rice Krispies Treats I tucked into their bags, to the women moved to tears reading my



love letters, to the tough men sipping from tiny juice boxes, it was humbling and beautiful."

Her efforts exceeded Dr. Porter's expectations. "Thank you so much for sharing your incredible Make the World a Better Place project," he replied to Lo. "I love the Lunchbox of Love. Not only did you take an assignment and transform it into something extraordinary, but you also stepped into a role that had a tangible and deeply meaningful impact on the lives of so many people. Your story is a testament to the power of caring and the change one person can inspire when they act with purpose. I can only imagine the joy you brought to the people you served and the gratitude felt by the staff who saw your heart in action."

Moved by her first experience with shelter residents and staff, Lo returned over winter break, even though her assignment for Porter was complete. This time, she raised enough to serve 300 meals, including chicken from a popular fast-food vendor, 600 homemade M&M and chocolate chip cookies Lo baked overnight, hot cocoa, and coffee. "This assignment sparked something incredible," Lo told Porter. "Coming from a comfortable home and a school like the University of Miami, this experience opened my eyes in ways I can't fully describe. It's been deeply rewarding to step into a role where I can give back."

Lo remains committed to volunteering at the shelter beyond the holidays, with hopes of taking on a bigger role there at some point. "They are a wonderful place filled with love, but they desperately need someone with the drive to help them organize and grow," she said. Since returning to school this spring, she also established the Emily Lo Foundation, a nonprofit status that she said will enable her to do even more projects like her first. One such effort is already under way, she said, a partnership she's developing with the Theta Chi fraternity on campus to feed unhoused veterans in Miami. Seeing the outcome of Lo's compassion, determination, and heart struck a "profound sense of pride and joy" in Porter. "Students like you are the reason I love teaching," he said. "Watching you channel your passion into something that brings so much light to the world reminds me why this work matters."



# Nurses Unite to Find a Way Out of Human Trafficking

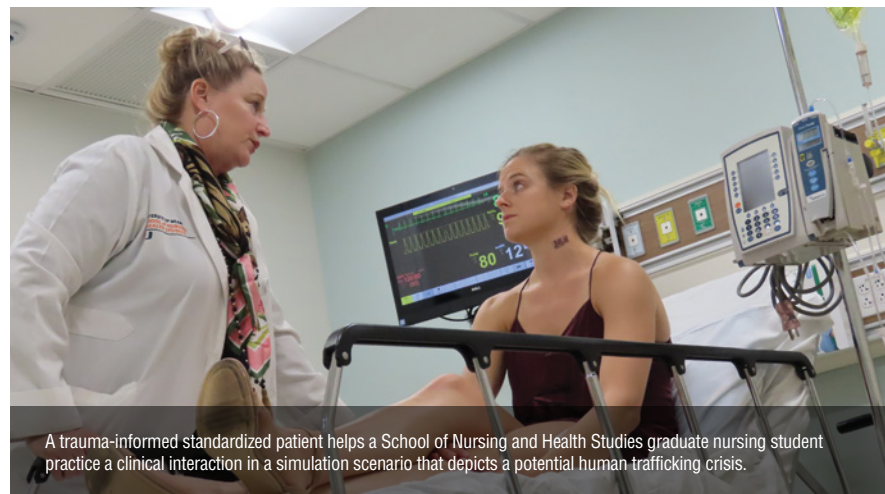
By Robin Shear

Right now, according to the US Department of State, an estimated 27 million people around the globe, including young children, are trapped in the horror of being exploited and sold for labor and sex. The US National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-3737-888) reports it has handled over 400,000 contacts about trafficking and identified some 197,000 victims in every US state and territory and another 179 nations since 2007.



Despite trafficked individuals suffering ongoing abuse, trauma, and neglect, statistics suggest that as many as 63 to 87 percent of those seen in health care facilities are never identified as captives, much less given the help or hope they need to get free. “Human trafficking is a huge public health problem, and health care professionals can make a huge difference,” said Dr. Hudson Santos Jr., dean, professor, and Dolores J. Chambreau, RN Endowed Chair in Nursing at the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies. “Recognizing signs of human trafficking is one of the first steps for us to be effective in combatting it. If we cannot identify human trafficking, we cannot stop it.”

In many states, including Florida, health care professionals are required to complete a human trafficking continuing education course for license renewal. It’s a start, but Dean Santos thinks more can and should be done. “Nurses [in Florida] go into practice initially without a requirement for human trafficking training until two years later, when they have to renew their license,” he said. “Our



A trauma-informed standardized patient helps a School of Nursing and Health Studies graduate nursing student practice a clinical interaction in a simulation scenario that depicts a potential human trafficking crisis.

goal is to close that gap. We believe every health care provider or every person looking forward to being an allied health professional should have basic knowledge of human trafficking identification because it takes a whole village to identify, report, and catch the case, then treat the people who have been victimized.”

To that end, Dean Santos is working with Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle and recently announced plans to launch a school certificate program for human

trafficking nursing education (see sidebar). Beyond the certificate, Dean Santos has proposed the idea of drafting a state law requiring graduates to take human trafficking awareness training as a prerequisite to sitting for their nursing licensure exam (NCLEX). Dean Santos also discussed pursuing this initiative with emergency physician Heidi Schaeffer, M.D. ’98, and Florida Nurses Association president Marie O. Etienne, D.N.P. ’10, both University graduates and veteran anti-trafficking educators. “If you’re a nurse or physician today, it’s your job to really meet these patients

where they’re at, build a rapport,” said Dr. Schaeffer, a Visiting Scholar at the school who has helped pass victim-centered legislation. “Nurses are the backbone of the health care profession, and the School of Nursing and Health Studies is passionate about educating not only their faculty but every nurse who graduates from their program in a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach to this special type of population.”

Dean Santos said the school is eager to build upon critical foundations laid by nurses like distinguished double alumna Dr. JoNell Efantis Potter, M.S.N. ’87, Ph.D. ’03 (see sidebar), and Drs. Deborah Salani and Betty Valdes, associate professors of clinical. In 2019, the year the Florida Board of Nursing mandated human trafficking continuing education, Drs. Salani and Valdes piloted the school’s human trafficking awareness curriculum. They have since taught almost 1,000 students and providers to recognize clinical red flags commonly associated with trafficking. Their simulation-based curriculum includes a powerful emergency department



Dr. Donna Shalala, center

scenario in which a standardized, trauma-informed patient presents with evidence of possible exploitation. Salani and Valdes published a study with five school colleagues in the peer-reviewed Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners demonstrating that their evidence-based curriculum is a feasible tool for teaching nurse practitioners to recognize signs of human trafficking and understand how best to safely promote appropriate resources for patients they suspect are at risk. They have also worked with doctoral nursing students interested in pursuing solutions for providers.

Aileen Alvarez, D.N.P. ’22, for example, created a rapid assessment for trafficking reference card that

hospital personnel can keep handy in their badge holders. “Florida ranks number three in the country for human trafficking, and Miami-Dade has the highest reports per county, so it was somewhat alarming to find out that most places don’t screen for human trafficking,” said Alvarez. “We need more standards for mandatory screening for human trafficking in the same way we screen for depression and domestic violence. I just would love nurses to feel more comfortable having those difficult conversations with patients.” Dean Santos would too, and he’s optimistic the school can help make that happen. “The good news is we already have the clinical expertise and curriculum at the school. Now the work is to figure out how we transform this resource to extrapolate it across the state and hopefully across the nation,” he said. “That’s our call for action moving forward.”

*Generous support of the school’s human trafficking awareness efforts comes from the Sylvester Foundation, led by Jayne S. Malfitano; Maria G. Lamas; and Dr. Heidi Schaeffer.*

## SAO Human Trafficking Forum



State Attorney Fernandez Rundle, center, with Deans Kohn Wood, Abril, Santos, and Wilkins

Every January, in honor of National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, the School of Nursing and Health Studies hosts a symposium made possible by the Maria G. Lamas Featured Speaker Series for Human Trafficking Education and Prevention Endowment. This year, Dean Hudson Santos amplified the annual event, inviting Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle to host her State Attorney’s Office (SAO)

Forum on Human Trafficking at the University of Miami for the first time. The forum, themed “Healthcare Heroes: Making a Difference for Survivors,” drew over 400 attendees. “When I look out on this room, I see what you see: collaboration, partnerships, friends, people who are all on a mission together,” said State Attorney Fernandez Rundle. “Today we’re forming a partnership with our medical professionals, our nurses.” Since establishing its Human Trafficking Task Force in 2012, the State Attorney’s Office has filed 906 human trafficking criminal cases, resulting in freedom for 1,257 people being trafficked in those cases, reported Fernandez Rundle. In 2024 alone, she reported, her team made 104 human trafficking-related arrests, provided comprehensive services to over 105 trafficking survivors, and fielded 539 calls to the Miami human

trafficking hotline (305-FIX-STOP) her office started. “We’ve learned a lot,” she said. “We learned that online is really the platform where we need to be doing a better job of understanding what we as investigators, as police, as prosecutors need to be able to make a case.”

The forum also featured two panel discussions: a community resources panel chaired by Miller School of Medicine Professor Dr. JoNell Efantis Potter, founding director of THRIVE Clinic, and a panel chaired by former University president Dr. Donna E. Shalala that featured five deans from the University, including Santos. “This is what nurses do,” said Dean Santos, “bring people together and address social inequities. Bringing the schools together, we should think about how we can address human trafficking from different lenses with the same goal in mind.”

## THRIVE Turns 10

In the early days of Miami’s HIV/AIDS epidemic, JoNell Potter, M.S.N. ’87, Ph.D. ’03, a double alumna of the nursing school, innovated a multidisciplinary model of health care for women and children infected with the virus. Decades later, the Miller School of Medicine professor found herself caring for vulnerable patients suffering horribly from another public health crisis, human trafficking. “It was not just a matter of performing a simple GYN exam,” recalled Dr. Potter. “They had experienced trauma, and they had tremendous medical care and mental health needs.” She and her Miller School colleague Dr. Panagiota “Pat” Caralis, an internist, enlisted nurse practitioners, physicians, psychologists, and trauma-informed patient navigators, among others. They also reached out to Miami-Dade State Attorney Katherine Fernandez



Dr. JoNell Potter

Rundle. “She advocated on our behalf,” said Potter. “She made it clear that there was a gap in health care access for these patients and that they desperately needed specialized, trauma-informed health care services.” In 2015, the Trafficking

Healthcare Resources and Intra-Disciplinary Victim Services and Education (THRIVE) Clinic opened. This unique collaboration between the Miller School and Jackson Health System quickly became a national model. Now in its 10th year, THRIVE Clinic provides everything from primary and gynecological care to prenatal, psychiatry, and behavioral health services in one contained clinic space. THRIVE Clinic, said Dean Santos, is “the perfect example of nursing-led care that has evolved into an interprofessional clinic serving people at the most vulnerable place in their lives.”

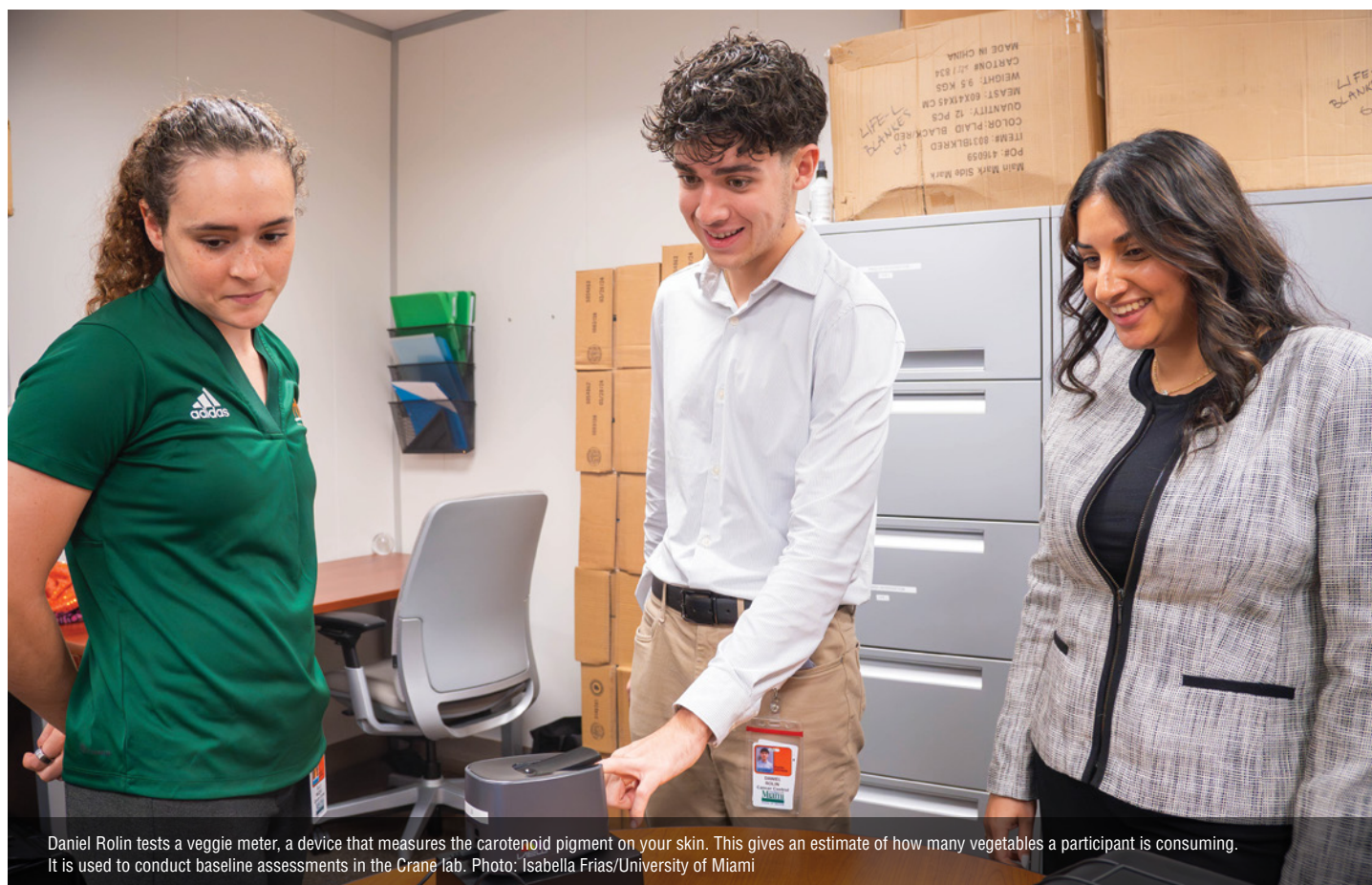
*Robert C. Jones Jr. contributed to this report.*



# SPARK for Science

Gifted undergrads pursue ‘fast track into cancer research’ with innovative mentoring programs at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center.

By Janette Neuwahl Tannen



Daniel Rolin tests a veggie meter, a device that measures the carotenoid pigment on your skin. This gives an estimate of how many vegetables a participant is consuming. It is used to conduct baseline assessments in the Crane lab. Photo: Isabella Frias/University of Miami

When Daniel Rolin, a sophomore health science major at the School of Nursing and Health Studies, took a kinesiology course in Fall 2023, he found out there are more benefits to his daily workouts than simply looking fit and feeling great. He could also be fending off cancer, if he paired his exercise with eating right. “We spoke about foods that inhibit certain enzymes and reduce the chances of cancer metastasizing,” he said. “Foods that include fiber, like nuts, seeds, and legumes, along with leafy greens, beets, and carrots.”

The experience piqued Rolin’s interest in cancer research and motivated him to apply for a new pilot program that pairs undergraduates with top

researchers studying cancer control, tumor biology, and translational oncology at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. Launched in the Fall 2024 semester, the program is called Sylvester Program for Academic Research and Knowledge, or SPARK, and it allows undergraduates to be immersed in cancer research and earn course credit for their work. It grew out of a collaboration between leaders at Sylvester and the Office of Undergraduate Research. “SPARK provides undergraduates with a fast track into cancer research with eminent mentors at the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center who are internationally recognized for their

research,” said Dr. Michael Gaines, the University’s director of undergraduate research and community outreach.

Rolin and fellow health science major Paige Owusu-Ofori, a sophomore, were two of the first five undergraduates selected to SPARK. Rolin is in associate professor Tracy Crane’s lab, alongside a large team of scientists exploring the most effective ways to tailor diet and exercise interventions for cancer survivors. The 50-member lab team employs evidence-based strategies to support cancer survivors in adopting healthier lifestyle choices and improving their quality of life. “Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in the US,”



Elayna Bassuk



Anaya Hill

said Rolin, a premed student, “but if we spread more awareness about the steps we can take to prevent breast and colorectal cancer, that’s ideal.”

Crane runs several clinical trials to help cancer survivors, and Rolin’s support has been critical, she said. He spends over 10 hours a week working with postdoctoral fellow Harleen Kaur to identify and recruit participants for the Precision Oncology Interventions in Nutrition and Training, or OnPOINT, intervention study. Rolin is also creating educational materials for survivors to track their diet and exercise. “These are all heavy personnel trials, so Daniel is one of the many people helping us run OnPOINT and make it a success,” said Crane, an associate professor of medical oncology and Sylvester’s director of lifestyle medicine, prevention, and digital health. “The SPARK program is a great way to identify students who are interested in cancer and who want to be involved.”

Owusu-Ofori had always been interested in becoming a doctor, but after shadowing oncologists while still in high school, she decided she would like to care for cancer patients. In research assistant professor Anis Ahmad’s lab, she is helping to investigate the benefits and drawbacks



Sophomore Paige Owusu-Ofori loads micro-stained slides of kidney tissue for digital scanning. She will later edit and enlarge the photos before they are uploaded for analysis in the Ahmad lab.

of radiation treatment for cancer patients. The lab focuses on using kidney tissue to identify these impacts, and Owusu-Ofori is learning complex biomedical techniques to analyze samples. “This experience has been eye opening for me to see another side of medicine,” she said. “I am now able to look beyond medical care at new treatments and techniques from a scientific point of view, and I feel very fortunate to get this training.” Owusu-Ofori plans to keep working in Ahmad’s lab for at least the next two years. SPARK requires students to spend at least 8 hours a week in the lab to earn two credits. After two semesters, they also may be eligible to earn a stipend, said Vanina Zack, the program coordinator.

Senior public health major Anaya Hill, B.S.P.H. ’25, was selected in 2024 for Diversity in Cancer Research (DICR), another program launched at Sylvester in 2023 and privately funded by the American Cancer Society. Hill’s grandfather passed away from cancer when she was in high school, but his work as a chemist continues to inspire her. “He planted the seed and would be so proud,” she told the Miller School. “And now I’m doing research on the disease that took his life, which makes perfect sense.”

Elayna Bassuk, a junior public health major, learned about Sylvester’s Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship, SURF, as a member of the Project Public Health club and was accepted into the program last summer. “I enjoyed being with all the other research fellows,” said Bassuk, who conducted a qualitative study on how extreme heat in Miami-Dade affects people with cancer. She also presented her work at various events, including giving a poster presentation to Dr. Stephen D. Nimer, Sylvester’s director and the Miller School’s Oscar De la Renta Endowed Chair in Cancer Research. “I went through the background, methods, findings, and the five key themes I pulled out from my research,” said Bassuk.

Programs like SPARK, SURF, and DICR are “essential for inspiring the next generation of medical researchers and fostering a passion for discovery in young minds,” said Dr. Nimer. “By engaging undergraduate students early in their academic journey, we have the opportunity to direct their energies and talent to help them appreciate the breadth and impact of cancer research.”

Email [vzack@miami.edu](mailto:vzack@miami.edu) (SPARK) or [surf@miami.edu](mailto:surf@miami.edu) for more information.



# Titans of Teamwork

A simulation-based Canes partnership helps novice nurses launch their health care careers in Miami with confidence and critical skills.

By Yolanda Mancilla



Titan Canes Nurse Residents Susie Londoño and Giselle Tellechea get hands-on immersion at S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education®.

Giselle Tellechea's patient presents with diabetic ketoacidosis and a history of congestive heart failure that's poorly managed at home. When she enters his hospital room, he's already on monitors, so Tellechea gets to work, talking with him, and checking his wristband, code status, labs, and other orders. Noting his dangerously high glucose level, she administers insulin and continues her assessment. Suddenly, however, the patient gets short of breath. His condition

deteriorates quickly, and Tellechea has to activate a Code Blue alert and start CPR. Soon she begins getting feedback on the depth and speed of her chest compressions. The instructions help her make life-saving adjustments to stabilize her patient, who in this case is not really a patient or even a human for that matter. He's actually a high-tech simulation mannequin. In fact, every aspect of this fast-evolving scenario—from the mannequin's voice and vital signs to the advanced technical

guidance—has been staged by a team of nursing simulation experts watching and recording Tellechea's every move.

That's because Tellechea, a new nurse, is spending the day at S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education®, the state-of-the-art teaching facility run by the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies. "I was very nervous because I didn't know what to expect, and some things did catch me

off guard," she said. "They can adjust so many things within the simulation environment, so I can be more aware when I go into the real world and assess a patient. Everything about it was very on-point."

Her daylong simulation immersion was a key part of the Titan 'Canes Nurse Residency, an intensive six-month training program designed to onboard newly minted nurses at UHealth - The University of Miami Health System. The team of educators guiding Tellechea and her peers are S.H.A.R.E. faculty and simulation technicians working closely with dedicated nurse educators from UHealth Tower, where Tellechea was hired last year as a newly licensed registered nurse. "When on the job at UHealth, it may be easier for a novice nurse to rely on others who are more skilled, but during a simulation, when a patient suddenly goes into a Code Blue, they have to jump into action and respond on their own," said Zuzer Calero, executive director for business operations at S.H.A.R.E.

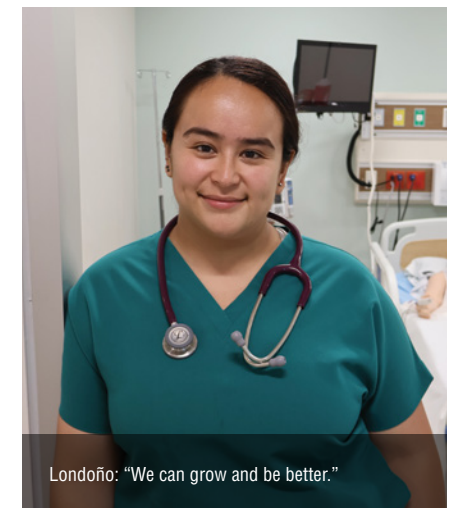
Participants in the Titan 'Canes Nurse Residency also attend didactic lectures, engage in hands-on clinical practice with real patients, and shadow their preceptors. By the end of their residency, they are expected to care for a five-patient caseload competently and independently. "The whole environment at S.H.A.R.E. is conducive to learning," said Anide Telfort, M.S.N., APRN, FNP-C, a senior nurse educator in the Department of

Professional Development at UHealth Tower and director of the Titan 'Canes program. "Everything is structured and set up to meet the specific training needs of each individual nurse resident. They're all nervous at the beginning, but by the end they're asking me, can we do this again? They tell me that after the simulation day they feel more confident when they're back on the floor at UHealth. The experience opens their eyes."

The S.H.A.R.E. team provides novice nurses like Tellechea with an eight-hour immersion day in the first six weeks of their residency. They guide small groups through increasingly challenging simulated scenarios developed especially for the UHealth program. The nurse residents have to set up hospital rooms, accept patient hand-offs, and conduct admission assessments. They're called on to respond to everything from urgent, drastic situations, like performing CPR while calling for a Rapid Response Team, to more subtle concerns, like recognizing variations in a patient's vital signs or noticing something amiss in the hospital room.

"S.H.A.R.E. plays a crucial role in ensuring the residency's success," explained Dr. Frank Guido Sanz, the associate dean for simulation education and research and a professor of clinical at the school. "We provide opportunities for the residents to work both independently and in teams in a safe, controlled environment."

"At first it was nerve-racking," said Susie Londoño, another program resident. In her simulation, the patient had a history of acute myeloid leukemia and hypertension and was experiencing weakness, nausea, fever, and chills. Londoño practiced critical communication skills with Rapid Response Team members, who arrived without delay after she activated a Code Blue emergency. "My patient was neutropenic, and I hadn't encountered that in real life, so that was something new I needed to keep an eye on," she said. "It's important to experience new scenarios. If I have



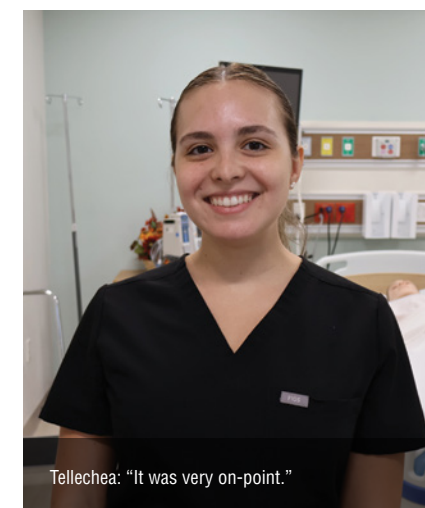
Londoño: "We can grow and be better."

this in real life, now I know what to look for. I know what to do."

Every session is recorded so after the simulation, residents gather in the S.H.A.R.E. debriefing room to review the footage, learn from each other, and discuss what went well along with what they might have done differently. "That's the best thing about simulation," said Londoño. "It's where we can make mistakes so we can grow and be better in real life."

Telfort agrees. "During our fast-paced simulations, the residents are constantly asking themselves, 'What am I missing? What didn't they tell me? What's happening to the patient? What else do I need to know, ask, or do? What is my next step?' In the process, they're using and sharpening critical thinking skills and becoming more confident clinicians," she said.

S.H.A.R.E. and UHealth are partnering on providing simulation-based education for up to 90 nurse residents each year. "Everything—training, technology and hands-on experience—comes together to make it real," said Calero. The benefits for health care are also real. "At S.H.A.R.E., we learn more about what to focus on and do in certain situations," said Tellechea. "The simulation experience helps us to be better prepared before we go into our patients' rooms at UHealth Tower."



Tellechea: "It was very on-point."



# Creating Healthy Communities

## Dr. Saribel Quinones, Associate Professor of Clinical

By Robin Shear

Photos Courtesy of Dr. Saribel Quinones



Saribel Quinones, B.S.N. '88, M.S.N. '95, is helping Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) students excel in pediatric practice through a creative collaboration. "I'm a big advocate for health promotion and disease prevention, which is what primary care is all about," said Dr. Quinones, a pediatric primary care nurse practitioner who earned her doctoral degree at Columbia University. "Primary care is a vital service, and it involves engaging with the community, working proactively to prevent illness in children and safeguard their health."

When Quinones discovered that Family Nurse Practitioner programs were having trouble providing students with adequate pediatric clinical experiences, she addressed the dilemma head on, first as a New York University faculty member and then at her two-time alma mater, the University of Miami, where she returned as an associate professor of clinical in 2022. At both schools, Quinones devised "a faculty-led clinical project so all students in the FNP program rotate through pediatric primary care and meet specific competencies," she explained. Back in Miami she found support at the Miller School, where she had worked for 17

years before relocating to New York. Specifically, she teamed up with Dr. Lisa Gwynn, a professor of clinical pediatrics and public health sciences who serves as medical director for the Pediatric Mobile Clinic program and the University of Miami/Dr. John T. Macdonald Foundation School Health Initiative. "To her credit, Dr. Gwynn opened the doors and said, 'we need you, let's collaborate and make this work.' This is a true partnership."

Since launching her pilot in 2023, Quinones has spent one day per week seeing patients with four FNP students. Her rotating schedule enables 36 FNP students per year to complete their required pediatric primary care clinical hours. "Students are able to bring what they learned in the classroom into practice every week and meet all their competencies for pediatric primary care," she said. "It's been extremely valuable. By the end of their rotation, the students have demonstrated significant improvement in all pediatric preventive competencies."



Quinones uses the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF) pediatric preventive care competencies and the American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures guidelines to guide the rotation. Last year a paper she wrote on the topic with Dr. Cynthia L. Foronda, the school's assistant dean of innovation

and scholarship, was published online in *Nursing Education Perspectives*. Quinones presented the study findings at the 2025 American Association of Colleges of Nursing's Doctoral Education Pre-Conference.

Initially, she and her students saw patients in a mobile health unit but in Spring 2024 relocated to a larger clinic at Miami's Booker T. Washington Senior High School. There they conduct comprehensive histories, perform head-to-toe physicals, take vitals, draw labs, administer vaccines, provide anticipatory guidance and education, do screening questionnaires, and make referrals for additional assistance. "Dr. Quinones is dedicated to providing excellent care to our pediatric patients, while providing invaluable hands-on experience for her nursing students," said Dr. Gwynn. "Her passion for teaching and caring creates a supportive environment where both students and young patients thrive."

The patients range from 2 to 18 years old. Many are new immigrants, which gives the FNP students ample opportunities to learn about the social determinants of health such as housing and food insecurities, noted Quinones. They handle sports physicals for school athletes as well, and triage other students who may drop in with more pressing concerns. There's also a mental health component to the clinic's grant, so Quinones is working with the University's on-site psychology leads to promote interprofessional development between their undergraduate research assistants and her grad students. "We're teaching both groups about incorporating mental health screeners into primary care," she said. "Working with this interprofessional team has been wonderful. It's been a great experience overall."

# New Faculty



**Maria de los Angeles Ortega Hernández**, D.N.P., APRN, GNP-BC, PMHNP-BC, CNS, CDP, FAANP, FAAN, joined the school as associate dean for graduate clinical programs and professor of clinical at the start of the Spring 2025 semester. For the past decade, she was director of the Louis and Anne Green Memory and Wellness Center (MWC)

at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) and in 2024 became the CEO of the FAU/Northwest Community Health Alliance Community Health Center in West Palm Beach. In addition, Dr. Ortega was an associate dean of clinical practice and professor in the practice teaching track at FAU's Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing. Her innovative thinking and demonstrated leadership in clinical care, scholarship, teaching, research, and policy development have resulted in health care advances for Latinx and other vulnerable populations in the United States and globally. A Fellow of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and of the American Academy of Nursing, Dr. Ortega was named an AAN Edge Runner in 2021 for "Caring Science Model of Specialized Dementia Care for Transforming Practice and Advancing Health Equity." She is a board certified Gerontological and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner, Clinical Nurse Specialist, and Certified Dementia Practitioner whose clinical specialties include gerontology, psychiatry, and mental health. Her scholarly endeavors are aimed at improving health outcomes of older adults transitioning from the hospital to skilled nursing facilities post-open-heart surgery and with cognitive impairment. Ortega's continuing postdoctoral work is focused on enhancing and sustaining specialized long-term care services and supports through excellence in clinical practice and integrated care coordination. She has initiated or participated in 22 externally funded grants in the areas of Alzheimer's disease, home-based care, advance care planning, psychiatric and mental health, and community outreach. Her philanthropic efforts have raised millions of dollars supporting the MWC. She has led and facilitated clinical practicum experiences at the MWC for nursing, medical, and social work students. She holds B.S.N., M.S., and D.N.P. degrees from FAU and earned her post-graduate psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner degree from Johns Hopkins University.



**Frank Guido-Sanz**, Ph.D., APRN, ANP-BC, AGACNP-BC, CHSE, FAANP, joined the School of Nursing and Health Studies and S.H.A.R.E. Simulation Hospital Advancing Research & Education® (S.H.A.R.E.) as associate dean for simulation education and research and professor of clinical in January 2025. In his administrative role, he will focus on expanding education, research, and corporate partnerships contributed by S.H.A.R.E. Most recently,

Dr. Guido-Sanz was a tenured associate professor and the graduate simulation coordinator at the University of Central Florida College of Nursing. A Certified Healthcare Simulation Educator®, he is a member of the Society for Simulation in Healthcare (SSH) and the International Nursing Association of Clinical and Simulation Learning (INACSL). He chaired and co-chaired the Simulation Special Interest Group of the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties, which presented him its Outstanding Research Award in 2020. Guido-Sanz has been an intensivist nurse practitioner since 2006, with clinical experience in critical care and intensive care. He was an active member of the National Disaster Medical System's Trauma and Critical Care Team for over 20 years, leveraging clinical expertise as lead nurse practitioner on several national and international deployments to provide care to disaster victims. His research focus is on the use of simulation to improve outcomes in acute and critical care, trauma, disaster health (including mass casualties), combat casualties, and nursing education. He is co-inventor of three patented wound simulation systems with several others under review and is involved in several research collaborations related to graduate education and training for acute care, trauma, and combat and disaster casualties. He developed a medical handoff tool for the uniformed services that was tested and published, and several diagnostic and intervention algorithms for training systems using voice recognition technology to aid in the care of combat casualties. Guido-Sanz earned his B.S.N. from Barry University in Miami. He holds M.S.N. and Ph.D. degrees from Florida International University, and in 2024 received FIU's Distinguished Alumni Award for Excellence in Nursing Innovation. He completed Adult/Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner and Nurse Educator certificates, plus an International Family-focused Healthcare Certificate in Family-Focused Interdisciplinary Healthcare Across Cultures from the Sapienza University of Rome.



**Wonsuk Yoo**, Ph.D., was hired as a research associate professor, biostatistician effective January. Before joining the school, he was an associate professor in the Department of Translational Neuroscience at the Barrow Neurological Institute and director of the Ivy Brain Tumor Center Biostatistics Program in Phoenix, Arizona. He also led the institute's Biostatistics Core Shared Resources. Dr. Yoo, who was named a Young Investigator presented by the American Statistical Association in 2005, is an experienced biostatistician and population health scientist. His expertise is in clinical trial study designs related to intervention studies and drug therapeutic studies, population-based cancer research, and data-driven health disparity studies. His research aims to develop statistical and quantitative methods and conduct collaborative research to



# New Faculty

develop novel approaches to address real-world problems in health, cancer, and medicine. Throughout his career, he has used biostatistical and quantitative methods to reduce health disparities using national survey databases (NHANES/NIS/BRFSS), cancer registry data (SEER/NCTR), health services and Medicare data, BioLINCC, FITBIR, and The Cancer Genome Atlas (TCGA). His current research includes post-hoc go/no-go decisions based on artificial neural network based modeling for single-arm trials of rare diseases, health disparities research on the development of disparity metrics/indicator(s) based on disease burden and economic burden, data-driven disease progression modelling including imaging and genomic data for neurodegenerative diseases, causal inference using machine learning algorithm, cost prediction modeling in dementia and Alzheimer disease, and population-based, data-driven research using public-access big databases. As an educator, Dr. Yoo has over 15 years of graduate and training program teaching experience in biostatistics, epidemiology, and research method courses based on evidence-based instruction and novel educational technologies in biostatistics and data science. He also has a keen interest in continuing to develop web-based resources in biostatistics and research methods for students and researchers. He is a member of the American Association for Cancer Research, the American Statistics Association, and the American Public Health Association. He earned his Doctor of Philosophy in biostatistics from the Medical University of South Carolina, Master of Science in statistics from the University of Florida, and Bachelor of Arts in social science from Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea.



**Marva Hodges Louisville**, D.N.P. '23, was already an alumna and a long-time member of the Hurricanes family when she was named a senior lecturer in the school's B.S.N.-D.N.P. Nurse Anesthesia Program for the start of the Spring 2025 semester. She is a Certified Healthcare Simulation Educator® who has worked with the school as a health care simulation educator since 2022, a part-time lecturer since 2023, and a clinical faculty and faculty advisor since August 2024. As a proud staff CRNA with the University of Miami Medical Group since 2017, Louisville provides anesthesia care to surgical patients. In addition, she draws on more than two decades of clinical CRNA experience to educate, precept, and mentor student registered nurse anesthetists (SRNAs). After earning her B.S.N. from Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisville joined the United States Air Force. As a Captain and critical care nurse, she provided advanced, high-acuity care to critically ill or injured military personnel and beneficiaries, collaborated with multidisciplinary teams to develop and implement patient care plans, and provided leadership, mentorship, and training to junior nursing officers and enlisted medical technicians. She then served as a major

in the US Army Reserve's 405th Combat Support Hospital for almost two decades. As a civilian, Louisville has participated in medical aid trips to Belize, Haiti, and Cambodia. She earned her Master of Science in Anesthesia through Xavier University in New Orleans and her M.S.N.-D.N.P. from the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies.

**Felicia Casanova**, Ph.D., joined the School of Nursing and Health Studies as a research assistant professor Spring 2025, after completing a National Institute of Mental Health-funded competitive R25 Community and Clinical HIV Research Training Fellowship at the Brown University School of Public Health. At the University of Miami, she was a fellow with the Center for HIV and Research in Mental Health (CHARM), supported by a T32 postdoctoral fellowship through the Culturally focused HIV Advancements through the Next Generation for Equity (C.H.A.N.G.E.) program. She is currently the principal investigator of a competitive National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) K01 Mentored Career Development Award. Her project—ADDRESS: Disruptions and Displacement Response for Equitable and Sustainable Systems of HIV Care in Puerto Rico—examines the impact of extreme weather events on HIV care continuity and mental health, leveraging social networks to design disaster-resilient interventions in highly affected communities. Dr. Casanova's broader research program bridges HIV, cancer disparities, and environmental health. As a doctoral student, she led community-based participatory research investigating breast cancer screening disparities and risk factors among Latinx immigrant farmworker families. She also received the CHARM Scholars Award, supporting her work on HIV data equity and participatory approaches to improving community-relevant data representation in Miami-Dade. Additional honors include the National Institute on Drug Abuse Diversity Travel Award and the University's Center for Global Black Studies Faculty Research Grant. Past Peace Corps experience in Guatemala continues to inform Dr. Casanova's community-engaged research approach. She has published in JAMA, Qualitative Health Research, PLOS One, Weather, Climate, and Society, and other leading journals, and has presented at national conferences, such as the American Sociological Association, American Public Health Association, and Interdisciplinary Association for Population Health Science. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and an M.A. in International Administration with a concentration in Global and Environmental Health from the University of Miami. Her B.A. is from the University of Florida.

**Andres Ocampo-Salazar**, M.D., is an anesthesiologist who joined the School of Nursing and Health Studies in January as an assistant professor of clinical, teaching in the B.S.N.-D.N.P. Nurse Anesthesia program. He was an assistant professor with the Rutgers University Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Jersey. Dr. Ocampo-Salazar is board certified by the American Board of Anesthesiology and is a member of the American Society of Anesthesiologists, International

# New Faculty

Anesthesia Research Society, Society of Critical Care Medicine, and the New Jersey and Florida state societies of anesthesiologists. He is licensed in Florida and New Jersey and certified in Advanced Trauma Life Support, Advanced Cardiac Life Support, Pediatric Advanced Life Support, and Basic Life Support. He completed his medical education with

distinction and continues to pursue advanced training to offer cutting-edge techniques in pain management. Dr. Ocampo-Salazar did his anesthesiology fellowship at Jackson Memorial Hospital. He is a graduate of Rutgers University medical school and anesthesiology school.

# Awards and Honors



**Dr. Frank Guido-Sanz**, associate dean for simulation research and education and professor of clinical, won the SimVentors Showcase Award in the Best Innovation category at the 25th anniversary of the International Meeting on Simulation in Healthcare (IMSH 2025) for "System to Visualize, Measure, and Track Simulated Wounds in 3D," a project he developed with his former team at the University of Central Florida. The event was hosted by the Society for Simulation in Healthcare (SSH), and Dr. Guido-Sanz was recognized in the SSH's Virtual Simulation Section for excellence in innovation in the field of virtual simulation. He also contributed to the conference as a speaker in five presentations, addressing topics that ranged from education and research in public health to simulation equipment in health care education. Themed "Looking Back, Reaching Forward," IMSH 2025 took place January 10 to 14 in Orlando, Florida.

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# Canes Celebrate the U at 100

Centennial Open House at the School of Nursing and Health Studies, April 8, 2025

Photos by C. Gonzalez & University Communications



# Cane Nurse Chemistry

Stacy Feemster and Lauren Cagen recount how their School of Nursing and Health Studies journey cultivated a powerful, purposeful collaboration.

By Joy Elizabeth Cadman



Colleagues Lauren Cagen, left, and Stacy Feemster

Double Cane nurses Lauren Cagen, B.S.N. '14, M.S.N. '17, and Stacy Feemster, B.S.N. '12, M.S.N. '14, met over a microscope in 2017. Eight years later, they're still connected by their passion for science, innovative health care, and the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies. Feemster, a graduate of both the accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Family Nurse Practitioner master's programs, was Cagen's preceptor for her women's health clinical rotation at BioCollections Worldwide Inc., a Miami lab. There she showed Cagen how to analyze diagnostic biological specimens for use in the in-vitro and molecular R&D community. "Stacy went out of her way to teach me," recalled Cagen, also a graduate of the accelerated B.S.N. and Master of Science in Nursing FNP programs. "It was so educational."

Feemster, meanwhile, said having a nursing student depend on her helped her stay up to date on nursing principles. After graduating in 2017, Cagen went to work as an advanced practice nurse at private neurology clinics, but she never forgot her positive research experience with Feemster. "There is a level of trust, support, and shared experiences that connects people for life," said Cagen. So, when she was ready to make a career move, she called on

Feemster, who had since been promoted to a national role with the company.

Their long-time Cane connection led to a new job for Cagen, who joined BioCollections this past November. Today, working in the same lab where she first met Feemster, she is responsible for collecting gynecological specimens that inform women's health studies and testing for sexually transmitted infections among high-risk populations. "I was so fortunate to connect with someone like Lauren through the University of Miami," said Feemster, who now lives in Las Vegas. "I was honored that she valued her clinical experience with me and reached out to help continue my work here. She was a perfect fit."

Both women agree their alma mater provided them with "the best" clinical opportunities. "My small, intimate nursing school experience made a huge impact on my education," said Cagen. As a result, she's eager to become a preceptor herself. "This experience with Stacy gave me an understanding of the discipline it takes to work in health care. It helped me want to keep going down this nursing pathway and paying it forward."

Email [BeACaneNurse@miami.edu](mailto:BeACaneNurse@miami.edu) for more information.



## CLASS NOTES

### 1990s and 2000s

**Grace Grau, B.S.N. '96**, is president-elect of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses, which convenes its annual conference in Dallas this July. She is an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, School of Nursing.

**Julie Luengas, B.S.N. '96, D.N.P. '17**, is chief nursing informatics officer for Stony Brook Medicine.

**Charlie P. Buscemi, B.S.N. '99, M.S.N. '01, Ph.D. '05**, clinical professor at FIU, retired from clinical practice after 35 years to focus solely on his academic career. He serves on the *Journal of Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing* editorial board and is "Wound Care" section editor. He was named "Clinician Emeritus" by Woundtech, is a flutist with the Greater Miami Symphonic Band, and was elected to the Frontline Honors Class of 2024 in the Home Health & Home Care category.

**Sonya Maria Hadrigan, B.S.N. '08, M.S.N. '11**, was appointed inaugural associate vice president for research integrity at the University of Rochester effective April 1.

**David Zambrana, D.N.P. '09, Ph.D. '17**, was promoted to the role of president and chief operating officer for Jackson Health System.

### 2010s and 2020s

**Veronica "Vee" Scott-Fulton, D.N.P. '11**, is the system chief nurse executive at Bon Secours Mercy Health in Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Roberto Roman, M.S.N. '14, Ph.D. '23**, delivered a keynote on LGBTQ+ inclusive health care, education, and advocacy in nursing at the California Organization for Associate Degree Nursing.

**Catherine Nadeau, M.S.N. '17, D.N.P. '19**, received the Graduate Academic Nurse Educator Award and the Outstanding Faculty Community Service Award from the University of South Florida College of Nursing, where she is an assistant professor and director of the Family Nurse Practitioner program.

**Evelyn Mangold, B.S.P.H. '19**, is a Legal Fellow at the Women's Law Project, where she is dedicated to advancing gender and reproductive justice through legal representation, policy development, and advocacy. She earned a J.D./M.P.H. dual degree from University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School and Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health.

**Shanelle Hodge, B.S.N. '20, Ph.D. '24**, successfully defended her doctoral dissertation, "Barriers and Facilitators to Disclosure and Treatment of Sexual Violence among Black Women," last October.

**Nicholas Cristofari, B.S.H.S. '21, B.S.P.H. '21**, has matched into an internal medicine residency at George Washington University. "I cannot wait to begin the next stage of my medical training, integrating it with essential health policy and public health work while in Washington, D.C., for the next three years," he stated.

**Bailey Reidy, B.S.N. '21**, is a D.N.P. Student Registered Nurse Anesthetist at Augusta University in Georgia, was named the Georgia Association of Nurse Anesthetists SRNA of the Month in March. Her nominator cited her exemplary simulation and classroom contributions as well as her leadership in adding to the well-being of her entire class.

**Kavita Amachee, D.N.P. '21**, received the 2024 faculty of the year award at Nova Southeastern University College of Nursing, where she is an assistant professor of nursing and the coordinator of clinical services.

**Brianna Cardenas, B.S.N. '23**, an Emergency Department RN at Broward Health, has returned to her alma mater to start the Master of Science in Nursing, Adult-Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Program.

**Johannie Beauvais, B.S.N. '24**, reports that she obtained her registered nurse license and was hired by Mount Sinai Medical Center as an oncology nurse. "I am so grateful to my friends, family, and undergrad staff at the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies for their continuing support and encouragement," she stated.

**Gabriella Tuchman, B.S.N. '24**, received her Registered Professional License from the New York State Board of Education and accepted a full-time position at New York-Presbyterian Hospital Columbia as an oncology nurse in the new graduate residency program.

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