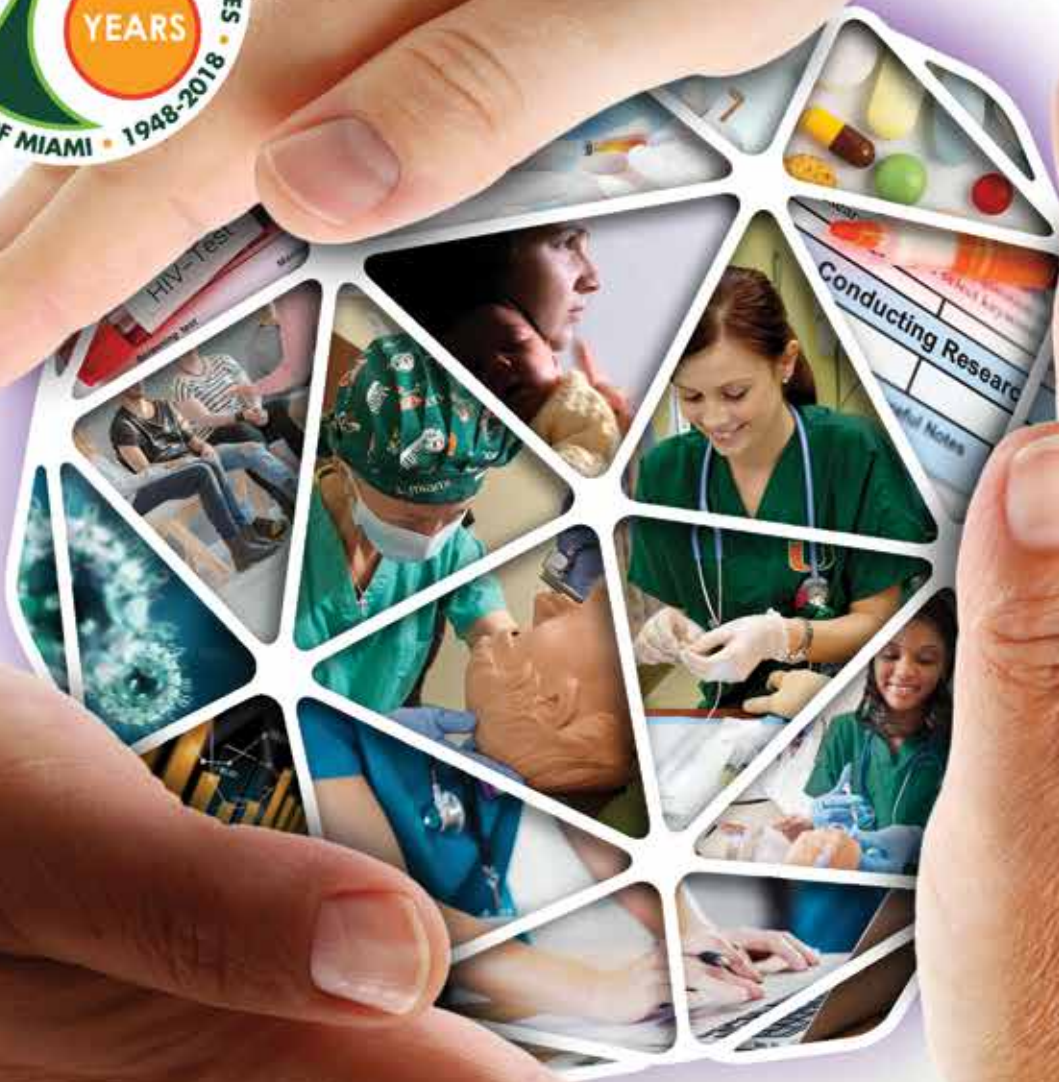


Spring 2018

# heartbeat

University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies



**THE CROSSROAD  
OF TEACHING,  
RESEARCH, AND SERVICE**

NIH Funds CLaRO • • • FAVoR'S Healing Voices • • • Ph.D. Problem Fixers • • • Suicide Risk Report



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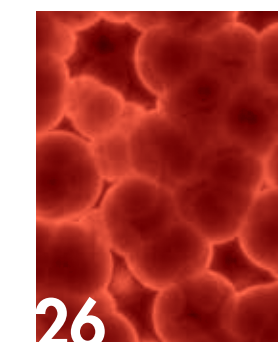
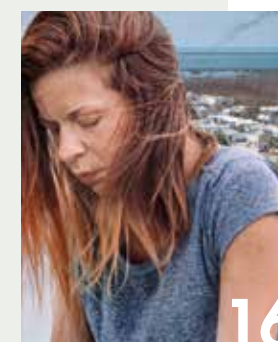
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## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the School of Nursing and Health Studies is to educate students and support faculty committed to excellence in nursing and health science. Through research, education, and practice, the school will create and disseminate health knowledge and prepare culturally competent leaders to provide safe service to our community, the nation, and the world.

# Welcome to the Spring 2018 Issue of Heartbeat!

Like the **three sides** of a triangle that together create the strongest geometric shape, our school is strong because of three elements—teaching, research, and service—that support and inform each other in a continual, iterative process. Each is essential. Remove one, and the shape is lost. But when all sides are present and equally strong, then as a school, as a community of learners, we are unstoppable.

This issue showcases one of the SONHS' three foundational components of success: research.

From the moment our undergraduate students enter the M. Christine Schwartz Center—whether in nursing or health studies—they're introduced to the central role played by research in ensuring that all of our professional activities, from healthcare to behavioral health to policymaking, are based on evidence and best practices.

Throughout the course of their education, they're surrounded by world-class faculty and exceptional graduate students who serve as daily examples of our collective commitment to research. These investigators exemplify our belief that it is not only possible, but necessary, to integrate the insights born of scientific research into our nursing and health studies curriculums, and to be guided by these insights in our clinical practice.

By the time they graduate, our students understand how the three sides of the triangle together form the structure of our pedagogy and our profession. They may decide to accept a clinical or other position in the healthcare field, pursue a graduate degree in advanced clinical practice, or explore a career in behavioral, public health or nursing research.

They also understand that as clinicians, they must continue to be informed by research, and that as researchers, they must continue to learn from the experiences of those on the frontlines of healthcare. And some—like so many of our

faculty—will feel called to be both researchers and clinicians. If we're fortunate, they will also feel called to teach.

In these pages, you'll learn about myriad ways in which our faculty and students alike are advancing the science of nursing and health studies through groundbreaking research.

You'll read about exemplary undergraduate students who are participating in research through hands-on experiences locally and around the world.

You'll meet five recent Ph.D. graduates, all SONHS members, who are contributing to the field through their dissertation research on the families of ICU patients, adolescents whose mothers suffer with mental health and substance abuse issues, young adults and HIV testing, the link between suicide and housing, and improving the workplace for nurses and other caregivers.

You'll learn about two major research projects newly funded by the National Institutes of Health: The Center for Latino Health Research Opportunities (CLaRO), a collaboration with Florida International University dedicated to advancing health disparities research and developing the careers of emerging scientists, and Family Automated Voice Reorientation (FAVoR), a clinical trial that is testing an intervention to prevent delirium in mechanically ventilated ICU patients.

You will travel to Haiti with a group of advanced practice nursing students to learn about our School's commitment to service and the kind of experiential learning that can inform clinical practice and policymaking while inspiring out-of-the-box research questions that push the boundaries of scientific knowledge.

You'll read about a faculty member recognized for her pioneering research on marijuana and about alumni pursuing research careers that are improving the science.

As I pass my half-year mark at the SONHS as your dean, I continue to be impressed and humbled by the extraordinary talent and accomplishments I witness daily, not to mention the strides made in the school's first 70 years. To all of our deeply committed faculty, gifted students, and dedicated staff, I say "thank you" for allowing me to be a part of this remarkable family. Together, in this special anniversary year, we continue to craft and advance a vision for our school to ensure that we are Hemispheric, Excellent, Relevant, and Exemplary. I can't wait to see what the next year brings.

**Cindy L. Munro**  
Ph.D., R.N., A.N.P.-B.C., F.A.A.N., F.A.A.N.P., F.A.A.A.S.  
Dean and Professor





## Medical Mission to Haiti Leaves Students “Humbled” and “Grateful”

“**They welcomed us** to their towns and laughed with us. They confided their concerns and trusted our judgments. They were patient with wait times and long physical exams. They were thankful, and I hope they know we were thankful for them.” A.P.R.N. student Sarah Lipsey eloquently captures the feelings shared by School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS) nurse practitioner students who spent five days in Haiti in December 2017 as part of a medical mission.

Associate Professor Johis Ortega, B.S.N. '02, M.S.N. '06, Ph.D. '10, led the volunteer team of five SONHS faculty/staff and 25 students to support

Project Medishare, a non-profit that strives to strengthen healthcare services, accessibility, and infrastructure in Haiti.

“As a Haitian-American, I felt so blessed to be part of that mission and to be able to serve the most vulnerable,” says Mirlande Cazeau. “As a nurse practitioner student, I was able to use all the skills I have learned to assess, diagnose and treat the patients there.”

A generous contribution from Evelyn J. Budde provided travel scholarships that allowed the students to engage in this real-world learning experience that was both personally and professionally transformative.



“It gave me an opportunity to learn about medical conditions I hadn't seen before and to take everything I've learned through the program and apply it into practice,” says Vanessa Odriozola. Amanda Simon echoes the sentiment. “As a future family nurse practitioner, I gained immeasurable knowledge and confidence,” she says.

The faculty and student team set up clinics in remote locations, where they cared for patients in specialized areas such as adult health, pediatrics, and women's health.

“Our instructors had every detail mapped out to provide for the most effective impact, maximizing our time, learning, and skills,” says Lipsey.

“The autonomy given to us by our instructors helped us to feel comfortable while providing care, but not too much to feel afraid of making a mistake,” adds Miguel Pedraja. “This trip helped me realize some of my weaknesses and strengths as a nurse practitioner student at this point in the program.”

While the students were troubled by the poverty and hunger they witnessed, they were uplifted by the spirit and fortitude demonstrated by the Haitian people in the face of their great need for nourishing food, clean water, adequate shelter, and accessible healthcare.

“This trip not only opened my eyes to the adversities they face, but also taught me about tailoring care to their needs and the resources available to them,” says Raisa Genao. “Many don't



have access to clean water or even a well-balanced meal and are severely malnourished and dehydrated. We had to be creative with our care, thinking of their safest long-term needs.”

The students were especially moved by the children they met. “Some of the children I cared for had not eaten in days, yet still had a smile,” recalls Simon. “Project Medishare is the only medical care they receive. I was astonished to witness 5-year-olds who showed up on their own, responsible for taking medications and for younger siblings as well.”

A visit to one school had a profound impact on Genao. “Learning about the daily struggles the children go through to receive an education, how their only warm meal of the day or medical care is received at school, seeing them walking for miles to get to school and to our clinics really moved me,” she says.

Reflecting on their visit, the students all agreed that they received much more than they had been able to give. “I know I was able to help others and provide care,” says Lipsey. “Still, it feels minimal in comparison to what I received in return.”

“The experience was humbling,” adds Wilfredo Padron. “I wish I had been able to do more.”

“Everyone was so grateful and humble to receive our help,” Genao remembers, “when we were the ones taking the greatest gift of all—this experience that we will forever carry in our hearts.”



## Beta Tau Chapter of STTI Earns Chapter Key Award

The University of Miami's Beta Tau Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI), the Honor Society of Nursing, over its 43-year history has forged a distinguished record of scholarship, leadership, and service. In October 2017, the chapter of more than 500 members received a first-ever Chapter Key Award in honor of its many accomplishments.

The Chapter Key Award honors STTI chapters that, through leadership and collaboration, excel in supporting the organization's mission of advancing world health and celebrating nursing excellence, explains Laly Joseph, D.V.M., D.N.P., assistant professor of clinical and chapter president. “With the hard work of our board and members, we do all of these things at the University,” she says.

Beta Tau's service projects include Hearts for Haiti, a fundraising effort to purchase medical supplies for the University's missions to Haiti. Closer to home, members organize back-to-school drives for school supplies, Christmas toy campaigns, and Thanksgiving meal deliveries to benefit local families. Last year, chapter members rallied to raise funds for the University of Puerto Rico's School of Nursing following the devastation caused by Hurricane Maria.

Beta Tau's leadership development initiatives include a mentorship program for students who exhibit leadership potential and financial assistance for current or budding leaders to attend STTI leadership activities. As a host of the Elizabeth McWilliams Miller Distinguished Lecture Series (see page 11), the chapter supports continuing nursing education, and chapter members are often invited to present their research at national and international conferences.

Beta Tau members have an ambitious agenda planned for 2019 as they look ahead for the chance to earn another Chapter Key Award (chapters are eligible for the award every two years).

That plan includes creating leadership opportunities, increasing membership involvement, promoting scholarships and award programs, and expanding educational opportunities, community programs and services. “In these and other ways,” Joseph says, “the University of Miami's Beta Tau Chapter will continue to work tirelessly to fulfill the STTI mission.”





## A Mother Honors Her Daughter's Love of Nursing and the U

Even as a toddler growing up in Ohio, Natalie Perry demonstrated a special fondness for nursing.

Her mother, Paula Perry, remembers how Natalie enjoyed “playing nurse” with the house cat, even pretending to give him injections. “Nipsy would be out prowling all night and come home exhausted from his nighttime adventures,” Perry recalls, smiling at the memory. “So he would put up with it.”

While the source of her daughter’s desire to be a nurse was a bit of a mystery, Perry speculates that Natalie may have been influenced by her grandfather. “My father felt that nursing was a great career,” Perry says, “and he was always urging the women in the family to pursue it.”

When Natalie graduated from high school, she and her mother moved to Miami to start a new life. Perry worked in fundraising at a hospital in West Palm Beach, where she met and married her second husband, a physician. Meanwhile,

Natalie began attending the University of Miami and also worked for a time in the Hurricanes Football office.

As she neared the completion of her UM education, Natalie considered switching from her business and sociology studies to nursing, but for family reasons, she decided to continue on the business road. She graduated in 1991 with her bachelor’s degree.

After graduation, she worked for a time at a Miami shipping company but then, no longer able to resist her lifelong calling for a career in nursing, Natalie returned to school. She enrolled in the Accelerated B.S.N. program at Miami Dade College, earned a certificate in trauma care at Jackson Memorial Hospital, then worked for a time at the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center.

From there, Natalie moved on to Delray Medical Center. She worked in the

cardiovascular surgery intensive care unit for three years before transferring to the cardiac catheterization lab, where she was soon serving as nurse manager.

“Natalie adored her nursing career,” Perry says. “She worked long hours and enjoyed every minute. She liked the people she worked with. She just loved every aspect of nursing.”

And then in 2008, Natalie suffered a fatal pulmonary embolism. She was 39 years old.

Eight years later, Paula Perry’s husband passed away. Prior to his death, the couple had talked “for a long time” about making a gift to UM. “When he died in 2016, I realized it was time to update my will,” Perry says.

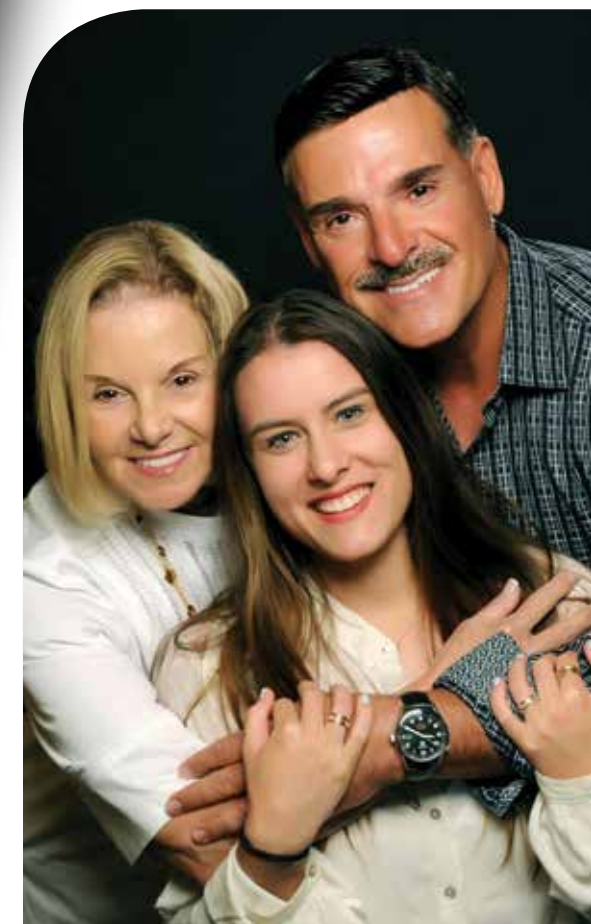
Working with the University’s planned giving team, Perry revised her will so that, when she passes away, her entire estate will be donated to the University of Miami and its School of Nursing and Health Studies. Part of the bequest will establish a nursing scholarship in Natalie Perry’s name.

Her mother, Paula Perry, remembers how Natalie enjoyed “playing nurse” with the house cat, even pretending to give him injections.

The gift, says Perry, honors her daughter’s two great passions—nursing and the University of Miami.

Over the years, Natalie’s affection for the U was as unwavering as her devotion to her profession. Even long after she graduated, Perry says, “Every spring, we would go down to Coral Gables together and stock up on ‘Canes T-shirts.’”

Paula Perry, who now lives in North Carolina, knows her planned gift to the University of Miami is exactly what her daughter would have wanted her to do. “I hope this will make it possible for a student at the University to get a nice degree,” she says, “and do some good in the world.”



*The Morales family generously donated to support the SONHS Simulation Hospital.*

## This Family Gives Together

Meet the Moraleses—a true UM legacy family. Elise Morales, B.S.N. '77, M.S.N. '81, and Oscar R. Morales, B.S. '75, M.D. '79, met at a mixer for nursing and medical students. Today Oscar serves on the SONHS Visiting Committee and professionally is the founder, partner, and obstetrician-gynecologist at South Florida Women’s Care. Their daughter Jessica Morales, B.S.N. '18, graduated in May from the traditional nursing program. The Morales family’s generous donation will serve to name the student lounge in the SONHS Simulation Hospital. They hope their donation will inspire other alumni to “give back” as well.





## Faculty Share Simulation Expertise at Peru Conference

**Highlighting the education and expertise** afforded by the new Simulation Hospital, a team of faculty from the School of Nursing and Health Studies traveled to Lima, Peru, last fall advancing the University's hemispheric mission while sharing insights and innovations with regional and international colleagues at the XIV Iberoamerican Conference on Nursing Education.

"Every time we attend a meeting in the Americas or host global visitors at our school, the major need we hear, by far, is for more simulation-based teaching techniques and resources," said Johis Ortega, B.S.N. '02, M.S.N. '06, Ph.D. '10, associate dean for Master's Programs and Global Initiatives and director of the Collaborating Centre. He added that the Lima symposium underscored the increasing role and importance of simulation in preparing the next generation of healthcare providers.

In addition to Ortega, SONHS faculty Cynthia Foronda, Juan Gonzalez, and Carmen Presti teamed to offer a series of presentations in Spanish on "The Use of Clinical Simulation in Nursing Education: State of the Science and Innovative Methods."

Gonzalez, assistant professor of clinical, opened by explaining the methodology behind simulation-based

nursing education and how it is integrated into nursing program curriculum. Like his co-presenters, he incorporated key words and phrases from the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation & Learning (INACSL) Best Practice Standards into his presentation. "Basing this activity on INACSL's best practices in simulation was really important," said Gonzalez. "We may be teaching in different countries, but these are the universally agreed-upon, evidence-based methods upon which the world's leading simulation experts have reached global consensus. It's important to have common standards."

Foronda, associate professor of clinical, then shared her experience and expertise in virtual, futuristic simulation methods, such as avatars. Addressing the audience of primarily Latin American nursing educators, many from moderate-to-low-resource world regions who lack access to expensive equipment, she

recommended that they partner with other academic programs in their own universities. "By collaborating with your schools of theatre, communications, engineering, and business, it is possible to create highly realistic simulations," she suggested.

Presti, assistant professor of clinical, closed the symposium by presenting the "how-to's" of simulation-based undergraduate nursing student training, with a focus on designing, implementing, and evaluating simulation, and using techniques appropriate to the region. She emphasized low-fidelity simulation scenarios, such as a staged situation with multiple patients requiring attention simultaneously, to train students in prioritization, critical thinking, and decision-making skills.

The symposium was organized by the SONHS Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization Collaborating Centre, an elite designation under which the school is committed to enhance healthcare science and education capacity across the hemisphere.



From left, Drs. Gonzalez, Presti, Ortega, and Foronda

## Florida Blue and MHIRT Grants Pave the Way for Minority Researchers

**As the women shared** their stories about how they had contracted HIV, how they cared for their bodies—or didn't, how they felt about the women they'd become, UM nursing student Heather Nicole Sanchez was moved by their intimacy and vulnerability.

The summer research program interviewing women at Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital, part of the Minority Older Women HIV project funded by the Florida Blue Foundation, gave Sanchez a tremendous appreciation for people she might not otherwise have met. The experience shifted her professional trajectory.

"One part of research is writing papers and analyzing data," says Sanchez, a senior and native Miamian who intends to enter a doctoral program after graduation. "But the interviews with these women showed me they are all individuals with their own stories—it was a fascinating experience and truly an 'ah ha' moment."

Sanchez was one of seven students who took part in the research project, supervised by Associate Professors Natalia Villegas Rodriguez, Ph.D. '12, and Rosina Cianelli, designed to increase diversity and enrollment in nursing Ph.D. programs by pairing minority students with SONHS faculty researchers.

While Sanchez and her colleagues broadened their experience in Florida, 10 other students spent the 2017 summer abroad, conducting research under a \$1.2 million, 5-year (2014-2019) grant from the National Institutes of Health/National Institute on Minority Health and Health



Disparities International Research Training (MHIRT). For the third consecutive summer, the program dispatched students to Chile, the Dominican Republic, Spain, and Australia for eight weeks of global research training in partnership with a faculty mentor from an institution of higher healthcare education in the participating countries. Jamaica will be added to the list of host countries this year.

Both the Florida Blue Foundation and MHIRT programs are designed to address a recommendation from the Institute of Medicine's Future of Nursing report that the number of doctorate-prepared nurses double by 2020. The programs both aim to develop a nursing research workforce that better reflects the increasingly diverse demographics of South Florida and the nation.

"MHIRT students are paving the way forward in the next evolution of minority researchers," says Johis Ortega, B.S.N. '02, M.S.N. '06, Ph.D. '10, and



PHOTOGRAPH BY R.M. LAMAZARES-ROMERO



associate dean of Master's Programs and Global Initiatives. "They are being educated, early in their careers, to address global health disparities using a complementary set of skills that includes culturally competent, dynamic, and specialized education.

"Their backgrounds provide unique insight into the difficulties that minority populations face," adds Ortega, principal investigator for MHIRT. "Through blending real-world experience with the expertise of the mentors, our goal is to have these future health providers lead transformative approaches to first-class, high-quality, outcomes-based healthcare. MHIRT is the platform from which they will propel."

The 17 students who took part in the 2017 summer programs were all recognized at a SONHS Research Day held in early Spring 2018.



# Students: Enhanced Simulation Education Boosts Confidence, Skills, and Ability to Interact with Patients

**“It just feels so real.”** If you set out to build a simulated anything, these five words constitute the highest praise. When the praise comes from a graduate student describing a multimillion-dollar simulated hospital, the visionaries who planned it can claim success.

Clinical simulations are integral components of nursing education, and both Valerie Halstead, B.S.N. '12, Ph.D. '16, and Caroline Scalamandre, M.S.N. '17, had participated in simulation exercises as students in the past.

When the two women returned to the University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS) last fall to earn their Family Nurse Practitioner degrees, they were elated to find that simulation education at the SONHS had advanced to a whole new level following the opening of the state-of-the-art Simulation Hospital.

Scalamandre was amazed how closely the simulated education experiences mirrored a real-life hospital scenario.

“I’m literally walking into a real examination room, fully equipped with everything I would need in an outpatient

setting, and a ‘patient’ (a faculty member) is sitting on the table, waiting to speak to me,” she says. “The scenarios are well thought out, and the faculty take their roles seriously, changing their personas and even their looks to enhance the realism.”

The improved quality of education challenges students to be even more proactive, Scalamandre says. “It’s up to the students to ask the right questions, decide what tests and assessments to perform, prescribe medications, and refer patients to specialists, if necessary.”

According to Halstead, facing real-life scenarios in a controlled environment is critical for anyone in a hands-on, patient-centered profession. “Simulations help us build the confidence we need to translate the concepts and skills that we learned in the classroom into practice. At the Simulation Hospital, we can navigate through the entire thought process to work out a problem without risking the consequences of not addressing a patient’s problems correctly.”

While a scenario is unfolding in the examination room, other students can watch the proceedings in an adjoining classroom area via live-streaming. A debriefing session at the conclusion of the scenario gives students and faculty an opportunity to



discuss the outcome, including any aspects of the student’s approach that could be improved.

Coming face-to-face with a live “patient” in an environment that mimics the real world so convincingly strengthens students’ critical thinking skills, clinical knowledge, and ability to interact effectively with patients, family, and other healthcare professionals.

“It really sharpens your clinical skills,” Scalamandre says, “and as a future family nurse practitioner, I’m learning not only how to assess the whole patient beyond the diagnosis but also to watch for family interactions and social cues.”

The five-story, 41,000-square-foot, fully equipped state-of-the-art SONHS Simulation Hospital, which opened in September 2017, is the largest of its kind in Florida and among the largest in the world. The facility houses a six-bed emergency department, labor and delivery suites, a critical care unit, four operating rooms, an incident command center, a hazmat decontamination training area, an outpatient clinic, and a simulated home-care room. Designed to test and master skills and technologies to transform healthcare education, research, and practice, the Simulation Hospital serves as a hub for students, healthcare professionals, first responders, and corporate partners.

Valerie Halstead, B.S.N. '12, Ph.D. '16, at left, and Caroline Scalamandre, M.S.N. '17, top, participate in simulation exercises.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY R.M. LANAZARIS-ROMERO

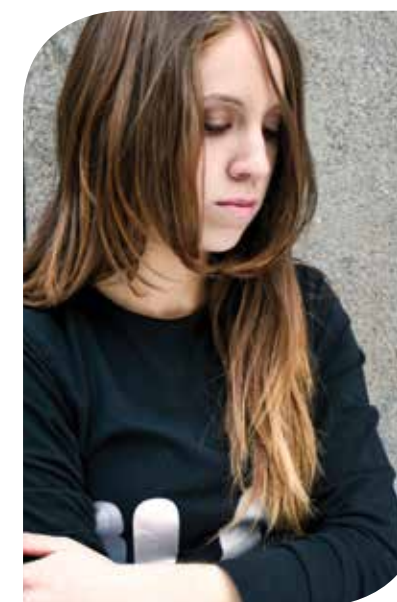
## Signs of Abuse: Do You Recognize Them?

**Nearly 70 percent** of human trafficking victims access the healthcare system at some point—38 percent through emergency or urgent care. Do healthcare professionals know the warning signs and red flags to look for?

Hanni Stoklosa, M.D., M.P.H., of Harvard Medical School and executive director of Health, Education, Advocacy Linkage (HEAL) Trafficking, facilitated an interactive workshop in the SONHS Simulation Hospital Auditorium in March, in conjunction with UM’s Beta Tau Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI), to help ensure that more healthcare professionals recognize victims’ behaviors associated with this modern-day slavery practice.

“My goal today for all you nurses, doctors, and dentists using your clinical judgment whenever the alarm bells go off—for issues of potential violence, sexual assault, domestic violence—is that you add human trafficking to your differential diagnosis,” Stoklosa told the audience of students, faculty, and community members.

The workshop, part of the McWilliams Lecture Series, served to expand the SONHS educational mission to encompass new audiences and broaden partnerships beyond the student population and into the community. A new Florida statute that goes into effect in 2019 requires that all licensed nurses undergo training on human trafficking.



Hanni Stoklosa has served as an expert witness on human trafficking cases around the world.

**“Healthcare has a huge responsibility to intervene. To ask better questions, to take a different action, to watch for behaviors, warning signs, and red flags.”** — Hanni Stoklosa

A fan of Stoklosa’s efforts through HEAL, JoNell Efantis Potter, M.S.N. '87, Ph.D. '03, professor of clinical at the University’s Miller School of Medicine, helped to coordinate the session with STTI. She was also instrumental in launching UHealth’s Trafficking Healthcare Resources and Intra-Disciplinary Victim Services and Education (THRIVE) Clinic.

“These are people taken as children or as young adults that have spent years without proper care,” says Efantis Potter, who has a secondary appointment as professor of clinical at the SONHS. “It’s first about recognition and then about providing the care that’s needed.”



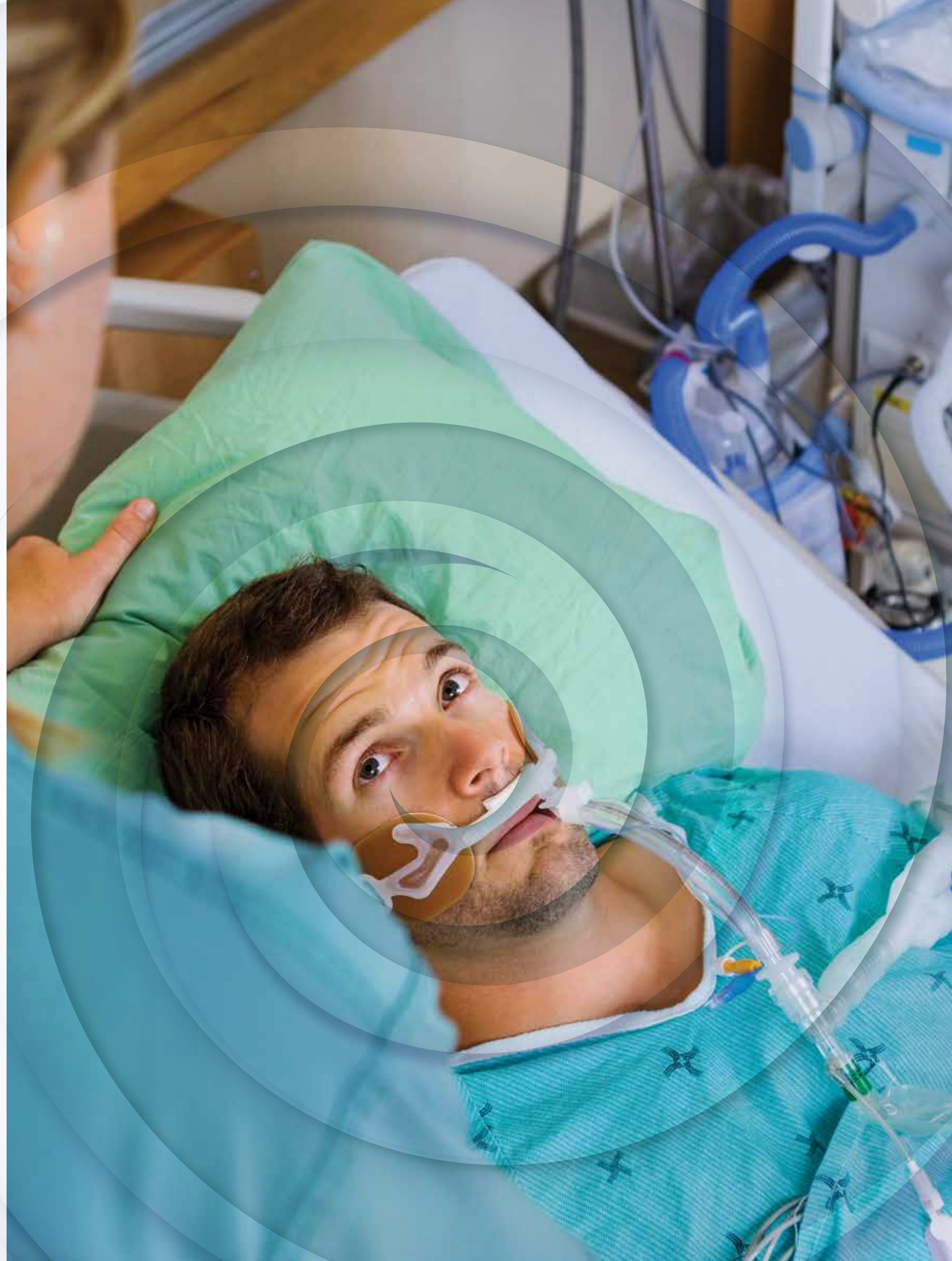


# FAMILIAR VOICES, HEALING VOICES: Preventing Delirium in ICU Patients through FAVoR

By Yolanda Mancilla

“Marvin,” a 75-year-old patient, is confused and disoriented. Interned in a busy intensive care unit, he slips in and out of consciousness. Yesterday he underwent emergency surgery to clear an intestinal blockage. Now, mechanically ventilated and surrounded by glaring lights and blinking, beeping equipment, he struggles to understand what happened to him and where he is. ● Suddenly, from a small speaker near his head, he hears a soothing, familiar voice. “Hello, Marvin. This is Carla, your daughter. This is a recorded message to help you understand what is going on around you.” The

reassuring voice of his adult daughter continues speaking. “You are a patient at University of Miami Hospital... Your nurses and doctors are here looking after you... All of our family know you’re here, and we are in and out, looking after you, too... It is loud and noisy because of the machines helping you get better.” ● In anticipation of her father’s surgery, Carla recorded a series of short messages designed to comfort and orient him. The messages play every hour during daytime hours. Carla’s soothing voice calms Marvin’s anxiety and finally helps him rest.





**“Marvin” and “Carla” are fictional participants** in Family Automated Voice Reorientation (FAVoR), a new study that explores whether scripted audio messages recorded by a family member can help to prevent delirium in critically ill, mechanically ventilated ICU patients by providing them with ongoing orientation to the ICU environment. Funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the four-year, \$1.94 million randomized clinical trial will test whether the recorded messages enable patients to interpret the ICU environment more accurately and help them improve their day/night orientation and nighttime sleep, thus reducing the risk of delirium.

The nursing-oriented FAVoR intervention provides an innovative, non-pharmacological approach to addressing delirium. “Traditional medical care in the ICU has focused on pharmacological management of delirium,” says principal investigator and School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS) Dean and Professor Cindy Munro, Ph.D., R.N., “but because our intervention has a strong nursing care focus, it has the potential to affect delirium in ways that are distinct from, yet synergistic with medical care.”

## Giving family members a “voice”

More than 5.7 million patients are admitted to ICUs each year in the U.S. The cramped, technologically advanced ICU patient room is an unfamiliar, stressful environment for patients and their families. “Critically ill patients may be hardly recognizable to their own family members due to all the lines, tubes, and machines attached to them, the swelling and displacement of facial features, and the discoloration of skin from internal bleeding or from respiratory or other major organ failure,” says FAVoR project coordinator Paula Cairns. Patients may feel frightened, alone and

confused, and family members may neglect their own self-care while feeling as if there is little they can do to help their loved one. FAVoR is designed to reassure and orient the patient while literally giving family members a voice in their care.

Family involvement is at the heart of FAVoR. “This a project that really connects with people,” says Munro. “Family members feel like their voices are there, even when they can’t be with their loved ones.” Adds Cairns: “FAVoR gives family caregivers permission to leave the patient’s bedside, to go to the cafeteria or go home to get some much-needed rest. It allows caregivers to engage in self-care, knowing their voices will be there to help soothe and orient the patient.”

Patients participating in FAVoR are randomly assigned to intervention and control groups. FAVoR is being implemented in both medical and surgical ICUs so that a full range of ICU patients and problems are included, thus ensuring that the results have broad applicability across ICU settings and medical conditions. The study includes both female and male adult participants at all age levels to explore whether certain groups respond better to the intervention. Because many variables in the ICU may influence outcomes, the study design controls for variations between patients, including type of illness, relationship to the family member recording the messages, and direct interaction with nurses and family members.

## Nursing science bringing innovation to the ICU

Beyond its approach to preventing delirium in ICU patients, FAVoR’s innovative contributions to the field will also include assessments of patients’ 24-hour sleep patterns and cognitive function. “This will be the first time

continuous sleep data will be available for ICU patients,” says Munro. “We know that patients don’t follow regular sleep patterns in the ICU, and the study will provide the data to help us understand this problem.” Patients’ cognitive function and memory will also be measured following their transfer out of ICU and again after they return home.

## A commitment to improving care for ICU patients

Reducing risk for ICU patients has been a long-time focus of Munro’s. “They come to us sick and vulnerable, and the ICU environment is not always the most nurturing,” the dean says. Her interest in this clinical population began when she observed that ICU patients on ventilators sometimes developed pneumonia that could be fatal. Munro brought her microbiology background to bear on this critical issue in patient safety. Thanks to the protocols she developed, ICU ventilator-associated pneumonia is now very uncommon.

Munro then turned her attention to delirium, which she believes is the most important problem in the ICU today. “Patients become disoriented in the ICU; they aren’t able to attend to and interpret what is happening around them, or they may interpret it incorrectly,” says Munro. “And even after the patient improves and goes home, the episode of delirium they experienced has lasting effects on cognition and memory. They have problems going back to their everyday lives.”

Munro conducted a pilot study using recorded messages in a familiar voice and found that ICU patients who heard the messages were better oriented and had more favorable outcomes than control group patients who did not hear any messages. The pilot study provided the foundation for the current clinical trial.

## Looking toward the future

For Munro and Cairns, FAVoR is only the beginning. “If the study yields the expected results, there are other populations, such as pediatric and dementia patients, who could benefit from hearing a familiar voice,” says Munro. “Children may benefit greatly from hearing the voices of their parents or siblings, freeing parents to attend to other family and work obligations, knowing that their child is comforted by hearing their voice. And we may be able to reduce the risk of falls in dementia patients by providing them with recorded cues reminding them not to get out of bed.” Future research might also look at how FAVoR can promote nighttime orientation and address sleep disturbances in the ICU, as well as how to provide additional supports to family caregivers.

FAVoR has potential global applicability and impact to advance UM’s evolution as a hemispheric university, one of the aspirations of President Julio Frenk’s Roadmap to Our New Century. As a low-tech, low-cost, non-pharmacological, family-oriented intervention, FAVoR shows promise as a practice that can be replicated in resource-challenged environments with relative ease and with the help and involvement of SONHS faculty and student clinical teams.

“My entire career has been devoted to thinking about the problems patients experience when they’re critically ill and finding ways to address these problems so patients have better outcomes,” says Munro.

“There is beauty and humanity in nursing research,” adds Cairns. “By partnering with families to help these most vulnerable patients, we’re helping not only to prevent delirium, but also empowering families to be an integral part of their loved ones’ care and recovery.”

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## OFFERING HOPE TO CAREGIVERS

When Paula Cairns, Ph.D., encountered patients lying in ICU beds, often mechanically ventilated and in a state of delirium, invariably a family member would be sitting beside them—leaning forward, holding their hands, talking to them. She was drawn to these dedicated caregivers whose worried faces told a story as compelling as that of the patient’s illness.

“ICU patients can develop a cluster of complications known as Post Intensive Care Syndrome [PICS],” says Cairns, FAVoR’s project director and a SONHS research nursing specialist. PICS refers to an impairment in a patient’s physical, cognitive, or mental health status that begins after a critical illness and persists after the patient leaves the hospital. “But family members can develop a similar response to the ICU ordeal,” explains Cairns. “We call it PICS-F to indicate that a family member is affected.”

Critical illness is a family crisis. Family caregivers are often sleep deprived and neglect their own care. They may fear making the “right” healthcare decisions because they feel overwhelmed about the situation and unsure about the information presented. They endure day after day of stress, uncertain how long their loved ones will be in the ICU or how their condition will change. Even before the patient is discharged, family members may already be experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD—and these symptoms may worsen after their loved one goes home.

The more scenarios like these Cairns observed, the more she wondered what support would be helpful for family members and caregivers.

To answer her question, she conducted a randomized controlled pilot study for her doctoral dissertation. “The first step needed in critical care to prevent PICS and PICS-F is to treat the patients and their family caregivers as whole units to leverage the power of healing support that family members and close friends have and want to give,” says Cairns.

She developed a family-centered approach that supports caregivers as soon as the patient arrives in the ICU. Family members were taught an innovative exercise known as Sensation Awareness Focused Training (SĀF-T) that uses coaching, eye movements, and deep breathing to eliminate stress from the start.

By activating the parasympathetic nervous system, SĀF-T elicits a calming response and interrupts negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Once caregivers master the technique, they can use it to manage their stress in many situations.

The pilot study yielded promising results. Family members who received the SĀF-T intervention had significantly lower stress levels, and follow-ups at one month and three months demonstrated continued benefits, according to Cairns.

Cairns’ findings—that family members’ stress during an ICU visit could be reduced—were a first. Now, they serve as the foundation for a larger study that explores how effective SĀF-T might be in helping family members prevent and manage PICS-F. Such a study will have the potential to promote widespread use of a low-cost, easily implemented, non-pharmacologic intervention that nurses and other clinicians can use to prevent or reduce PICS-F symptoms.

“Through interventions like SĀF-T, we can help family caregivers transform helplessness and despair into hopefulness and resiliency,” says Cairns.

“Dr. Cairns’ study is an excellent example of the quality of innovation in nursing research at our school,” says SONHS Dean Cindy L. Munro. “Her novel approach to stress reduction in family members of ICU patients will have a significant impact on the field.”





Though many see the Keys as an idyllic place to live, a SONHS researcher tracks a link between access to housing and the area's high suicide rates

#### SOON AFTER MOVING TO ISLAMORADA

in 2015, Summer DeBastiani, Ph.D. '18, M.P.H., began seeing local media reports about startlingly high suicide rates among her fellow Keys residents. Beyond the news, it was personal for her. "I've lost friends," says the UM School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS) doctoral candidate.

The statistics seemed especially mystifying for a place many consider a tropical paradise. DeBastiani, a former health scientist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), turned her attention to the topic, contacting the Florida Department of Health in Monroe County to collaborate on research.

At her urging, questions from the Suicidal Behavior Questionnaire were added to the 2016 Monroe County Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey "to estimate suicide risk, elucidate some of the risk factors associated with suicidal ideation in the county, and begin to explore potential interventions," according to DeBastiani's resulting "Suicide Risk Report," distributed by the health department this past December.

Among other findings, the research revealed an intriguing link between housing issues and the risk of suicide.

Monroe County, with a population of about 77,500, has some of the highest suicide rates in Florida annually, according to the state Department of Health. With 66 suicides between 2013 and 2015, the county's death rate from suicide hit a peak of 27.7 per 100,000 residents—nearly twice as high as the state rate of 14.1 suicide deaths per 100,000 residents for that same period. In the Keys, where tourism is the dominant industry, those suicide rates are often thought to be associated with alcohol and drug use.

But the Monroe County survey showed a stronger correlation between suicide risk and those who rent as compared to those who own their homes in the Keys. "And that," says DeBastiani "came as a surprise."

"We knew we had some of the highest suicide rates," she adds, "but we didn't know what the risk profile looked like." The findings form the basis of DeBastiani's doctoral dissertation, "A Population-based Assessment of Suicide Risk."

The 2016 Monroe County data set contained 528 respondents who were 18 years and older. Of those who responded, 7.34 percent were at risk for suicide. Those respondents reported significantly more

depression, less exercise, more inability to work, and poorer mental health, physical health, and general health, as well as more activity limitation due to health, than those not at risk for suicide.

Most notably, DeBastiani found, people at risk for suicide were more likely to be renters than those not considered suicide risks. In the suicide risk category, 63.5 percent rent or have other arrangements while 36.5 percent own homes. In the no-risk category, it's the other way around: 35.9 percent were renters while 64.0 percent owned homes.

As a measure of socioeconomic status, housing "tenure," whether one rents or owns, has been emerging in the suicide

literature as a stronger predictor of suicide than income, employment, or education, DeBastiani explains.

In association with its higher percentage of suicide rates, she adds, Monroe County has a higher percentage of renters than the rest of Florida. Further, the percentage of residents paying more than 30 percent of their income for rent or mortgage exceeds statewide estimates by 8 percent. In Monroe County, more than 19 percent of households pay more than half of their income for housing.

Hurricane Irma only exacerbated matters. When Irma barreled through the Florida Keys in September 2017, it

destroyed 25 percent of the region's housing stock, particularly low-income housing.

"Our biggest issue down here, and it's gotten almost as much attention as the suicide rate, is that we don't have affordable housing for people," DeBastiani says. "My research found a link showing people struggling to pay their rent are actually more at risk for suicide."

DeBastiani presented her findings at a February meeting of the Florida State Suicide Prevention Coalition in Tallahassee and in April at the CDC's 2018 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey Training Conference in Atlanta. Her work will also be included in the

next Monroe County Community Health Almanac. She represented the SONHS at UM's Three Minute Thesis competition and has been interviewed on US1 Radio in the Florida Keys.

Now, having successfully defended her dissertation and graduated, DeBastiani says her research is just beginning on the ways in which housing in a particular population area relates to health.

She will collaborate with Monroe County's health department again next year to ask the same suicidal behavior questions. "It's going to be interesting what we find pre- and post-Irma," she says. "The mental health repercussions for some people are really, really hard."

# ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE?

By Mike Clary  
Additional reporting by Robin Shear







Chante Washington-Oates, Ph.D. '18, aims to help reduce healthcare disparities among minorities—especially those with mental health and substance abuse disorders. David Zambrana, Ph.D. '17, wants to improve the workplace environment for nurses and other caregivers, and Winifred Adebayo, Ph.D. '17, plans to motivate more at-risk young people to proactively seek testing for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

# Ph.D. PROBLEM FIXERS

By Maggie Van Dyke

**Meet the “Ph.D. Problem Fixers”**—three nurse-scientists and scholars who recently earned their doctorates from the School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS). Each is driven by a passion to address a complicated healthcare problem they witnessed first-hand as nurses. ● Nurses are at the front lines of patient care, engaging with patients and coordinating care with other team members.

In the “trenches,” they get a clear view of the many complex challenges that hinder providing safe and effective care to all patients, improving the health of communities, and ensuring the affordability of health services. ● Yet it’s hard to remedy multifaceted challenges when you’re immersed in the day-to-day work of patient care. To solve big problems, you need an in-depth understanding of their causes and drivers—and this can only be revealed through rigorous scientific research. ● That’s what makes the work of nursing doctoral students at SONHS so vital. Their rigorous education includes learning to conduct research and statistically analyze. This expertise helps them understand the problems afflicting healthcare delivery and develop evidence-based approaches or policies for resolving them. ● Heartbeat spoke with Washington-Oates, Zambrana, and Adebayo to learn more about the important contributions that emerged from the doctoral research conducted by these recent graduates—our newest “Ph.D. Problem Fixers.”



## HELPING FAMILIES NAVIGATE MATERNAL MENTAL ILLNESS

Chante Washington-Oates, Ph.D. '18, grew increasingly frustrated with the health disparities she saw in the emergency room. Why are minorities so susceptible to mental health problems? What are the causes? She struggled to find answers, then decided: "Something needs to be done—and I'm going to do it."

As a first step, Washington-Oates focused her research on a critical population: young people whose mothers have a mental health disorder, including substance abuse. Then she opted for an assets-based approach—to identify positive characteristics in the families that help adolescents build resilience and succeed in life despite the challenges of having a parent with mental health issues.

"Existing research is saturated with deficit-focused approaches," Washington-Oates says. "By looking at protective factors and the challenges confronting those affected, I hope to raise awareness among nurses about effective protective-focused treatments."

Washington-Oates' dissertation work dove-tailed with her involvement

in a clinical trial conducted by El Centro, the SONHS' Center of Excellence for Health Disparities Research. The study tested a nurse-led, home-based, family-strengthening program for mothers in mental health outpatient treatment and their children. In addition to serving as a research assistant and study coordinator, she was one of the home health nurse interventionists who worked with the mothers and families.

For her dissertation, Washington-Oates interviewed 19 adolescents to identify individual and maternal factors that protected the young people. She found that the adolescents were able to build resilience and well-being by using self-management strategies such as goal setting, emotional control, self-evaluation, and reflection.

Another key finding was the powerful impact that a mother's positive parenting practices had on her child's ability to self-manage. An important skill was being able to help children navigate challenges by providing emotional support and advice. "One young woman mentioned that she could tell her mother anything," Washington-Oates recalls.

Washington-Oates hopes that insights from her research will aid nurses in helping families like the ones she studied. In some cases, this means arranging for basic services, such as housing and food, so moms are less stressed and better able to care for their children. "I remember visiting one mother in the homeless shelter," she says. "When you think about a mother who doesn't have stable housing, you can imagine how this could interfere with her ability to be involved in her child's life."

Going forward, Washington-Oates hopes to develop community agencies worldwide that deliver evidence-based preventive interventions to improve the quality of life of at-risk youth and families—including those affected by mental health and substance abuse disorders. "This is my life calling," she



asserts. "I won't be able to rest until I see a major improvement in the lives of minorities and other at-risk populations."

## BRING YOUR JOY TO WORK

David Zambrana, D.N.P. '09, Ph.D. '17, the senior vice president and CEO of Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital, believes an organization's culture is created and that its leaders are accountable for creating and maintaining that culture.

He's enjoyed a full perspective view of leadership at Jackson Memorial. Zambrana started as a hospital nurse, working his way up the leadership ranks to nursing director, CNO, COO, and finally his current post.

While pursuing his Ph.D., Zambrana conducted research on enhancing the work environment for nurses and other hospital staff, which he sees as critical to improving the patient experience and quality of care, as well as to lowering costs. The ideal working conditions for nurses, referred to as the Nursing Professional Practice Environment (NPPE), include elements such as having a clear philosophy for nursing and quality care; adequacy of staffing and support structures; quality of unit-level leadership; and collegiality among nurses, physicians, and other team members. NPPE also looks at the degree to which nurses feel connected to

their work and engaged in making decisions that govern their practice.

Zambrana examined the relationship between NPPE and two organizational outcomes—nurse turnover and intent to leave the current workplace—as well as three clinical outcomes: patient falls, central line associated bloodstream infections, and catheter-associated urinary tract infections.

He also monitored nursing workload. But instead of looking at the traditional workload measure of nurse-to-patient ratio, he chose a novel metric: "patient churn," which is the number of admissions, discharges, and transfers nurses experience. "The patient churn concept is being studied more because researchers are seeing that nursing workload is more complex than the total number of patients," Zambrana says. "If there's high churn, that adds quite a bit of chaos to a nurse's workload."

Zambrana's study found significant correlations between lower NPPE scores and higher patient churn on patient fall rates. NPPE and patient churn were also linked to nurse turnover and intent to leave. More than 40 percent of nurses in the study intended to leave within the next 12 months.

"For me, the biggest takeaway is that the 'intent to leave' process is reversible," Zambrana explains. To retain nurses, he recommends two steps: Educate nursing

and other leaders about the elements of an ideal work environment and help them understand their role in changing the organizational culture.

"What I'm most passionate about is learning how to lead individuals to be at their best and bringing joy to work," Zambrana concludes. "Every day, I see that the really successful units in clinical environments are grounded by a great leader or group of leaders, and an organizational culture that supports effective care delivery."

## INCREASING YOUTH HIV TESTING RATES

Winifred Adebayo, Ph.D. '17, had an "aha" moment when she was interviewing 18-to-24-year-olds for her dissertation. The 30 research participants had all sought out HIV testing on their own, which is uncommon.

In an earlier study, Adebayo had discovered that most young people who get tested for HIV do so at the suggestion of a clinician during a checkup or visit for a health complaint. Because young people, in general, don't get sick that often, they're unlikely to visit healthcare providers on a regular basis. This dynamic may be contributing to low testing rates in this population despite high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

One way to counter this challenge is to encourage proactive HIV testing, especially among at-risk youth. Her research focuses on understanding what makes young people decide to get tested for HIV infection on their own, and her intent is to create an intervention that will influence HIV and STD testing in this age group.

Adebayo didn't realize how complex her research goals were until she interviewed the 30 young adults, most of whom were female and either African-American or Latina. As they shared their stories, she saw a disturbing

disconnect between the risky sexual behaviors they reported and public health messages on STDs. More than half of the young adults hadn't used a condom the last time they had sex, and 47 percent said they'd had six or more sexual partners.

"I realized we still have a lot of work to do," Adebayo says. "Ideally, every young person should take steps not to engage in these behaviors and, if they do, they need to stay on top of their testing. If this is the data we're getting in 2017, then we're nowhere near managing sexually risky behavior in this population."

Adebayo's research uncovered potential explanations for this disconnect, which may eventually inform public health and educational interventions. The young people reported feeling unable to talk about their sexual activity with their parents or family. They feared having their parents find out about their behavior through a bill for an STD test performed at their college clinic, but they also lacked knowledge about free local STD testing services. Ill-informed sex education at school had led to fear and ignorance about HIV or other STDs. They also reported receiving STD education only in elementary school and not hearing the messages reinforced at later ages.

Adebayo plans two follow-up studies focused on HIV testing among males and among younger youth, beginning at age 13. Now an assistant professor at Penn State University, she's excited to have received start-up funding to kick off this pilot work.

But Adebayo knows she'll need the help of nurses everywhere to achieve her goal of reducing the burden of HIV among young people. "Nurses are often the ones in community settings," she says. "They're the ones in schools. They're the ones at health fairs or running outreach programs. They need to help intervene and encourage proactive healthy sexual behaviors among youth."



R.M. LAMAZARE-RODRIGO





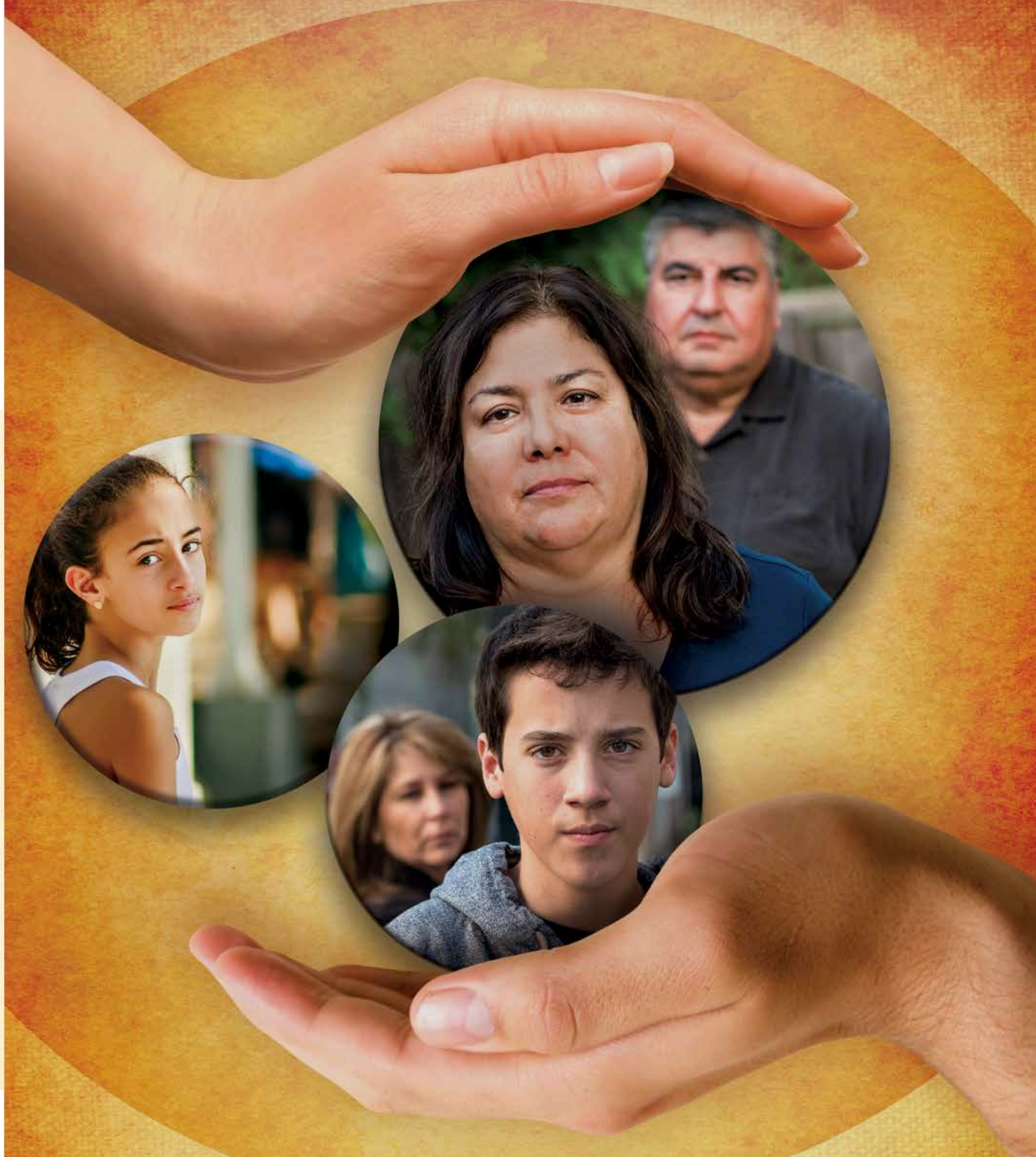
# iCLaRO que sí!

## Center Aims to Reduce Latino Health Disparities

By Yolanda Mancilla

**The son of seasonal farmworkers**, Luis learned early the value of hard work. As a boy, he spent hours under a hot sun cutting and picking alongside his parents and sisters in the fields. But financial, health, and extended family issues have stressed the family. His mom is often too sick to work, and his dad seems more tired and anxious than ever. Now 14, Luis hangs out with “friends” who tempt him to drink, smoke marijuana, and explore sexual encounters. He stays out late and talks back to his parents. His dad has tried everything—talking, scolding, and punishing—but the situation has only gotten worse. Recently, Luis started skipping class. His father worries that there’s worse trouble ahead.

When 15-year-old Elena and her family arrived in Miami two years ago, she was elated to find that teen girls in the U.S. have greater freedom than the girls in her country. They go out alone, have boyfriends, and learn to drive. Elena met a boy at school that she liked, but her parents wouldn’t allow her to date. When they found out she was seeing him behind their backs, they were furious and forbade her to see him again. Elena started isolating in her room and seeks “relief” from her distress by cutting herself. She conceals the wounds on her upper arms and thighs under her clothes. Her parents, worried and confused, don’t know where to turn.





While “Luis” and “Elena” are imagined characters, their scenarios are very real to healthcare providers in urban and rural Latino communities.

CLaRO, the newly funded Center for Latino Health Research Opportunities at the University of Miami’s School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS) focuses on shifting the trajectories of stories like these to generate positive outcomes. The five-year, \$6.8 million grant, awarded by the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, will advance health disparities research and the careers of emerging scientists while helping to improve the health and well-being of some of the most vulnerable members of our Latino communities.

## Is for Collaborating Centers

“CLaRO represents the next phase of the work we started at El Centro, the Center of Excellence for Health Disparities Research,” says Victoria Behar Mitrani, Ph.D. ’86, professor and associate dean for research. “El Centro established the SONHS as a leader in health disparities science at UM; CLaRO expands our influence to a partnership with Florida International University [FIU].”

CLaRO builds on a 10-year collaboration between El Centro and the Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work’s Center for Research on U.S. Latino HIV/AIDS and Drug Abuse (CRUSADA) at FIU. CLaRO will also work closely with its Community Scientific Advisory Board to ensure CLaRO’s research findings benefit Latino communities.

The center’s principal investigators, Mitrani and Mario De La Rosa, Ph.D., FIU professor of social work and CRUSADA director, have worked together previously and are well-versed in the community’s needs. “Thoughtful interventions are at the core of our efforts,” says De La Rosa.

## Is for Latino Health

CLaRO will promote research that addresses a constellation of Latino health challenges—substance abuse and other mental disorders, violence/trauma, and HIV/AIDS—collectively known as the SAVA syndemic.

“A ‘syndemic’ occurs when two or more health conditions interact and impact the health of a population,” explains Mitrani. “Because SAVA conditions are intertwined and caused by the same underlying factors, they should be addressed together.” Interventions developed from a syndemic orientation focus on reducing the impact of underlying risk factors such as stigma, disconnection between parents and teens, and living in high-stress conditions, while strengthening protective factors such as Latino cultural values that emphasize family and support networks. Focusing on factors that influence multiple outcomes heightens the potential impact.

CLaRO scientists hope to gain a better understanding of how SAVA conditions impact Latino health. “We’re developing interventions for populations that represent pockets of vulnerability within Latino communities,” says Mitrani. “These include seasonal farmworkers, sexual and gender minority youth, and Latina adolescents. We want to promote change in SAVA conditions at multiple levels—the individual, family, health care settings, and community.”

## Is for Research

CLaRO will implement two major studies that focus on understudied Latino health disparity populations.

HoMBRES de Familia (Hispanic Men Building Respect, Education,

and Safety within Families), led by CRUSADA research associate professor Patria Rojas, Ph.D., will target substance abuse, family violence, and HIV/AIDS among Latino seasonal farmworkers (LSFWs), one of the most marginalized and exploited populations in the U.S. LSFWs face barriers such as poverty and hazardous working conditions, along with risk factors such as disrupted family and social network functioning, all of which are linked to increased risk of SAVA. Still, Latino cultural values that emphasize strong family bonds, respect for parents and elders, and *caballerismo* can protect families against SAVA.

HoMBRES will be the first culturally tailored intervention that targets the SAVA syndemic among adult male LSFWs and their adolescent sons. This family-based prevention program tailored to the gender-specific determinants of SAVA strives to increase the father’s involvement and strengthen the father-son relationship. Groups of fathers will meet with peer advocates to learn strategies to reduce or prevent risky behaviors in their teen sons.

“Computer Assisted Family Intervention to Treat Self-Harm Disparities in Latinas and Sexual/Gender Minority Youth” will adapt an existing intervention geared to support Latina and sexual/gender minority adolescents who engage in self-harm behaviors. UM School of Education and Human Development Professor Daniel Santisteban, Ph.D. ’91, and research assistant Professor Maite Mena, Psy.D., are adapting their successful, evidence-based model, Culturally Informed and Flexible Family Therapy for Adolescents for this innovative study.

The intervention will serve 12-to-18-year-olds who self-identify as Latina and/or LGBT and who report self-harm behavior along with SAVA risk factors. “The study focuses on self-harm because we’re seeing increased rates of this behavior among Latinas and sexual/gender minority youth,” explains Mena.

“But because self-harm co-occurs with other risky behaviors, we’re looking for the connections among these behaviors so we can address them in our interventions.”

“A traditional family intervention won’t work for these families,” says Santisteban. The intervention’s flexible, hybrid approach, which combines individual and family therapy with a computer-assisted psychoeducational component, provides the needed specialized focus.

The study will provide an opportunity for CLaRO senior scientists to mentor an emerging investigator, helping to develop expertise in health disparities research. SONHS research associate professor Karina Gattamorta, Ph.D. ’09, brings her knowledge of Latino sexual/gender minority youth to the task of developing psychoeducational content for the modules. Gattamorta has studied the impact of the coming out process on Latino LGBT emerging adults and their families. Limited research has been conducted on the intersection between Latino and sexual/gender minority status, she explains.

As an emerging leader of a new generation of health disparities investigators, Gattamorta is on a mission to make a difference. “There’s no support system for families of sexual/gender minority youth,” says Gattamorta. “Parents may feel isolated and unable to connect with others who share their experience.”

The investigators will work closely with community partners to help translate their findings into real-world interventions that address self-harm behaviors among adolescent Latinas and sexual/gender minority youth. Their study is uniquely positioned to make a difference. “There are many evidence-based treatments, but few are culturally informed and address issues of diversity in their language and intervention models,” says Santisteban. “Ours is one of the few looking at the mental health impact of issues like discrimination, marginalization and intersectionality.”

## Is for Opportunity

CLaRO will also promote the careers of emerging scientists through its Investigator Development Core, led by Guillermo “Willy” Prado, M.S. ’00, Ph.D. ’13, dean of UM’s Graduate School and professor of public health sciences at the Miller School of Medicine. Through pilot grants, mentoring, and training, the core will enhance the careers of UM early career faculty and postdoctoral fellows across disciplines. “We’re creating a pipeline to facilitate the career trajectory of investigators committed to Latino health disparities research,” says Prado.

The Development Core will fund 15 pilot studies to collect preliminary data related to CLaRO’s priority areas with the goal of generating future NIH grant applications. “We’re looking for innovation that targets the SAVA syndemic,” explains Prado. “Pilot studies might capitalize on existing studies, adding new measures or a qualitative component, adapting an intervention to a new population, or integrating biobehavioral measures.”

Pilot study grantees will be linked to two mentors—a UM-based health disparities researcher and an external career mentor who can provide them with practical career advice, such as how to develop an NIH research program or negotiate a faculty position.

Securing NIH funding is highly competitive, Prado says. “The pilot studies will give these early career scientists the opportunity to make their case to NIH reviewers that they’re committed to this work and ready for larger grants.”

The core will also deliver a research education training program open to pilot grantees as well as other UM and FIU investigators. A two-week summer institute on health disparities research will cover topics such as implementation science, health disparities practice and

policy, and the economic and social determinants of health in Latino populations. Participants will also learn how to write NIH-quality grant proposals.

“We’re training the next generation of health disparities scientists,” says Prado. “They’re the innovators and change agents who will impact the future health of Latino populations.”

## Making a Difference? ¡CLaRO Que Sí! Yes, of Course!

With its committed and enthusiastic leadership and talent, it’s clear that CLaRO is already on its way to making a difference for some of the most vulnerable members of Latino communities. “CLaRO is lighting the way toward a future in which Latino health disparities have been erased,” says SONHS Dean and Professor Cindy L. Munro, Ph.D. “And CLaRO’s partnership with FIU and community agencies is strengthening our school’s reputation as a leader in health disparities science.”

“When we were writing the CLaRO grant proposal and pondering the complex and extensive reach of Latino health disparities, we found inspiration in this simple but powerful slogan: *¡CLaRO que sí!*” says Mitrani. “Can these health disparities be reduced, even eradicated? With strong collaborations, a commitment to the best science, and talented, emerging researchers—yes, of course. *¡CLaRO que sí!*”

*Research reported in this publication was supported by the National Institute On Minority Health and Health Disparities of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number U54MD002266. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.*



The University's Foote Fellows are among the most accomplished incoming freshman in terms of GPA and test scores. Self-motivated and independent thinkers, these young scholars enjoy generous flexibility and resources to pursue their academic passions. Colleges and schools often grant them unique opportunities for learning and exploration.

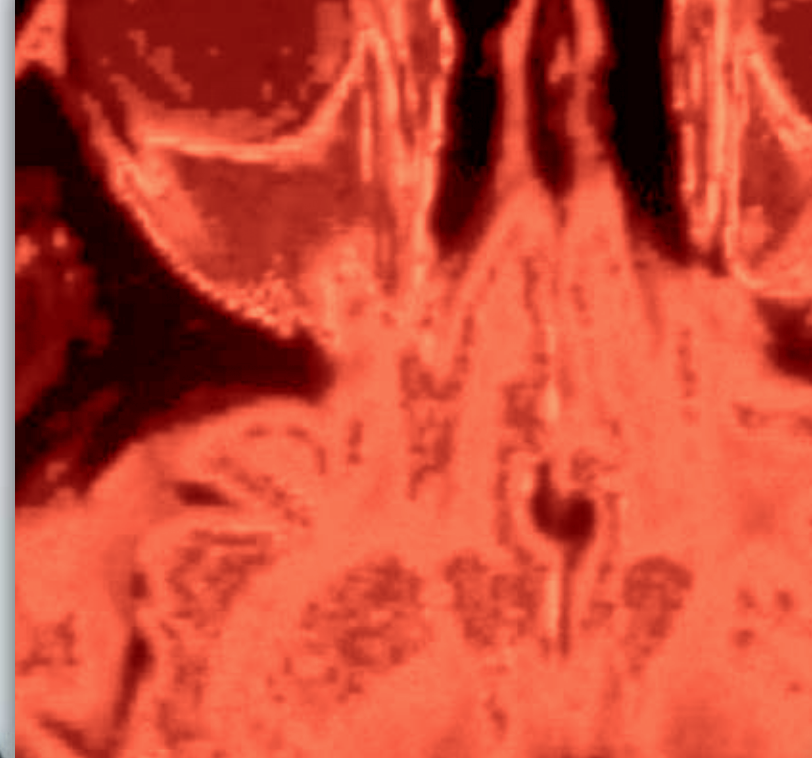
**The School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS)**, for example, sponsors special events — lectures, poster days, and simulation learning exercises at the Simulation Hospital — especially for Foote Fellows. ■

Fellows pursuing a degree through the SONHS must maintain a GPA of 3.5 and submit a portfolio that illustrates how they've addressed a health disparity. "One of our research strengths has been looking at and addressing health disparity from various viewpoints, including income, race, and gender," says Mary McKay, B.S.N. '88, D.N.P. '09, associate dean for the B.S.N. program. ■

The five SONHS Foote Fellows profiled show how these scholars are influencing and inspiring their SONHS peers, both inside and outside the classroom. ■ "Foote Fellows are role models in the class whether the other students realize they're fellows or not. Through their attitude, work ethic, and contributions to class discussions, they set a standard that would be wonderful for all our students to emulate," says Martin Zdanowicz, Ph.D., associate dean for health studies.



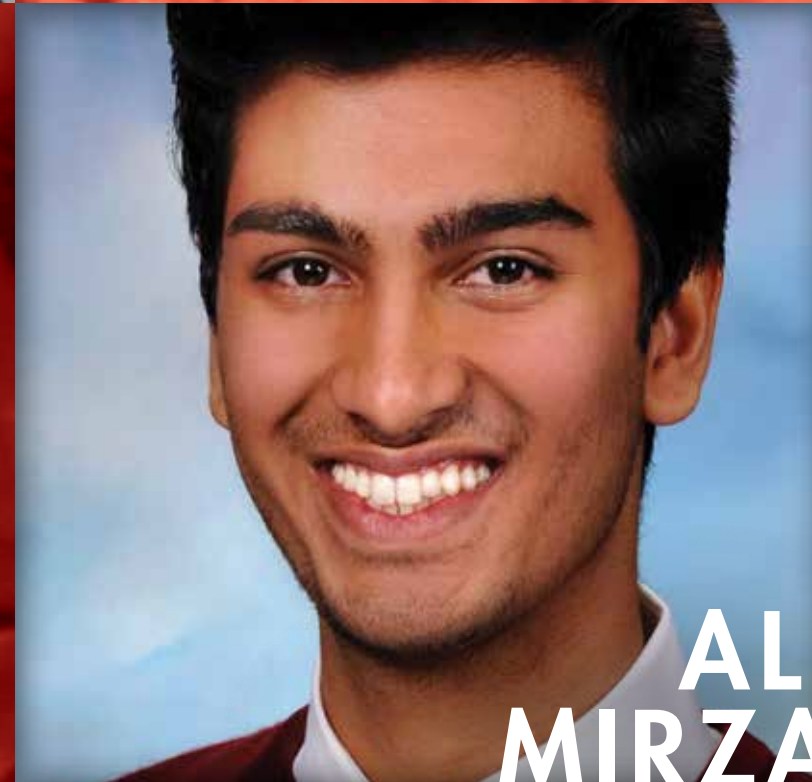
**SYDNEY  
MATHIS**



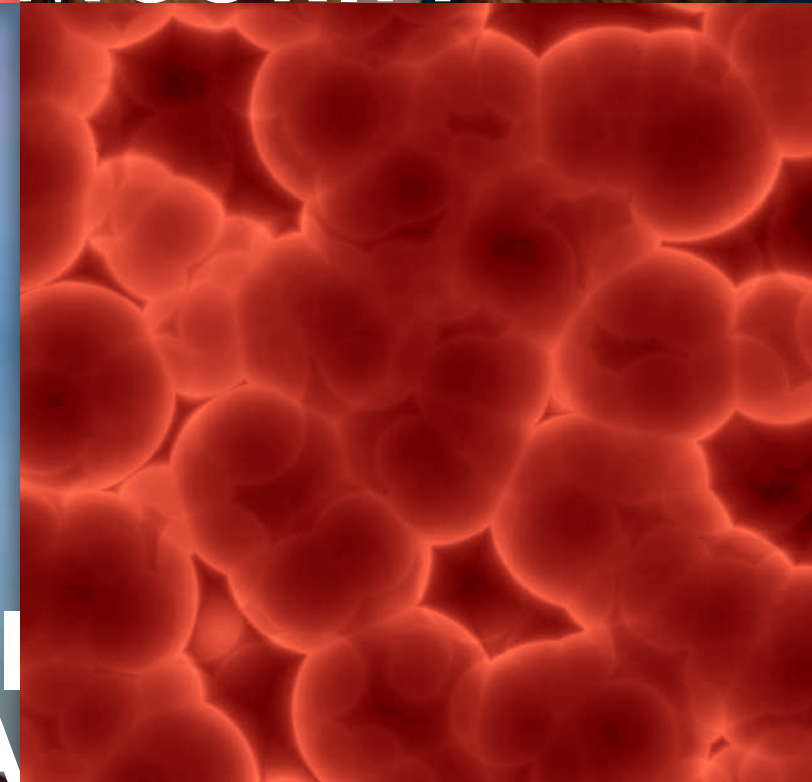
**KATHERINE  
MCGRIFF**

## HIGH-PERFORMING FOOTE FELLOWS ARE RAISING THE BAR FOR THEIR SONHS PEERS

By Maggie Van Dyke



**ALI  
MIRZA**



**HERVELINE  
SAINTIL**



**KRISTIANA  
YAO**



## SYDNEY MATHIS

B.S.H.S. student Sydney Mathis wanted some hands-on medical experience before committing to a career as a doctor. Because the Foote Fellowship exempts her from general education requirements, Mathis has had time to shadow a trauma surgeon at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

“I’ve gotten to watch all these amazing procedures,” she says. “I dress in scrubs and stand at the table with the surgeons. While I’m not allowed to touch any patients, I help by handing supplies to the doctors.”

The experience has reinforced Mathis’ goal to become a doctor and steered her toward surgery as a specialty. A sophomore, she is pursuing SONHS’ new premed track, which launched in 2016. Mathis initially planned on majoring in biology or another science, which is a traditional premed route. But happenstance intervened. When she came to UM, she accidentally attended an information session at the SONHS instead of the College of Arts and Sciences.

“I transferred into SONHS because the premed program prepares us to be doctors on a global scale,” she notes. “It teaches us public health, epidemiology, and how the field of healthcare works, which is very interesting to me.”

Mathis is pursuing a second major in exercise physiology. A member of the UM Hurricanettes Dance Team, she is particularly interested in injury prevention. She’s also intent on learning Spanish and spent spring break in Peru last year helping in medical clinics. “The School of Nursing has really encouraged me to take advantage of all the resources available to me as a Foote Fellow across the entire University,” she says.

## KATHERINE MCGRIFF

When Katherine McGriff arrived at UM, she’d yet to decide her major. The Foote Fellowship proved particularly beneficial. McGriff who credits the honors program with helping her identify that she wanted to become a nurse. “Because the Foote Fellowship waives general education requirements, I have been able to explore and take the classes that I was really interested in,” she says.

Following her parents’ advice, McGriff spent her first two years at UM “finding something that I would love to do,” she says. She tried classes in various fields, including advertising and exercise physiology, before becoming a B.S.N. student at SONHS. “I realized that what would make me happy is being able to care for people when they’re in a vulnerable state,” McGriff says.

She remains open as to what field of nursing to specialize in after she graduates in 2019, though patient education around prevention is of increasing interest. “I really like the preventative health side, and a lot of nursing is about teaching patients what they can do to take care of themselves so they don’t have problems.”

McGriff has nothing but praise for the SONHS. While the B.S.N. program is “really challenging,” professors and instructors prepare students well for the National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX). “They do a really good job of coaching us to be intelligent and competent nurses,” she says. “We’re not only learning about the disease processes, but also learning how to talk to patients when they’re upset or when there are cultural considerations.”

## ALI MIRZA

Ali Mirza, a rising sophomore B.S.P.H. student, has already accomplished more than most people twice his age. His father is a physician with the international charity UNICEF, and Mirza and his family have to date called four countries “home”: Pakistan, Lebanon, Kenya, and the United States. “All those experiences—growing up in the developing world as well as the developed world—shaped me and left me with a more open eye towards the world.”

While at high school in New York City, Mirza and a friend started a club devoted to raising education standards in developing nations. They sponsored a school in Pakistan and raised enough funds to buy library books, construct a classroom, and award a scholarship. “The idea is that we help one school directly—and that impact will set off a chain reaction, putting a greater focus on education in these countries.”

The Foote Fellowship is a perfect match for Mirza, who is molding himself to be a Renaissance man, skilled and knowledgeable in many subjects. To achieve his dream of becoming a neurosurgeon, he has chosen SONHS premed track. He is especially excited to learn hands-on skills in the Simulation Hospital, among the largest such facilities in the world.

Mirza is also working with faculty to design a customized second major that will allow him to learn more about one of his passions: space exploration. As a Foote Fellow, he’s free to pursue additional interests and enjoys wide access to university resources. “I feel like I have no limits on learning all the things I want to learn,” he says.

## HERVELINE SAINTIL

Growing up, B.S.N. student Herveline Saintil spent long hours in the hospital due to her sickle cell disease. Fortunately, Saintil has a mild version of the disease that hasn’t held her back. Yet all the time she spent around nurses led her to her chosen career. “The nurses took the time to know who I was and remembered to give me little gifts,” she says. “I want to do that for somebody else in the future.”

Like many Foote Fellows, Saintil graduated high school with a high GPA. She credits the encouragement of her parents, who are Haitian immigrants, for her work ethic and drive. “My mother moved here to make sure that her kids could have an American education,” Saintil says. “Given such a chance to pursue a college degree, it would make no sense for me to throw that away.”

Because she has fewer academic requirements as a Foote Fellow, Saintil has time to pursue a second major in psychology, which she thinks will help her be a better nurse. “When you’re working with patients, you don’t only have to look after their physical aspects. You need to meet them on an emotional and behavioral level, too.”

Impressed by the SONHS’ reputation as a top-tier nursing school, Saintil appreciates the smaller class sizes and the vibrant interaction between teachers and students. “At other schools, students might be just a number,” she says. “But here my professors know my name,” she says.

## KRISTIANA YAO

Kristiana Yao, B.S.P.H. ’18, B.B.A. ’18, first ventured into public health in elementary school when she advocated for a partial indoor smoking ban in her hometown. “That experience opened my eyes to how a few voices can make a difference in improving the community,” she remembers.

Since then Yao has not looked back from her goal of making a difference. Since coming to UM, she has organized various campus health initiatives, from tailgate hydration to a mental health forum. She also gained field experience by helping to administer an HIV/STD program through the Miami-Dade County Health Department and by improving a charity care program at Jackson Health System.

Yao spent more than a year in Washington, D.C., as an intern at the White House, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance. Her duties included conducting research on health-related legislation and preparing briefings for policymakers. “These internships helped me learn how to operate effectively in a politically charged environment and to think strategically and pragmatically about being a good civil servant and making the most of any opportunity,” she says.

In Spring 2017, Yao was selected as a Truman Scholar. The coveted national scholarship recognizes college juniors for their commitment to public service leadership.

Yao credits the Foote Fellowship with providing the flexible schedule she needed to balance multiple internships and a dual degree in public health and business administration. Yao also applauds her SONHS professors for continually challenging her. “A central tenet they really drill into our heads is that ‘health’ is multifaceted,” she says. “You have to consider not only the medical care people are getting, but all of the other factors that play a role in someone’s well-being.”

**THE FIVE SONHS  
FOOTE FELLOWS  
PROFILED SHOW  
HOW THESE  
SCHOLARS ARE  
INFLUENCING AND  
INSPIRING THEIR  
SONHS PEERS,  
BOTH INSIDE AND  
OUTSIDE THE  
CLASSROOM.**





Cynthia L. Foronda

## Foronda Appointed President-elect of International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning

Associate Professor of Clinical **Cynthia L. Foronda**, Ph.D., R.N., C.N.E., was voted president-elect of the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL) in March. She will be appointed president in June during the annual INACSL conference in Toronto, Canada, and her one-year term begins June 2019. A member of INACSL since 2013, Foronda currently chairs the Governance Committee and has previously co-chaired and served on other committees. In 2015 she received the INACSL Excellence in Research Award for contributions to the simulation community and for advancing the science of simulation. Her INACSL leadership goals include broadening the scope of simulation and extending the international reach of INACSL, which currently represents over 1,500 members from about 20 countries; advancing the science of healthcare simulation by improving the quality and rigor of evaluation processes; and promoting principles of diversity and inclusion within INACSL and throughout simulation centers globally.

## Falcon and Hauglum Selected as Fellows of the Faculty Learning Community

Assistant Professors of Clinical **Ashley L. Falcon**, Ph.D. '14, M.P.H., and **Shayne D. Hauglum**, Ph.D. '15, C.R.N.A., A.R.N.P., have been selected as Fellows of the University of Miami's Faculty Learning Community (FLC). The art and science of teaching and learning has continued to evolve, prompted by



Shayne Hauglum



Ashley L. Falcon

PHOTOGRAPHY BY R.M. LAMAZARES-ROMERO

the introduction of new technologies. The Office of the Provost in collaboration with Academic Technologies and the University of Miami Libraries, is facilitating this evolution through the creation of an annual FLC. Through the FLC, faculty connect with other faculty who seek to solve an instructional problem, engage their students, or explore a new educational approach. Falcon participates in the Flipped and Active Learning workgroup, while Hauglum is active in the 3D Scanning, Printing, and Visualization workgroup.

## DeSantis Is Unanimous Choice for McKnight Outstanding Mentor Award

Assistant Professor **Joseph P. DeSantis**, Ph.D., A.R.N.P., A.C.R.N., F.A.A.N., has been awarded the McKnight Doctoral Fellowship Program's 2017 William R. Jones Outstanding Mentor



Joseph P. DeSantis

Award by the Florida Education Fund. The McKnight Doctoral Fellowship program is designed to increase representation of African-American and Hispanic faculty at colleges and universities in Florida. The University of Miami is one of only nine universities in Florida eligible to host McKnight Fellows. DeSantis was nominated for the award by Natalie M. Leblanc and was selected as the recipient by a unanimous vote of the Florida Education Fund.



Jill Steiner Sanko

## Sanko Inducted as Fellow of the Society for Simulation in Healthcare Academy

Assistant Professor **Jill Steiner Sanko**, Ph.D. '15, M.S., A.R.N.P.-B.C., C.H.S.E.-A., has been inducted as a Fellow of the Society for Simulation in Healthcare (SSH) Academy. Fellows are selected based on their outstanding contributions to the development of simulation in healthcare. Their skills and knowledge are a vital component of the academy's success, as the fellows initiate important work to advance the field of healthcare simulation. The Society for Simulation in Healthcare is a leading interprofessional society that advances the application of simulation in healthcare through global engagement.



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# Driven to Save a Loved One, Pioneering Researcher Explores Marijuana Use

**Assistant Professor Denise C. Vidot, Ph.D. '15**, decided to go into research because of her father's cancer. But happenstance led her to shift her focus to marijuana research, and the change in direction turned out to be exceptionally timely.

Vidot's pioneering work into cardiovascular and metabolic outcomes among marijuana users has gained widespread attention as states and localities around the country debate legalizing marijuana for medical and recreational use. She was even recognized by Routledge for her article "Emerging Issues for Our Nation's Health: The Intersection of Marijuana Use and Cardiometabolic Disease Risk." Her research was one of the top three most downloaded articles of the year published in Routledge's *Health & Social Care* journals—while she was still working on her doctorate.

The eldest of seven siblings, Vidot set her sights on medicine more than a decade before she arrived at the University of Miami. When she was growing up in the Boynton Beach area, her father was diagnosed with scleroderma, a rare—and incurable—autoimmune disease.

"I was young and had the dream to become a physician to fix him," she says. "But it wasn't until 2004 when I was an undergrad at UM, that he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma cancer."

Vidot realized that "if I wanted to save him—that was my mindset back then—I needed to do research. After his diagnosis, I learned that scientists are the ones who do research to discover treatments and cures."

Her father wouldn't hear of it. "He made me promise him that I was not going to spend my career trying to cure multiple myeloma cancer." She agreed, but didn't stop trying to help bring about a cure. As an undergraduate student in biology, she started the Student Myeloma Advocacy Coalition, a non-profit to raise myeloma awareness. It soon grew into a fundraising

and networking organization offering a sense of community to others coping with loved ones who have cancer. She went on to earn a master's degree in non-profit management and still serves as the coalition's executive director.

Vidot's interest in substance abuse research was kindled while working on her Ph.D. in epidemiology. "Now, you talk about marijuana and it's normal conversation—constantly in the news," she says. "When I started, it was all about cocaine." She became involved in a long-term study of children who were exposed to cocaine *in utero*. They were adolescents by then, and she discovered they were more likely to use marijuana than cocaine.

Since then, Vidot's research has centered on marijuana use and its impact on cardiovascular risk, metabolic health, and physical activity. She also has looked at the effect of marijuana use among bariatric surgery patients and eating behavior disorders among adolescents who use marijuana. Vidot's groundbreaking contributions have garnered high-level recognition: the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, in a 2017 report, cited her work as the only study examining marijuana use and metabolic syndrome.

But don't think she's trying to change anyone's mind about marijuana.

"I have no opinion pro or against marijuana use," she says. "I was trained that it is not smart to make policy without evidence. So I want to do my part to make sure that there is evidence-based research out there on the topic of the physical health impact of marijuana use."



## 1950s

**Ann Marie McCrystal, B.S.N. '59**, founder and board member of Visiting Nurse Association of the Treasure Coast, was honored with the SONHS 2017 Alumnus of Distinction Award on November 4, 2017. The award recognizes alumni who, through the practice of nursing, exemplify the professionalism, humanity, and citizenship that bring distinction to themselves, all alumni and the SONHS.

## 1960s

**Betty Lovell Alvarez, B.S.N. '65, and Marcelo A. Alvarez, B.B.A. '62, M.B.A. '65**, were recognized by the Champion for Learning, Educational Foundation of Collier County Educational Foundation for their involvement and commitment to enrich the education of students in Naples, Florida.

**Judy Amerkan Jones, B.S.N. '68**, passed away this past January 2 in Glen Allen, Virginia. She worked at Jackson Memorial Hospital for over 30 years. For many years, Mrs. Jones was the director of the School of Nursing and the Department of Nursing Studies. She leaves behind her husband Dennis A. Jones and a daughter, Kathryn M. Gilden, B.B.A. '00, M.S.T.X. '01, M.B.A. '01.

## 1970s

**Clare Wolf Good, B.S.N. '70**, has moved into a lovely independent living facility in West Palm Beach and is excited for this next phase of her life, which of course includes the University of Miami. Some of her favorite memories include "the Flavets and driving from North Miami Beach after a full day of work as an assistant director of Nursing at Plantation Hospital; being married, and raising two teenage girls. Those were the days!"

## 1980s

**Mary C. Smolenski, A.R.N.P., C.N.P. '80**, was highlighted in a chapter in *Redefining Retirement for Nurses: Finding Meaning in Retirement* (2018) by Joanne Evans and Patricia Tabloski, Sigma Theta Tau International, Indianapolis, IN. She received the Chair's Award, Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE), October 2017. Her editorial or publications include Goudreau, Kelly A. and Smolenski, Mary C., co-editors (2018) on *Health Policy and Advanced Practice Nursing: Impact and Implications*, 1st and 2nd Editions, Springer Publishing Co., New York. Cary, Ann and Smolenski, Mary (2018) *Credentialing and Clinical Privileging, in Advanced Practice Nursing: Essentials for Role Development*, Lucille Joel, editor, F.A. Davis Company (Fourth Edition).

## 1990s

**Carmen Sierra, B.S.N. '96**, presented a poster session on Nursing and Technology at the American Nurses Association and Association of Perioperative Nurses conferences in March. She also completed three half-marathons over the past year and in August will compete in the Chicago Triathlon, the largest competition of its kind in the world.

**Charles P. Buscemi, B.S.N. '99, M.S.N. '01, Ph.D. '05**, has been appointed as vice chair for Graduate Nursing at Florida International University Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing and Health Sciences, where he previously worked as a clinical associate professor.

## 2000s

**Johis Ortega, B.S.N. '02, M.S.N. '06, Ph.D. '11, and Kenya F. Snowden, M.S.N. '10, D.N.P.**, SONHS faculty and alumni, led the biannual Healthcare Mission trip to Haiti where they provided primary care in Thomonde, a remote town in Haiti's mountainous Plateau Central underserved by other Haiti relief agencies.

**Lillian Basadre, M.S.N. '05**, works as a clinical nurse consultant for Celgene Pharmaceutical Corporation.

**Chad R. Reihm, B.S.N. '06, M.S.N. '08, M.D. '12**, is on track to complete his radiology residency in Savannah, Georgia, this June. He has also accepted a breast imaging fellowship at the University of Utah, which will begin in July. Though he's no longer in Miami, Chad cherishes his UM connection: "As always, it's great to be a Miami Hurricane!"

**Meilin, B.S.N. '07, M.S.N. '14, and Luis Diaz-Paez, B.S.N. '15, M.S.N. '17**, in April welcomed their second child—a healthy baby girl, Liliana. Also, Luis recently accepted a job at Jackson South as an ARNP.

## Send us your news!

Email Rosa Lamazares-Romero, SONHS Assistant Director, Communications and Marketing at [rmlromero@miami.edu](mailto:rmlromero@miami.edu)

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## 2000s continued

**Megan Corley, B.S.N. '08**, worked at University of Miami Hospital for two years after graduation. Her love for nursing and desire to learn more took her to the New York University College of Nursing, where she graduated in 2012 with an Adult Primary Care NP degree. Megan enjoys the academic setting. She has been teaching in NYU's College of Nursing as an adjunct faculty member and working as a nurse practitioner at NYU Hospital since 2012. She plans to graduate this May with her D.N.P. from NYU and credits UM with "providing me the foundation for my nursing studies and giving me the chance to experience everything that nursing has to offer."

**Tiffany Chomko, M.D., B.S.N. '09**, graduated from American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine in February. She begins a residency in internal medicine at University of Miami/JFK Medical Center Palm Beach in July.

of her life's most incredible experiences, including being a nurse in a small town in the Arctic. The book, available via Amazon, chronicles the many challenges, joys, and encounters that shaped and influenced her life and her family's lives.

## 2010s

**Shirley E. Curtis, Ph.D. '11**, was promoted to the position of associate professor at the University of The Bahamas. She also serves as president of the Caribbean Regional Midwives Association.

**Janet G. Eves, D.N.P. '11**, a registered nurse for over 30 years has recently published a book titled, *Below-Zero Nursing*, in which she describes some

**Natalie Leblanc, Ph.D. '16, M.P.H., B.S.N.**, begins a position as assistant tenure track faculty at the University of Rochester School of Nursing. She started at the University of Rochester School of Nursing as a postdoc in October of 2016.

**David Smith, B.S.N. '17**, recently accepted a registered nurse residency position at Baptist Hospital of Miami.

## Hemispheric Spotlight on Sim Hospital

**Susana Barroso-Fernandez, Ph.D. '16**, assistant professor of clinical and director of special projects for the Simulation Hospital at the UM School of Nursing and Health Studies, participated in the *We Are One U* tour to Bogotá, Colombia, in March. At the reception for the interdisciplinary delegation led by UM President Julio Frenk, she delivered a 'Cane Talk to 100 alumni, incoming students, parents, and friends about the Simulation Hospital's capability to merge knowledge and practical experience. Barroso-Fernandez also stressed that the facility likewise will help train global communities to prepare for and cope with natural disasters, pandemics, and other catastrophes.



## Two Roads Merged: Combining a Passion for Culture and Care

**Inspired by ancestors who were trailblazers** in teaching and medicine, Amber Vermeesch, Ph.D. '11, has forged a path that combines her passion for culture with the desire to care for people.

Vermeesch's great-grandfather was the first doctor in the family. His medical school diploma hangs in her office at the University of Portland, where she is a tenured associate professor of nursing. Her grandmother was a doctor, too—earned her doctorate in education. Her father became an M.D. and a professor at Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

Despite the strong family influences in medicine, a career in healthcare was not Vermeesch's first choice. As an undergraduate, she was drawn by her fascination with cultures to cultural anthropology.

"The study of people and cultures. I love that," she says. "I still very much love the stories—where people are coming

from, what influences their behavior, and what makes them who they are."

Vermeesch studied Spanish as her foreign language requirement, traveling to Mexico during the summers and spending a year studying in Leon, Spain.

After graduation, she took time off to "just do stuff I knew I wasn't going to do again in a while." She tended bar while living on a ranch in Colorado, spent two months trekking New Zealand, and served for a year in AmeriCorps—the domestic version of the Peace Corps—helping to bridge the digital divide among underserved people in Montana.

Then, when her grandfather was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, she came home to Nashville to help care for him and her grandmother. The experience sparked her desire to become a nurse.

"I chose family nurse practitioner purposefully because I wanted to have a broad range of people that I could care for," Vermeesch says. "In school they tell us 'cradle to grave'—we care for everybody."

In nursing school, she combined her Spanish skills and desire to help people by researching homeless Hispanic men and working as a nurse practitioner in a clinic serving mostly Hispanic women. What she saw spurred her to find ways to increase physical activity among Latinas.

Her work with Latinas led her to UM where El Centro, the Center of Excellence for Health Disparities Research at the School of Nursing and Health Studies, was just launching. Vermeesch served as a research assistant for the center, working on HIV intervention and prevention among Hispanic women, and on the "Project VIDA: Violence, Intimate Relationships, and Drugs among Latinos" study.

Since then, she has investigated perceived barriers to physical activity among middle school girls. Most recently, her research has centered on promoting health and wellness for students coping with the stress of nursing school.

While her work has brought her into contact with a range of people and populations, the overarching theme continues to be "wellness."

This past March, Vermeesch was accepted into the University of Arizona's Integrative Nursing Faculty Fellowship, where she strives to transform her teaching pedagogy and to inspire fellow nurse educators, students, and clients.



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## A Nurse's Care Can Make a Lasting Impact

Casey Pearce, B.S.N. '18, has a deep-felt appreciation for the care that nurses provide, especially at those moments when a small gesture can make a huge difference. That appreciation motivated her to pursue a career in nursing.

When she was a young girl, Pearce visited her brother in the hospital after his open-heart surgeries to repair a congenital heart defect. Just being in the hospital made her jittery, let alone her concern for her brother. "The nurses would hold my hands to help me feel safe. They'd walk me around the unit," she remembers. Seeing familiar settings, like the little ice cream stand, helped her settle. "Little things like that—the generosity of the nurses—made me want to be that support for everyone else."

From her first step on campus, Pearce loved the University and felt that she was right where she needed to be. Her experience at the School of Nursing and Health Studies (SONHS) has reinforced what she'd always felt about the nursing profession. "The faculty is very supportive. It's not a weeding-out process. They want us to succeed."

Highly regarded by peers and faculty alike, Pearce has emerged as a dedicated student leader. She's president of the UM chapter of the National Student Nurses' Association and serves on the SONHS Patient Safety Committee.

She co-created several online games to teach patient safety concepts in a highly interactive and engaging manner, according to Mary McKay, B.S.N. '88, D.N.P. '09, associate dean for undergraduate nursing programs, and also participates in writing the *Patient Safety* newsletter and in SONHS patient safety awareness events.

Pearce was also named a President's 100 ambassador, a highly competitive honor. As an ambassador, she conducts campus tours for prospective students and their parents, conveying not only information about the school, but more importantly, her love and enthusiasm for the U.

Her desire to become a first-class nurse remains her priority, and she's garnered first-hand experience to support that goal. "I've been at UMH for orthopedic, at Jackson for neuro, and at Sylvester for cancer," she says.

In fact, she got to see patients the very first day, which was how the "waffle mix-up" happened.

"I was super excited about going into a room and helping someone," she recalls. "In one, there was a sweet lady who wanted help putting syrup on her waffles." Pearce picked up a container and started pouring. Hmm, she noticed, this syrup is quite thin and runny.

Then, as the woman started eating, Pearce saw the unopened syrup packet on the tray. "Oops, I just poured coffee all over the patient's waffles. I was shaking and didn't know what to do."

But Pearce's act of comfort turned out well. "The woman insisted they were the best waffles she'd ever had. Her husband even came down to the nurses' station and said, 'Wow! She just had the best breakfast talking to you.'"

Pearce laughs remembering her little gaff now as she prepares for graduation and the opportunity to share her compassion and topnotch nursing skills with the tiniest of patients: newborns in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. "I've fallen in love with this area of nursing," she asserts.

And in the same way those kind nurses inspired a young girl to become a nurse long ago, her SONHS professors have inspired in Pearce a calling to teach.

"I want to emulate those professors who have meant so much to me," she says. "I'd love to prepare our future nurses and help guide them on their journey with the same support and care I've been privileged to experience."



### The School of Nursing and Health Studies 2017

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNY ABREU & MITCHELL ZACHS

Alumni Weekend & Homecoming 2017 marked the first time festivities for SONHS alumni took place in the new Simulation Hospital. The 69th Annual Alumni Breakfast and Morning Spirits class reunion celebrations on November 4 gave many of the 200 attendees a first chance to tour the fully functional five-story hospital replica. At the event, Dean Cindy L. Munro presented the Alumnus of Distinction Award to registered nurse Anne Marie McCrystal, B.S.N. '59, a long-time advocate for equitable patient care who was appointed by Florida Governor Rick Scott in 2016 to serve on the Indian River County Hospital District Board of Trustees. Then in December, Dean Munro presided over her first SONHS Awards Ceremony at which 145 new graduates, including the inaugural cohort of the School's M.S. and M.S.N. Informatics U-Online programs, joined the ranks of proud 'Canes worldwide.





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