

UB NURSING

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO SCHOOL OF NURSING

>>

2025



A Statewide Hub

for Nursing Innovation

\$34 million investment will expand
simulation, research and faculty
development across New York State **Pg 12**

A MESSAGE

FROM THE DEAN



This issue of *UBNursing* reflects the depth and breadth of our work. Faculty, students and alumni are conducting research that addresses pressing health challenges, advancing educational innovation, earning national recognition, and building partnerships that strengthen the health of our communities.

Despite being the largest segment of the health care workforce, nursing continues to receive a fraction of the research funding awarded to other health disciplines. At UB School of Nursing, we are determined to change that. Our faculty, students and alumni lead studies that are rooted in the realities of patient care and informed by the expertise only nursing brings. The research you will read about in this issue demonstrates how nurses generate knowledge that informs policy, improves care delivery and addresses inequities. Whether investigating the effect of heat waves on kidney disease hospitalizations or evaluating how artificial intelligence can enhance nursing education, our researchers are contributing to science with insight that is grounded in practice.

Our commitment to educational excellence is equally strong. The State University of New York awarded UB SON \$17 million to develop SUNY's first Simulation Center of Excellence; UB has matched the investment for a total of \$34 million, the largest in our school's history. The new facility will be a place where students from UB and other schools of nursing across the state can refine their skills, apply evidence-based practices, and learn to navigate the complexities of clinical care before entering the workforce. Our recent endorsement by the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning affirms that we are using the highest standards in simulation education.

We also celebrate the exceptional achievements of our faculty. This year, five faculty were named fellows of the American Academy of Nursing, the American College of Nurse-Midwives and the American Heart Association. These honors recognize sustained contributions to research, practice, education and leadership. They also signal to our students and to the broader health care community the level of expertise and dedication that defines UB School of Nursing.

Our work extends well beyond the university. In partnership with the Erie County Department of Health and Buffalo Public Schools, we are providing a series of free back-to-school vaccine clinics for students. These clinics help children meet state immunization requirements so they can start the school year healthy, protected and ready to learn. They also give our nursing students meaningful real-world experience in public health while advancing access to preventive care and supporting the wellness of the wider community.

In addition to these advances and accomplishments, we are proud to share that our RN to BS program has once again been ranked the number one online bachelor's program in the nation by U.S. News & World Report. This marks the second consecutive year we have earned this distinction, reflecting the expertise of our faculty, the commitment of our students and the strength of our academic programs.

The work featured in this issue is the product of a community dedicated to advancing nursing science, preparing future leaders and improving health outcomes. Whether you are an alumnus, donor, partner or friend of the school, your support is essential to this mission. I invite you to explore the impact of that shared commitment in the pages ahead.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Annette B. Wysocki". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Dean Annette B. Wysocki, PhD, RN, FAAN, FNYAM



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ON THE COVER

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IN ACTION

RESEARCH

School Of Nursing Expands Research With FIRST WET LABORATORY

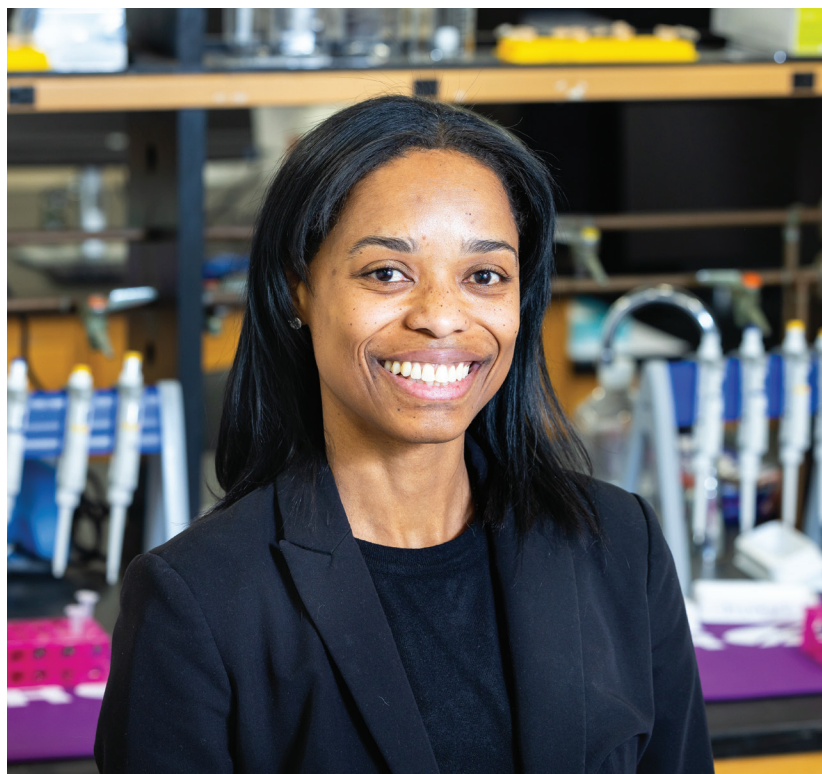
BY CHARLES ANZALONE

The University at Buffalo School of Nursing has opened its first wet laboratory, a milestone that expands the school's research capacity and enhances training in molecular biology, biochemistry and microscopic anatomy.

Located in Faber Hall on South Campus, the new lab is supported by funding from the National Institute on Aging. It positions the School of Nursing among a small number of nursing schools nationwide with dedicated wet lab facilities.

"Research in the wet lab can help understand disease mechanisms, early diagnosis, the development of new treatments and improve current technologies," says Carleara Weiss, research assistant professor in the Office of Nursing Research. "These abilities support improving overall health care."

Unlike dry labs, which focus on data processing and simulation, wet labs enable hands-on biological analysis in areas such as immunology, histology and chemistry. The School of Nursing's lab is designed for biomarker and immunoassay research – tests that examine antibody-antigen interactions to detect and measure proteins, hormones, drugs and other biomarkers in blood, serum



↑ With expertise in behavioral sleep medicine and circadian rhythms, Carleara Weiss strengthens UB School of Nursing's role as a leader in nursing science.

and other fluids. Current projects include studies on markers of neurodegeneration, Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

"The launch of our first basic experimental research lab marks a bold step forward in our commitment to advancing nursing science," says Dean Annette Wysocki, who Weiss says was instrumental in securing funding. "It expands our capacity to conduct fundamental biomedical research and offers students hands-on experience with molecular and cellular techniques, equipping future nurse leaders with the skills to translate molecular discoveries into better patient care."

Weiss notes that few nurse scientists nationwide have expertise in microbiology, and most nursing schools lack facilities for this type of laboratory research.

"Having a wet lab means collaborating with colleagues within the School of Nursing, incorporating lab capabilities into their studies," she says. "I also have interdisciplinary collaboration across UB and externally, combining the wet lab into their studies. This makes our research more meaningful and translatable into clinical practice. Lastly, the wet lab is an opportunity to expand learning skills and training for nursing students, as well as other disciplines."

“The launch of our first basic experimental research lab marks a bold step forward in our commitment to advancing nursing science.”

—DEAN ANNETTE WYSOCKI

Looking ahead, Weiss hopes to integrate her expertise in both molecular research and sleep science by developing a combined wet and sleep laboratory. In-lab sleep studies could begin this fall.

The wet lab marks a pivotal step in advancing nursing science. By deepening understanding of disease mechanisms, enabling earlier diagnosis, and driving the development of new treatments and technologies, it expands the School of Nursing's capacity to improve health care outcomes while providing vital training for the next generation of nurse scientists.

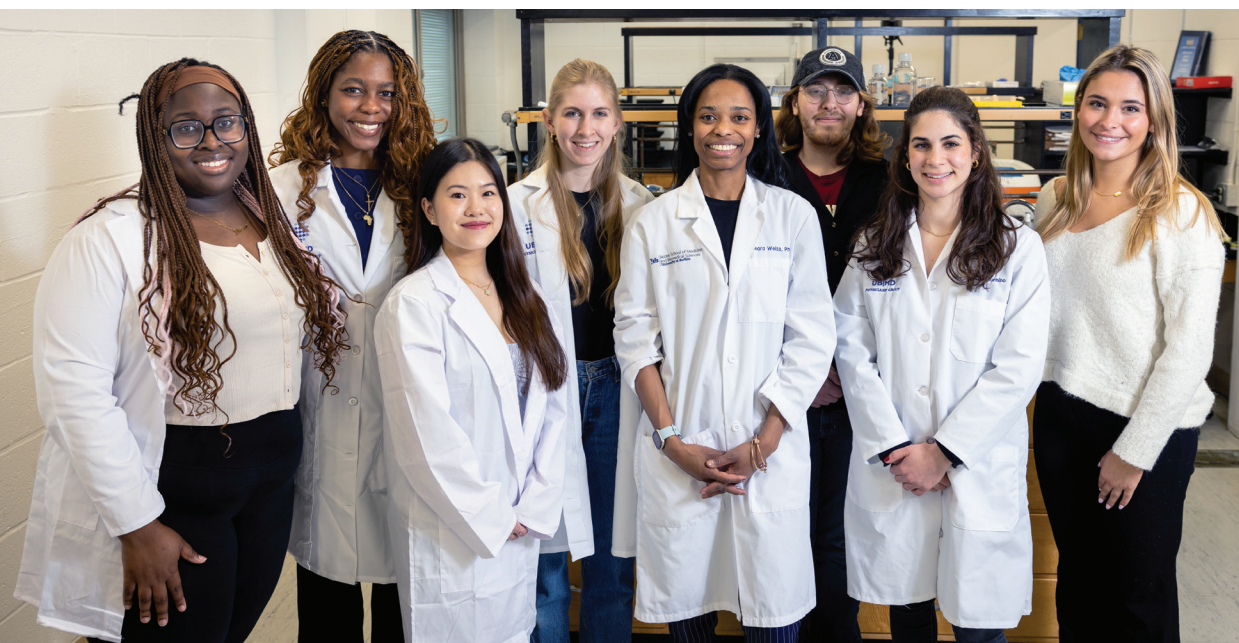
Students practicing the pipetting technique for biomarker sample preparation.



NOW ENROLLING VISTA STUDY

UB School of Nursing researchers are seeking participants ages 65–85 with sleep disturbances but no dementia or Alzheimer's diagnosis.

To learn more, contact research coordinator Ayesha Rahman at 716-829-3218.



From left: Medjie Cherry (medical student), Ifeoma Ezeilo (Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences graduate), Flora Lin (nursing student), Amber Goldstein (nursing student), Carleara Weiss, Jaden Troiano (biochemistry graduate), Laura Saturnino (medical student), Summer Perry (intended nursing student).

Exploring Generative AI as a Nursing Education Tool

BY SHANNON O'SULLIVAN

Generative artificial intelligence is rapidly entering classrooms and health care settings, raising new questions about how students and professionals can best use these tools. Vidya Chan, UB SON PhD student, examined what this integration might look like in nursing education.

Chan recently published a pilot study, "Integrating Generative Artificial Intelligence in a Writing Intensive Course for Undergraduate Nursing Students," in the *Journal of Professional Nursing*. The study investigated the use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in an undergraduate nursing writing-intensive course and highlights AI's potential to strengthen nursing students' writing, an

understand both the potential applications and limitations of these tools," Chan said. "The findings of this study indicate that, with faculty guidance, students are capable of using generative AI in an ethical and effective manner."

The study involved 20 undergraduate nursing students in a baccalaureate program in the northeastern United States. The students were asked to evaluate AI responses in relation to the current nursing literature. This assignment spurred students to think critically about AI output and articulate their understanding of nursing scholarship.

Chan noted an unexpected finding: students expressed apprehension



Vidya Chan

Despite these challenges, the pilot study offers a useful starting point for effectively and ethically integrating new technology into the nursing curriculum. Chan indicated that this project can serve as a springboard for future nursing education research.

"This project should be replicated with a larger, more diverse sample and include a control group to enhance the validity and generalizability of the results," she explained. "Future research should explore different strategies for integrating AI into the curriculum, including comparing various approaches to determine their effectiveness."

THE PILOT STUDY OFFERS A USEFUL STARTING POINT FOR EFFECTIVELY AND ETHICALLY INTEGRATING NEW TECHNOLOGY INTO THE NURSING CURRICULUM.

essential skill for patient care documentation, communication within health care teams, and dissemination of research.

"As the health care environment becomes increasingly integrated with AI, nurse educators and employers must ensure that students

about using generative AI in future assignments.

"During the exercise, some students found the limitations of the technology concerning," Chan said, "and the process of verifying the accuracy of the AI-generated output was viewed as too time-consuming."



REALISTIC SIMULATION IMPROVES EPIDURAL PLACEMENT TRAINING

BY SARAH GOLDTHRITE

Epidural placement is one of the most technically challenging procedures anesthesia providers perform, relying on precise tactile perception to identify tissue layers and achieve loss of resistance (LOR) without injuring the patient. Yet, widely used training manikins can fall short in replicating the feel of human tissue, limiting a provider's readiness before performing the procedure in practice.

A recent study published by the American Association of Nurse Anesthesiology – led by Clare Banigan, DNP '24, CRNA, in collaboration with University at Buffalo School of Nursing CRNA program assistant director Brian Lowe and colleagues at Highland Hospital in Rochester, New York – aims to address this gap.

The study, "Simulation Training for Epidural Placement: A Randomized Trial Comparing the Use of an Ex Vivo Porcine Spine Model with the M43B Lumbar Puncture Simulator IIA," also Banigan's Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) project, compared the effectiveness of two epidural training models: the commercially available M43B Lumbar Puncture Simulator IIA and an ex vivo porcine spine model.

Ten experienced anesthesia providers participated in an educational in-service, performing epidural placements on both models before rating them on realism, training utility and similarity to human anatomy.

The team found that porcine spine significantly outperformed

the M43B manikin in nearly every measure except landmark identification, which was similar between models. The porcine model scored markedly higher for ligamentum flavum feel, LOR, catheter insertion and novice training utility, with all differences reaching statistical significance. All 10 participants preferred it, citing its lifelike tissue texture, realistic resistance and authentic procedural feel.

Proficiency in epidural anesthesia can require 60-90 clinical cases, but current residency requirements – 10 for nurse anesthesia residents and 40 for physician anesthesiology residents – fall short of this benchmark. Opportunities for repeated practice in live patients are limited, slowing skill mastery.

By offering a realistic, repeatable and ethically sourced training platform, the porcine spine model can help bridge the gap between classroom learning and clinical performance. Tissue-based models preserve the authentic mechanical properties of human anatomy, allowing learners to refine skills in a safe environment, an approach that supports patient safety and improves procedural outcomes.

Banigan's work exemplifies the impact of practice-based research in nursing. She brought her clinical experience and expertise into the research arena, identifying a training gap and delivering findings with direct application to patient care.

Clinicians in practice are uniquely positioned to see where improvements are needed and to lead evidence-based change.

↑ Clare Banigan discusses her research with classmate Eric Ramdas (DNP '25) during UB Nursing's 11th Annual Research Day in April 2024.

Heat Waves, Kidney Health, and the Hidden Cost of Climate Change

UB nursing researcher Daniel Jackson Smith was awarded a grant to investigate how environments influence hospitalizations during extreme heat events.

BY CHARLES ANZALONE

“We all recognize the world is getting hotter, right?” says Daniel Jackson Smith, an expert on extreme heat and its effects on human health. “Politically, the idea of climate change is if it’s manmade or not. But when we say it’s getting hotter, that’s not up for debate. And that’s impacting human health.”

Smith recently received a three-year, \$487,230 grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research to study the connection between heat waves and kidney disease hospitalizations. His team will examine data from about 80,000 individuals living in the Philadelphia and Atlanta metropolitan areas.

The project will consider how environmental factors – including reduced green space, high concen-

trations of concrete, and historical redlining – correlate with kidney disease outcomes. Redlined neighborhoods, Smith explains, are often hotter than surrounding areas, and residents may face compounding health risks.

“We’re looking for whatever associations we can find,” he says. “Patients admitted to hospitals, numbers of diagnoses, co-morbidities. The novel piece is we will be looking at people’s addresses and their neighborhood. Are they living in neighborhoods that were historically redlined, which we know are hotter than neighborhoods that weren’t.”

While outdoor workers remain especially vulnerable, Smith emphasizes that the risks extend beyond fields and construction sites. Heat exposure also affects people working in restaurants and other indoor environments, as well as individuals already living with kidney disease.

“This grant is trying to take a look at how it’s really not only outdoor workers impacted by climate change, even though they are,” Smith says. “But more so, anyone with kidney disease is impacted.”

Smith attended the White House Extreme Heat Summit in September and will travel to Guatemala in January to train with mentor Lisa Thompson of Emory University. The training will focus on implementation science – developing interventions



Daniel Jackson Smith

that bring research directly back to communities and patients.

“That’s an important part of the study,” he says. “It takes 17 years for research findings to be translated into practice. We have to take the research back to the stakeholders – doctors, nurses, nurse practitioners, people running our public health departments. And especially patients. How do we start developing interventions that can potentially protect people’s health during periods of heat waves?”

Smith’s 2024 induction as a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing underscores his growing role in shaping how nursing science addresses climate change. His work seeks to ensure that the realities of neighborhood environments and social histories are central to understanding and preventing the health consequences of extreme heat.

Daniel Jackson Smith, assistant professor at the UB School of Nursing, participated in the 2024 White House Extreme Heat Summit as an informed observer and roundtable discussant. The event convened leaders and practitioners to address lessons from this summer’s record-breaking temperatures and strategies for community-driven responses to extreme heat.



BARRIERS TO RURAL PRENATAL CARE ACCESS PERSIST

BY SHANNON O'SULLIVAN

Access to prenatal care remains a critical challenge for rural communities, contributing to the maternal health crisis in the United States. A new study led by Stephanie Durfee, UB nursing clinical instructor and PhD student, examines why these barriers persist despite long-standing awareness.

Published in the *American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing*, the study, "Perceptions of Rural Access to Prenatal Care in the United States by Patients, Nurses, Midwives, and Physicians," was co-authored by UB nursing PhD student Danielle Nazarenko and Associate Professor Kafuli Agbemenu. The team reviewed seven peer-reviewed articles that investigated prenatal care in rural areas, identifying challenges rooted in individual, socioeconomic and health care system factors.

The findings underscore how rural residents face compounded difficulties, from lack of providers to logistical and financial hurdles, that can delay or prevent critical prenatal visits. These gaps contribute to the higher maternal mortality rates reported in the U.S. compared with other high-income countries.

"The study highlighted that transportation, health insurance limitations, and provider shortages remain significant obstacles," Durfee said. "One surprising

aspect was the persistence of barriers to prenatal care in rural areas despite long-standing awareness of these issues."

Durfee says that nurse educators and employers can play a key role in addressing these barriers and contributing to the improvement of maternal health outcomes in rural areas. Her recommendations include implementing nurse-led care coordination programs to help pregnant persons access services, expanding the roles of certified nurse midwives and nurse practitioners in rural



Stephanie Durfee

“The study highlighted that transportation, health insurance limitations, and provider shortages remain significant obstacles.”

—STEPHANIE DURFEE

settings, optimizing telehealth services, and developing mobile prenatal clinics.

"While previous research has focused on statistical trends or specific geographic areas, this integrative review provides a broader understanding of rural prenatal care access challenges," she said.

The study also identifies areas for future research, including evaluating the effectiveness of

telehealth and mobile clinics, understanding the impact of Medicaid policy changes, and exploring the experiences of pregnant persons from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Durfee says that longitudinal studies are needed to determine the long-term maternal and infant outcomes associated with rural prenatal care barriers.



HOW PEER SUPPORT SHAPES SLEEP HEALTH IN LGBQ+ ADOLESCENTS

BY SHANNON O'SULLIVAN

Adolescents who identify as LGBQ+ report poorer sleep quality, and researchers are uncovering how peer victimization and lack of support contribute to the gap.

A recent study published in the *Journal of Sleep Health* examined the connection between peer dynamics and sleep quality in sexual minority youth. The study, “Longitudinal Association Between Adolescent Sexual Identity and Sleep Quality: The Mediating Roles of Peer Victimization and Perceived Social Support,” was led by Misol Kwon, UB SON PhD alumna and post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Co-authors included UB School of Nursing faculty Jennifer Livingston, associate professor; Weijun Wang, principal research scientist; and Amy Hequembourg, associate professor.

Drawing on data from 800 adolescents surveyed online over a 12-month period, the researchers found that LGBQ+ youth experienced higher rates of peer victimization, reported less social support, and slept more poorly than their heterosexual peers. Nearly one in five participants identified as LGBQ+, and the majority were female.

“Our study found that sexual minority youth are more likely to experience peer victimization and receive less peer social support than their heterosexual peers,” Kwon said.

She added that the findings highlight the importance of supportive peer environments and addressing social dynamics to improve sleep health for this group.

Livingston noted that future research utilizing daily reporting in conjunction with actigraphy, a non-invasive approach to measuring sleep-wake patterns, “... would provide a more nuanced understanding of the acute, daily level effects of peer victimization and social support on LGBQ+ adolescents’ sleep quality.”

Wang echoed the need for future research to investigate the roles of family and school support in mitigating the impact of peer victimization on sleep.

Hequembourg explained the importance of furthering this research to ensure LGBQ+ adolescents can access equitable and competent health care.

“The impact of political and cultural stressors on individual health outcomes among LGBQ+ adolescents also warrants



Misol Kwon

further investigation,” Hequembourg said. “Heightened vigilance for physical violence from peers at school and others in the public sphere impose significant stress on queer youth and are associated with poorer mental health outcomes, including increased suicidality, self-harm, anxiety and depression.”

Understanding Why Young Adults Vape, and How to Help Them Quit

BY SARAH GOLDTHRITE



Yanjun Zhou

E-cigarette use among young adults

is rising at an alarming rate, despite growing evidence of its physical and mental health risks. These products are often viewed as safer alternatives to combustible cigarettes, but the reality is more complicated.

In a recent study, “Voices From Young Adults Perceptions About Electronic Cigarette Use,”

published in the *Journal of Addictions Nursing*, researchers Yanjun Zhou, PhD '25; Eunhee Park, associate professor; Maciej Goniewicz, Director of Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center's NicoTAR resource; and Yu-Ping Chang, associate dean for research, examine the motivations behind vaping and what may help young adults quit.

The study addresses a key gap: while research on the health effects of vaping is growing, less is known about how young adults perceive e-cigarettes and what might motivate them to stop. Drawing from in-depth interviews with 16 participants ages 18 and 26, the authors identify both the drivers of use and the barriers to cessation.

Many participants said they vape because it is convenient, discreet and socially acceptable. Unlike smoking, which is limited by public restrictions, vaping can happen almost anywhere. Devices are small, easy to carry and often cheaper than cigarettes. Flavored options like cotton candy, coffee and fruit make the experience feel more enjoyable and less harmful. Some even view vaping as a step toward quitting smoking.

Over time, however, even casual users noticed health concerns, including throat pain, chest tightness and unease about unknown ingredients. While many admitted limited knowledge of risks, most believed e-cigarettes were harmful.

“What surprised us most was the disconnect between young adults’ awareness of health risks and their continued use of e-cigarettes,” Zhou says. “Despite acknowledging that vaping may have serious health consequences ... many still rationalized their behavior due to the product’s convenience, flavors and social acceptability. This clearly demonstrates the significant appeal of e-cigarette products to this age group.

Several participants expressed a desire to quit and showed interest in interventions, especially those offering education, tools for reducing nicotine intake, and alternatives like patches or mobile apps.

The research is grounded in Self-Perception Theory, which suggests that people form attitudes by observing their own behavior. For young adults who vape without strong prior views on the risks, repeated use can lead them to downplay adverse effects.

“The findings underscore the power of normalization and how limited or ambiguous information can lead to underestimation of harm, especially when paired with peer influence and strategic marketing,” says Zhou.

The study also has policy implications. Participants noted how easy it is to access e-cigarettes and how rarely product health risks are marked on product packaging. Strategies such as raising costs, regulating online marketing, and promoting accurate, youth-focused messaging could counter the factors that normalize use.

The study shows that many young adults underestimate the risks of e-cigarettes and lack reliable information about them. Yet most participants were open to quitting if they had education and support.

“The most urgent change needed is to ensure that young adults receive accurate, accessible and age-centered information about the risks of e-cigarette use,” says Zhou. “Public health messaging must go beyond generic warnings and instead speak directly to the social realities and behavioral patterns of this age group.

“Additionally, policy measures such as stricter marketing regulations, increased taxation, and digital platform monitoring, like social media advertising, should be implemented to reduce appeal and access to youth.”



“...many still rationalized their behavior due to the product’s convenience, flavors and social acceptability.”

—YANJUN ZHOU

SHIFTING RISKS: HOW THE PANDEMIC RESHAPED SEXUAL ASSAULT

BY CHARLES ANZALONE

When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted daily life, it also reshaped the landscape of sexual assault. A study led by Jennifer Livingston, associate professor, reveals both progress and pressing challenges.

The Good News: Sexual assaults decreased by nearly half during the pandemic.

The Bad News: They didn't stop. Instead, the settings where assaults occurred shifted – away from public spaces and toward private ones.

The study, "Sexual Assault in the Context of Daily Level Changes in Socializing and Substance Use Prior to and During the COVID-19 Pandemic," was published by the American Psychological Association. Livingston collaborated with colleagues Jennifer P. Read, chair of UB's Department of Psychology, and Eugene Maguin, research scientist in psychology. The sample included 181 women, ages 22–25.

and sexual assault on weekend days for three weekends in a row, at three different times during the year (total of 27 days per year) for three years.

"We were a little over a year into the study when the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown occurred in March of 2020," Livingston says. "We recognized that we had a rare opportunity to see how changes in the contexts in which the women in our study socialized and used alcohol were related to sexual assault risk before and during the pandemic."

Given the social restrictions in place during the pandemic, the team anticipated a decline, and the data confirmed it.

"We speculated that if women were no longer hanging out in large groups and going to bars or parties, they would be less likely to be exposed to potential offenders who tend to be in those settings," Livingston explains. "This turned out to be accurate. During the pandemic women were less likely to go to bars or parties, were more likely to spend time with one person rather than a large group and were less likely to drink compared to what they did prior to the pandemic."

Even so, alcohol use on a given day still elevated the risk of sexual assault, both before and during the pandemic.

The number of assaults declined, but the context changed.

"During the pandemic, women reported that they were more likely to socialize at their home or someone else's home and spend time with a current or previous



Jennifer Livingston

romantic partner compared to before the pandemic," Livingston says. "Thus, when sexual assaults did occur, the perpetrators were more likely to be current or ex-partners than casual acquaintances."

Livingston summarizes: "As one type of risk receded (assault emerging from social settings that involve alcohol, groups of people, unknown males), another (assault by a partner, at home) became more prominent."

The findings underscore the role of social environments in shaping risk and highlight the need for prevention strategies beyond alcohol-involved assaults in group settings. Livingston and colleagues stress the importance of expanding efforts to address intimate partner violence, with or without alcohol, noting that interventions promoting communication and healthy relationships may help reduce it.

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's health and well-being are still being uncovered.

"AS ONE TYPE OF RISK
RECEDED, ANOTHER BECAME
MORE PROMINENT."

—JENNIFER LIVINGSTON

The project evolved from research conducted in Read's and Craig Colder's psychology lab, with Livingston as a co-investigator. Researchers gathered daily reports on socializing, alcohol and substance use,

Undergraduates Explore Nursing Science Through Summer Research

Hands-on research connects nursing students to the science that underpins evidence-based practice.

Five nursing students spent the summer immersed in discovery through the Nursing Undergraduate Research Summer Experience (NURSE) program. Held from June 3–Aug. 12, the 10-week program pairs undergraduates with accomplished UB School of Nursing scientists for hands-on research experiences that can lead to additional professional opportunities, including attending scientific conferences and disseminating research at local and national levels.

The NURSE program is offered through UB's Office of Nursing Research under the leadership of Yu-Ping Chang, associate dean for research and Patricia H. and Richard E. Garman endowed professor, and Courtney Hanny, assistant director for research advancement. Students receive support from both the School of Nursing and the SUNY Chancellor's Summer Research Excellence Fund. This year's NURSE cohort was part of a larger SUNY initiative that funded 200 undergraduate summer internships, advancing SUNY's goal of having every undergraduate complete a high-quality internship or experiential-learning opportunity before earning their degree.

The students delivered podium presentations of their research findings in Wende Hall on Aug. 8.

Vanessa Akuffo, a junior in the traditional bachelor's degree program, presented, "How Nursing Student Dyads Demonstrate Shared Understanding and Coordination During VR-Based Simulations." Under the mentorship of Kelly-Foltz-Ramos, director of simulation and innovation and assistant professor, Akuffo examined the learning process of virtual reality simulations designed to teach clinical skills.

An expert in occupational and community health among underserved populations, Daniel Jackson Smith mentored two students: **Bryan Lara**, a junior nursing student, who investigated "How Workload Influences Health Care Seeking Behavior," and **Joseph Pohrte**, an intended nursing major, who studied "English Proficiency and Migratory Status Among U.S. Crop Workers."

Owen Li, an intended nursing major, collaborated with Chang on "Heart Rate Variability as an Indicator of

Stress in First Responders and Health Care Workers." Chang is the recipient of a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration to integrate evidence-based behavioral health models into primary care clinics in Western New York.

Nicole Zhu, a senior, also presented research with a focus on behavioral health: "Adolescent User Experiences of an AI-Powered E-Cigarette Cessation App" under the guidance of Eunhee Park, associate professor. Park's research program aims to develop and implement interventions that reduce risky behaviors among young people with low socioeconomic status.

Reflecting on the program's benefits, Zhu said, "I learned that nursing isn't limited to bedside care; it also includes research, where we can explore relevant health issues and develop interventions to improve evidence-based practice in clinical settings."

By connecting undergraduates with faculty mentors, the NURSE program highlights the breadth of nursing science while preparing students to become the next generation of nurse researchers and leaders.

The School of Nursing's 2025 NURSE program students (from left to right): Bryan Lara, Owen Li, Vanessa Akuffo, Nicole Zhu and Joseph Pohrte.



INNOVATIVE

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A Statewide Hub for Nursing Innovation

\$34 million investment will expand simulation, research and faculty development across New York

BY CHARLES ANZALONE

The University at Buffalo School of Nursing is set to become a statewide leader in simulation-based education with the launch of a \$34 million simulation center that will advance nursing research, education and professional development. Announced in May by Gov. Kathy Hochul, the project includes \$17 million in funding from the State University of New York, matched by UB, making it the largest investment in the School of Nursing's 89-year history.

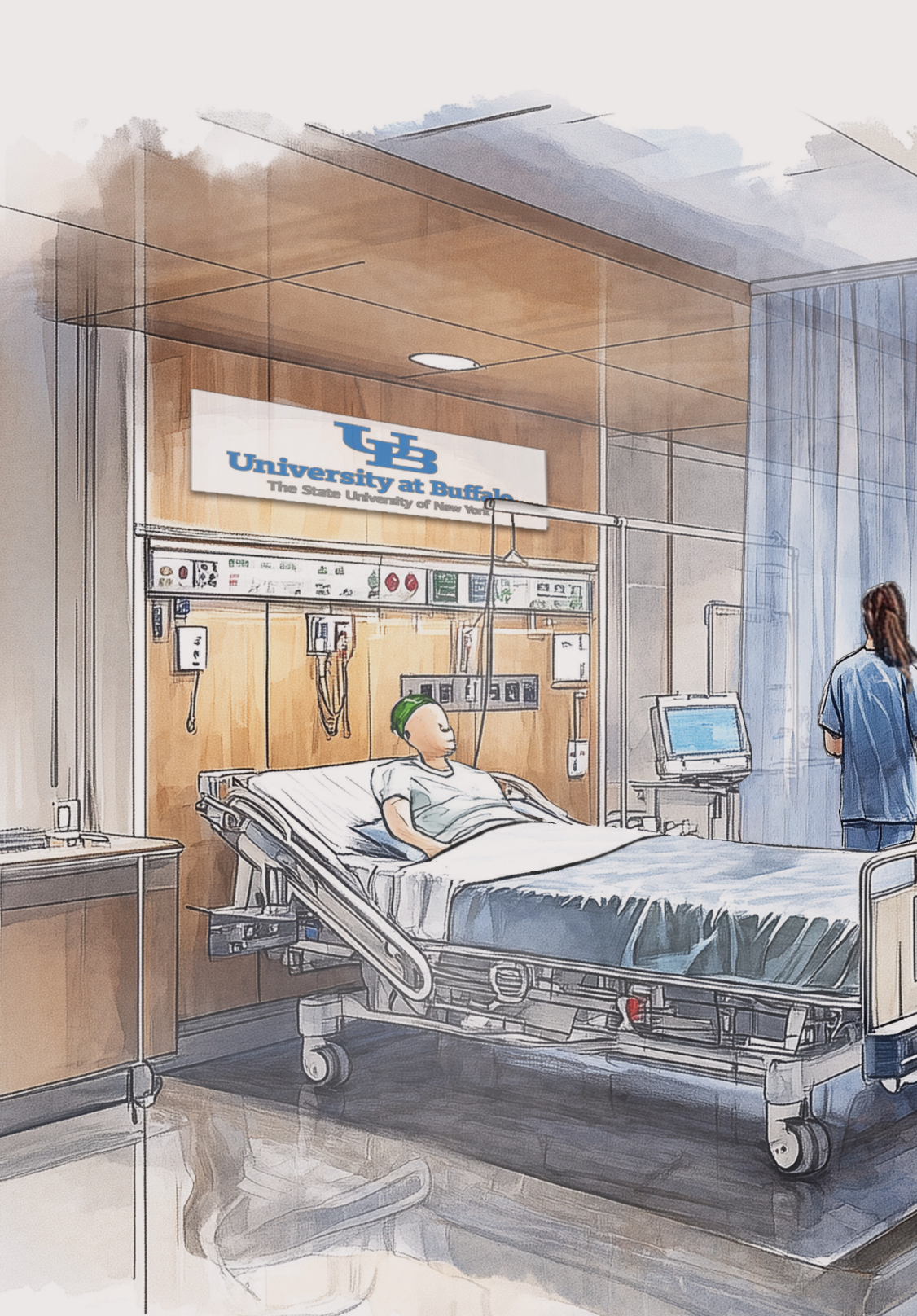
UB has also been named SUNY's first Nursing Simulation Center of Excellence, a distinction that recognizes the school's leadership in developing innovative, evidence-based approaches to preparing the nursing workforce.

"The School of Nursing at the University at Buffalo is grateful to Gov. Hochul and honored to have been selected to establish the new SUNY systemwide Nursing Simulation Center of Excellence that will be a major resource for SUNY system schools of nursing across New York State," says Annette Wysocki, dean of the School of Nursing.

Wysocki notes that the investment will help address a persistent challenge in the profession.

"This investment will advance the future success of the nursing profession in New York State, where the under-investment in schools of nursing continues to lag behind those of other health professions," says Wysocki. "The new simulation center will help prepare faculty and develop the expert nursing workforce of the future, equipping them to meet new clinical challenges driven by therapeutic advances."

The Center's design will emphasize operational efficiency, creating seamless connections between simulation spaces, control rooms, debriefing areas and clinical skills labs. Renderings by University Facilities, Campus Planning Office.



Expanding Capabilities and Enrollment

The School of Nursing already offers nursing simulation programs, including an operating room simulator, clinical skills lab and a health assessment lab.

The new enhanced center will integrate state-of-the-art technology, enabling the school to expand in-person and remote education. It is expected to support a 34% increase in prelicensure nursing enrollment in the first-year post-project completion, with a projected 67% increase over the next decade. The center will also create opportunities for SUNY-wide partnerships to develop and test new simulation scenarios, experiment with new educational tools and provide professional development for nursing faculty.

Extending the Impact Across New York

As part of the effort to expand the nursing workforce, regional nursing simulation centers at Stony Brook University and SUNY Canton will receive a combined \$28 million in funding, bringing the total SUNY investment in nursing education to \$62 million.

"By investing in nurses of the future, we're investing in the talent of aspiring professionals

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

“By offering nursing students repeated, hands-on experience with high-risk and high-frequency scenarios, ranging from emergency responses and maternal health crises to chronic disease management and telehealth delivery, graduates will be better prepared to provide safe, competent and compassionate care from day one.”

—KELLY FOLTZ-RAMOS

COVER STORY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12



LEADING SUNY SIMULATION INNOVATION

Kelly Foltz-Ramos,

PhD, RN, director of simulation and innovation, was selected for the inaugural SUNY Nursing Simulation Fellowship, now underway.

As a co-convener, she is helping lead the development of the SUNY Simulation Shared Resource Library, a system-wide hub of vetted scenarios, strategies and best practices created collaboratively by faculty fellows across the SUNY system.

"This fellowship is an incredible opportunity to advance simulation education together," says Foltz-Ramos. "By building high-quality, shared resources, we can enrich student learning and shape the future of nursing education for all SUNY students."

across our state and in the health care workforce we all rely on," Hochul said. "The SUNY nursing simulation centers will make extraordinary strides toward preparing students and strengthening the pipeline of excellence in our SUNY system and beyond."

SUNY Chancellor John B. King Jr. underscored the system's role in strengthening New York's health care workforce.

"SUNY is committed to strengthening New York's health care workforce," said King, noting that the "groundbreaking investment in nursing simulation is a testament to this commitment, and a reminder of the key role public higher education plays in health outcomes and workforce development."

Advancing Education, Research and Practice

UB's simulation center will position the School of Nursing at the forefront of one of the most promising trends in nursing education, says Kelly Foltz-Ramos, assistant professor and director of simulation and innovation.

The center will advance three major priorities: expanding nursing enrollment by fully leveraging New York State legislation that permits up to one-third of clinical training hours to be completed through simulation; serving as a SUNY-wide resource for faculty development in simulation-based education; and establishing a premier research hub dedicated to advancing simulation and artificial intelligence technologies in health care education.

"The simulation center will be designed with patients in mind," says Foltz-Ramos. "By offering nursing students repeated, hands-on experience with high-risk and high-frequency scenarios, ranging from emergency responses and maternal health crises to chronic disease management and telehealth delivery, graduates will be better prepared to provide safe, competent and compassionate care from day one."

Connecting SUNY Classrooms Through Simulation

The center at UB will serve as a resource for area SUNY nursing programs. Many of these schools face persistent shortages of simulation faculty and

staff, which have reduced the range and frequency of training. In some cases, staffing shortages have led to significant cuts in simulation activities, narrowing student exposure to essential scenarios. Some programs now offer only a single high-acuity simulation each term and rely solely on high-fidelity manikins, with little or no access to standardized patients, virtual desktop simulations, or augmented and virtual reality tools.

UB's new center will help close these gaps. Nearby SUNY programs plan to send faculty and staff for training and bring students to UB for hands-on experience with advanced simulation technologies. A telepresence robot bank will allow schools across the state to participate remotely. Planned offerings include training in content creation, video development, immersive VR and AR simulations, escape rooms, and virtual desktop simulation, all aligned with the Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice.

State Leaders Endorse the Vision

State lawmakers have voiced strong support for the project.

"There is no experience quite like hands-on experience and with these investments, SUNY is ensuring that students in the nursing programs at the University at Buffalo, Canton and Stony Brook are equipped with the very best tools to learn and fill in the gaps within our health care workforce," said State Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes.

State Sen. April N. M. Baskin said the funding will have a long-term impact on advancing health care in New York.

"This generous grant will have a profound impact on the lives of countless patients who will benefit from the training and expertise of the nurses that were fortunate to learn at the University at Buffalo, SUNY Canton, and Stony Brook University campuses," she said. "This cutting-edge medical simulation training can only improve clinical skills and enhance the professionalism of nursing students. Hands-on work by SUNY students will undoubtedly enhance actual clinical scenarios when patients' lives are in their hands."



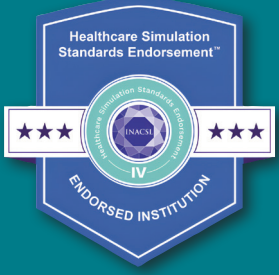
Features of the Simulation Center of Excellence

The facility will include

- High-fidelity simulation rooms for acute care, pediatrics, labor and delivery, operating room, and home care.
- Clinical exam and skills training rooms for foundational procedures and physical assessments.
- Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) labs to immerse students in diverse clinical settings.
- An immersive 360° simulation room for situational awareness, decision-making and team coordination in highly realistic contexts.
- Telepresence robots that enable remote simulation participation and SUNY-wide faculty collaboration.

Foltz-Ramos says these tools and others will ensure future nurses develop expert clinical judgment.

"This investment represents a bold commitment to the future of nursing education," she says. "By creating a cutting-edge hub for simulation, education, and research, we are not only preparing the next generation of nurses but also positioning UB as a national leader in the advancement of health care simulation and technology."



**NATIONAL
RECOGNITION
FOR SIMULATION
EXCELLENCE**

The UB School of Nursing has earned a three-year endorsement from the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation. This distinction recognizes programs that integrate evidence-based standards into simulation to enhance learning, advance professional development and strengthen clinical practice.

SERIOUS VR TECH.
NOT SO SERIOUS
FACULTY REACTIONS.
SCAN TO WATCH.



Prepared to Respond:

HOW UB NURSING STUDENTS ARE TRAINING FOR DISASTERS

BY TERRA OSTERLING

On the first Saturday in April, a Buffalo blizzard set the stage for a deadly traffic pileup resulting in serious injuries with the added risk of hypothermia. While a springtime snowstorm is nothing new in Erie County, this one was different: it was a first-of-its-kind simulation, organized and run by UB nursing faculty and students to gain real-world experience through hands-on emergency response training.

"This type of event is fairly new for an academic discipline, but when the Multicultural Nursing Student Association (MNSA) approached me with the idea for a disaster response training it was a natural fit for me to support them," Sands said.

The daylong training event featured three key components: didactic stations featuring skills refreshers, a triage activity/exercise, and a three-part hands-on drill simulating

collaborative exercise. Sands worked closely with Linda Chen (BS '25), MNSA secretary; Sabrina Schwartz, MNSA faculty advisor; and Clark Reinard, Fire Captain, and Bryan Goyette, EMS Coordinator and Paramedic, both of East Seneca Fire Company. Their goal was to provide nursing students with an opportunity to broaden their perspective while applying acute care skills in a setting they might not typically encounter in nursing school.



Joann Sands, a clinical associate professor at the UB School of Nursing, helped coordinate the event at the East Seneca Fire Company, where she also serves as a volunteer firefighter and EMT.

an automobile extrication, casualty collection point (CCP) and a hospital setting to complete the transfer of care.

The Disaster Management Cycle

Bringing the event to life was also a

The Multicultural Nursing Student Association partnered with the East Seneca Fire Company and UB nursing faculty, including Joann Sands, to host a disaster training in April 2025. Students rotated through three stations: a simulated car crash, triage site and hospital emergency room.

"We learn only a little bit about a nurse's role in disasters specifically, and we thought it would be a great experience if we can expand on that side of the profession," Chen said.

Sands, who devotes one class session each semester to disaster preparedness, has a long-standing passion for disaster preparedness. Her doctor of nursing practice project at UB focused on disaster response, and she earned a Master of Science in disaster preparedness and emergency management from Arkansas State University.

Preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery are critical to the disaster management cycle, Sands said. Training like this event reinforces each phase, with an emphasis on strengthening communication skills.

"The other disciplines [firefighters, emergency medical services, and Mercy Flight crews, who were all on-hand at the event] are trained to respond in these environments where mortality and morbidity can be high. We look at it as disaster epidemiology, so when it came to designing this event for our nursing students, we are teaching risk reduction is in learning how we can respond based on previous disaster scenarios," Sands said.

From Basic Skills to Critical Decisions

Twenty students eased into the day-long simulation with didactic stations led by Sands, Reinhard and Goyette. The sessions included skills refreshers on CPR and AED use, stopping bleeds and trauma assessment. And, appropriate to the event's theme, instructors also covered hypothermia management and how prescribed medications could impact patient outcomes in a disaster setting. Throughout the day, these core skills were framed within the context of a chaotic mass casualty event.

On hand for the disaster drill were 10 EMS and fire personnel and eight volunteers playing the role of the disaster victims. The realism of the drill shed light on a patient's full trauma experience in a way that many of the students had never considered. MNSA president Edwina Fang (BS '25) especially valued how that lesson was paired with the hands-on triage activity.

"We observed a firefighter use the Jaws of Life tool to take the door off a car and that took a while, which showed us how long a patient might be trapped, bleeding or losing oxygen. Nurses are not on scene to see that; now we can have a better



understanding of everything that patient has endured if we encounter them in the ER, and that makes a meaningful impact on our treatment choices," Fang said.

The students were also able to get into the vehicle to hold C-spine stabilization for the victim during that extrication simulation.

The triage activity challenged students to make rapid decisions about how to tag each patient in a high-pressure setting with limited supplies and personnel. Fang said the exercise forced a shift of

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THE TRIAGE ACTIVITY CHALLENGED STUDENTS

TO MAKE RAPID DECISIONS ABOUT HOW TO TAG EACH PATIENT IN A HIGH-PRESSURE SETTING WITH LIMITED SUPPLIES AND PERSONNEL.



← EMS and Mercy Flight personnel challenged students to make rapid decisions in the field.

THE SUCCESS OF THIS SIMULATION HAS SPARKED LONG-TERM GOALS.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

perspective on patient care in critical situations.

"The EMS personnel and the crew from Mercy Flight posed deep questions about our choices of who we wanted to send to the hospital and why. We had to make those choices, quickly, based on survivability," Fang said. "We learned that if someone is not breathing in a mass casualty setting, we have to move on to the next patient. That was hard," she added.

Training for the Transfer

Sands noted that while training for nurses and first responders does not typically intersect, creating training events like this with intentional overlap is meant to develop essential emergency and disaster response skills in nurses. Interprofessional collaboration in high-pressure situations sharpens critical thinking skills and builds nursing students' confidence for career readiness. The

result: smoother care transitions and patient outcomes in the real world.

The simulated transfer of care to the hospital emergency room was staged inside the East Seneca Fire Company. Fang was assigned the role of charge nurse, coordinating the patients from the triage activity while also managing routine emergency department walk-ins.

"We had continuity with our mass casualty patients from the field, and many of my decisions as charge nurse still depended on how we should use our resources," Fang said.

Meeting Real-World Expectations

Under federal regulations, all Medicare- and Medicaid-participating health care providers must meet national emergency preparedness requirements. This includes conducting regular exercises to test emergency plans and ensuring staff are trained about their roles and the facility's procedures.

For future nurses at UB, this means developing the skills and judgment needed to adapt quickly and collaborate under pressure is essential – it also helps them stand out among their peers.

"This type of experiential learning and interdisciplinary collaboration is empowering for our nurses, whether it helps them to improve care flow for patients coming in from a mass casualty event, or if nurses are deployed to or simply find themselves in stressful triage situations with limited resources," Sands said.

Fang, whose capstone clinical rotation was in intensive care at Millard Fillmore Suburban Hospital, agrees.

"A lot of critical thinking skills were involved as we had to consider everything happening to the patient. I not only better understand the role of other emergency caregivers, but I can also transfer the skills I learned today to working in an ICU," Fang said.

The success of this simulation has sparked long-term goals. With Sands' support, the Multicultural Nursing Student Association aims to organize two disaster drills each year: one focused on a natural disaster, the other on a man-made event. That momentum aligns with Sands' goal to develop a full-semester disaster preparedness course at UB, ensuring that future nurses are trained not only to respond, but to lead.



← A simulated hospital emergency room was staged inside the firehouse.

Back-To-School, Healthy and Protected:

UB Nursing Partners For Vaccine Effort

BY SARAH GOLDTHRITE

Hundreds of Buffalo Public School students started the year protected against preventable illnesses thanks to free back-to-school vaccine clinics offered through a partnership among the University at Buffalo School of Nursing, the Erie County Department of Health and Buffalo Public Schools.

The clinics help students meet state immunization requirements and begin the year “healthy, protected and ready to learn,” officials said at a press conference at BPS #45, International School.

“Our partnership with the Erie County Department of Health and Buffalo Public Schools is an opportunity for UB School of Nursing faculty and students to serve and advance the health of our community by protecting children from preventable illnesses such as measles, mumps and rubella,” said Annette Wysocki, dean of the School of Nursing. “These hands-on experiences strengthen our students’ clinical expertise while contributing to public health with high community impact.

“In today’s interconnected world, vaccination is one of the most cost-effective public health measures ... We are proud to join with our community in helping children stay healthy so they can learn, grow and thrive.”

Wysocki joined Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz; Erie County Health Commissioner Gale Burstein; BPS Chief of Student Support Services Sharon Brown; and Director of Social, Emotional and Wellness Services Mai Nguyen in announcing the program.

Beyond community health benefits, the initiative prepares UB nursing students for professional practice. Working under faculty supervision, students help administer vaccines after completing training in vaccine administration, patient communication and safety protocols.

“This is the kind of experience that builds confidence and readiness,” Wysocki said. “When our graduates enter the workforce, they’ve already provided care in a range of diverse community-based settings.”

“THIS MODEL SHOWS HOW WE CAN BRING HEALTH CARE DIRECTLY TO WHERE IT’S NEEDED MOST.”

—DEAN ANNETTE WYSOCKI

The clinics, she added, could model future collaborations to meet additional school-based health needs. “This model shows how we can bring health care directly to where it’s needed most,” Wysocki said. “It could potentially be adapted for screenings, education or other preventive services. Together, we’re making preventive care more accessible and preparing the next generation of nurses to lead in public health.”

UB School of Nursing students and faculty joined county and school leaders at PS 045 International School in August to announce a partnership bringing free back-to-school vaccination clinics to Buffalo Public Schools.



EXCELLENCE

FACULTY

National Fellowship Honors

UB Nursing faculty recognized for advancing equity, innovation and leadership in the profession.

BY SARAH GOLDTHRITTE

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF NURSING



Kafuli Agbemenu, PhD, MPH, RN, CTN-A, FAAN; Associate Professor

Kafuli Agbemenu is nationally and internationally recognized for her research on reproductive health equity among underserved populations, particularly African immigrant and refugee women in the U.S.

Agbemenu's scholarship addresses persistent disparities in maternal and reproductive health, emphasizing culturally responsive interventions for non-English-speaking and low-literacy populations. Her work includes the development of the first smartphone-based family planning intervention tailored for African refugee women, funded by an NIH R21 grant. She has also led groundbreaking research in Buffalo, NY, and Pittsburgh, PA, on sexual health communication between African immigrant mothers and daughters, filling a critical gap in the literature.

Her findings have informed sexual and reproductive health programs across the country and have been cited by international organizations including UNESCO, which incorporated her work into 27 global policy documents. She serves as Director of Community Outreach for Reproductive Empowerment (CORE) Lab and co-lead of the Refugee Health and Well-Being Team at UB's Center for Global Health Equity. Agbemenu contributes nationally through roles with the Society of Family Planning and internationally with the International Conference on Family Planning Steering Committee.

"I'm deeply honored to become a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing," Agbemenu said. "For me, this recognition reflects a commitment to centering communities, their lived experiences and their priority health concerns. I look forward to shaping responsive solutions through continued nursing research and leadership."



Kelly Foltz-Ramos, PhD, APRN, FNP-BC, CHSE-A, FAAN; Assistant Professor; Director of Simulation and Innovation

A nationally recognized leader in simulation-based education, Kelly Foltz-Ramos has transformed the way nurses and interprofessional teams are trained in New York State and beyond.

Her work focuses on enhancing clinical preparedness through simulation methodologies that emphasize critical thinking, teamwork and communication. She played a pivotal role in shaping New York's 2023 nursing simulation legislation and co-leads the State University of New York Nursing Simulation Fellows Program, which is building a statewide repository of evidence-based training materials for more than 70 nursing programs. These efforts ensure equitable access to high-quality educational tools, especially for rural and low-resource institutions.

As principal investigator of a \$1.49 million HRSA-funded project, Foltz-Ramos has developed virtual reality training to prepare nursing students for practice in underserved communities. She led the successful effort to designate the University at Buffalo as the first SUNY statewide Simulation Center of Excellence, securing \$34 million in funding to build a state-of-the-art center that will serve as a hub for simulation innovation, research and workforce development.

"Being designated as a Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing is both a profound honor and a responsibility," she said. "It affirms the impact of my work in nursing education and simulation, and inspires me to continue advancing health equity, innovation and interprofessional collaboration on a national level."



Eunhee Park, PhD, RN, FAAN; Associate Professor

Eunhee Park is recognized for her groundbreaking work in adolescent health promotion, digital health innovation and public health policy. A nurse scientist and public

health nurse, Park focuses on understanding and addressing risk behaviors such as smoking, e-cigarette use, and substance use among adolescents and individuals from low-income communities.

Her research, which includes more than 30 peer-reviewed publications and over \$1.5 million in funding as principal investigator, has helped identify critical developmental patterns and contextual factors contributing to youth risk behaviors. Park's work is rooted in community partnerships and participatory models, including collaborations with rural and urban schools, youth organizations, and public health agencies. Her interventions, ranging from digital media curricula to AI-powered cessation apps, leverage technology to engage "digital-native" youth in underserved communities.

Park's national and global impact is evident through her leadership roles in the American Public Health Association, the Global Korean Nursing Foundation, and the Eastern Nursing Research Society, where she has advanced nursing's role in shaping public health strategies and equity-focused policies.

"Being inducted into the American Academy of Nursing is a profound honor that affirms my dedication to improving health and achieving health equity through nursing leadership, innovation and science," Park said. "This recognition strengthens my resolve to continue pioneering adolescent health research, developing innovative solutions to address risk behaviors, and advocating for vulnerable populations."

AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION



Gail Markowski, DNP, ANP-C, ACNP, CCRN, FAHA; Director, Adult-Gerontology Nurse Practitioner Program; Clinical Assistant Professor

The American Heart Association recognizes Gail Markowski's more than 25 years of clinical expertise focusing on cardiology. Markowski is a nurse practitioner in the Cardiothoracic Surgery Program at Mercy Hospital of Buffalo, where she launched and directed Catholic Health's Structural Heart Program. The program introduced less-invasive, catheter-based procedures for aortic valve replacement in patients previously considered inoperable.

Markowski earned both her master's and bachelor's

degrees in nursing from UB. She has also worked as a nurse at Cardiology Group of WNY, Southtown's Cardiology, Pulmonary Group of WNY, Sisters of Charity Hospital and St. Joseph's Hospital. She also specializes in critical care.

"My goal is to educate our nurses and providers in all that cardiology is and what it offers patients with its advanced technology and knowledge."

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF NURSE-MIDWIVES

Jennifer Guay, DNP, CNM, FACNM; Clinical Associate Professor



Jennifer Guay is recognized for her remarkable impact on the advancement of midwifery, education, scholarship and practice. Since becoming a certified nurse-midwife in 2004, Guay has worked in full-scope midwifery, labor and delivery units; international health settings; and academia.

At UB, she plays a central role in designing a proposed midwifery program to expand access to high-quality reproductive health education in Western New York, a region where maternal health disparities are growing. Guay currently leads preparation of the ACME Pre-accreditation Report for the program and developed Midwifery Clinical Excellence Hubs in Buffalo and Rochester. These hubs will provide students with immersive training environments that connect academic instruction with real-world application.

Her curriculum design has been guided by community input and addresses local health needs, with courses in care for vulnerable populations, community outreach, addiction and sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) training. Guay developed UB's interdisciplinary obstetric simulation program, bringing nursing and medical students, residents and fellows together in hands-on, high-risk labor and delivery scenarios. The simulations were the first of their kind in Buffalo and continue to serve as a model for collaborative maternal health education.

Through research, policy work and mentoring doctoral students, Guay continues to champion midwifery as a science-based, equity-driven profession.

"By strengthening training, expanding access to quality education and equipping midwives to address modern health care disparities, we can make a lasting impact," Guay said.



CHAMPIONING INCLUSIVE NURSING EDUCATION

Mollie Oldenburg, family nurse practitioner program director and global initiatives coordinator, received a 2025 Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Awareness (IDEA) Award from Buffalo Business First for her work advancing culturally inclusive nursing education and practice. The award recognizes champions of diversity and inclusion in their workplaces and communities. She was celebrated alongside 19 other awardees at a ceremony in February.

As global initiatives coordinator, Oldenburg has led students and faculty on medical mission trips to Peru, Haiti, Ghana and Belize, focusing on the health care needs of underserved populations. She has also led mission trips to rural areas within the United States, including

Tennessee and Olean, New York, as part of the Remote Area Medical Program.

These experiences require students to navigate cultural practices and develop cross-cultural communication skills at the intersections of nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, religion and class, which are increasingly vital in nursing practice.

Oldenburg, a UB alumna, emphasized the importance of cultural immersion in improving patient outcomes when she received a Elsie P. and Lucius B. McCowan Private Charitable Foundation grant in 2024: "Cultural awareness is essential for nursing students because it deepens their understanding of each patient's unique cultural background and needs ... by recognizing and respecting these

differences, students can provide more compassionate, individualized care and build stronger patient relationships."

Students under Oldenburg's guidance have attested to the value of cultural immersion experiences. After participating Peru mission in August 2024, Rena Kessel, a 2025 graduate of the DNP Family Nurse Practitioner program, explained the impact of the trip on her approach to nursing: "I developed a deeper understanding of the role that cultural sensitivity plays in patient care delivery ... Regardless of the environment or background, it is essential to demonstrate cultural humility, take the time to establish trust with patients, and remain sensitive to the patients' individual values and expectations."



NURSE OF DISTINCTION IN EDUCATION: ALYSSA HAMEL

Alyssa Hamel, psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioner program director and clinical assistant professor, was named the 2025 Nurse of Distinction in Education Award by the Professional Nurses Association of Western New York (PNAWNY). The award recognizes outstanding nurse educators who demonstrate leadership, research excellence and advocacy in psychiatric mental health nursing.

Hamel, who is also a 2019 graduate of UB's Doctor of Nursing Practice program and current PhD student, has significantly expanded the psychiatric/mental health DNP program since becoming director in 2022. Under her leadership, clinical partnerships nearly tripled, broadening training opportunities for students.

She has also played a pioneering role in the substance use disorder

(SUD) education. Her leadership led UB to become the second university in the nation to verify that DNP graduates across all advanced practice registered nurse specialties meet the required SUD-related training hours, ensuring students receive comprehensive preparation in addiction treatment.

Hamel's integration of trauma-informed community service into the curriculum has contributed to a 100% board certification exam pass rate for psychiatric/mental health DNP graduates.

The PNAWNY also recognized Hamel for her dedication to community service and expanding access to mental health care in local communities. In 2024, she began a three-year appointment to the Prevention & Addiction Services and Supports Subcommittee, a

subcommittee of the Erie County Department of Mental Health's Community Service Board, advancing policy efforts to support those with substance use disorders in Erie County.

Hamel is also the project coordinator on a \$1.92 million Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training grant, awarded by the Health Resources and Services Administration. The grant funds an interprofessional training program designed to expand behavioral health services in underserved communities.

Through her leadership, Hamel is preparing the next generation of nurse practitioners to meet the complex mental health needs of their patients.

2025 Nursing Alumni Award Awards

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Mary G. Carey, PhD, RN, FAHA, FAAN, is the 2025 recipient of the University at Buffalo School of Nursing Distinguished Alumni Award. Carey



completed her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from UB in 1990. She earned both her master's in critical care nursing with a minor in education in 1993 and her PhD in physiological nursing in 2001 from the University of California, San Francisco. Her foundation in critical care nursing at UB launched a career marked by outstanding contributions to nursing research, education and practice.

Today, Carey is the Director of the Clinical Nursing Research Center at the University of Rochester/Strong Memorial Hospital. Over her 30-year career, she has earned numerous awards and honors, including induction into the International Nurse Researcher Hall of Fame; fellowship in the American Academy of Nursing; recipient of the Nurse of the Year, Education and Research by the March of Dimes; and recipient of the UB School of Nursing's Dean's Excellence in Research Award.



PATRICIA H. GARMAN AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE AND SERVICE IN NURSING

Susan M. Brooks, MS, RN, is the 2025 recipient of the University at Buffalo School of Nursing Patricia H. Garman Award for Excellence and Service in Nursing. Brooks earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from UB in 1994. She is the Vice President of Patient Care Services at Mount St. Mary's Hospital and Health Center and Lockport Memorial Hospital for Catholic Health.

Brooks' outstanding record of service includes volunteering on UB's Undergraduate Nursing Committee and supporting Dedicated Education Units and internships for students that promote clinical nursing leadership and education. She has also precepted and mentored numerous students and serves as a member of several community organizations.

She was also named to Buffalo Business First prestigious 2025 Women of Influence List, which honors women who have made exceptional contributions to their companies and communities.



OUTSTANDING RECENT GRADUATE AWARD

Jessica Varghese, PhD, RN, is the 2025 recipient of University at Buffalo School of Nursing's Outstanding Recent Graduate Award. Varghese earned her PhD in Nursing from UB in 2017. She is an assistant professor of nursing at the New York Institute of Technology, where she launched the RN to BS program – a Bachelor of Science program designed for licensed nurses with an associate's degree.

Varghese has presented her research at various regional and national conferences and has won numerous honors and awards, including the Jonas Doctoral Nurse Leader Scholar and the Shirley D. DeVoe Nursing Doctoral Dissertation Research Award. Varghese received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from St. John Fisher College in Rochester, NY. She also completed a Master of Arts in Urban Affairs at Queens College and a Master of Science in Nursing Leadership in Healthcare Systems at Grand Canyon University.

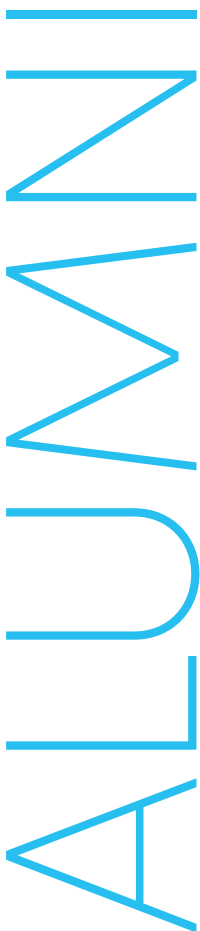
DISTINGUISHED PRECEPTOR AWARD

Heather Price, BSN, RN, is the 2025 recipient of the University at Buffalo School of Nursing's Distinguished Preceptor Award. Price is a dedicated nurse at Buffalo General Hospital, which is part of the Kaleida Health System. As an early career nurse, she has demonstrated exceptional leadership, clinical expertise and a deep commitment to patient-centered care and student learning.



Price has emerged as a lead preceptor in the Dedicated Education Unit. She integrates evidence-based practices into real-world clinical scenarios, fostering critical thinking and confidence at the bedside. Price earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from The Ohio State University in 2023 and is currently pursuing Master of Science in Nursing in Leadership and Management at Western Governors University.

PERSPECTIVE



BUILT FOR PRESSURE, DRIVEN BY PURPOSE:



A VETERAN'S PATH FROM THE AIR FORCE TO THE ICU

For Eric Bolles, nursing wasn't just a new career – it was the next chapter in a lifelong commitment to helping others.

At age 18, Eric Bolles was ready to chart his course in the world. He thrived in physical activities and found purpose in teamwork. With a long line of family members who served in the military, a life in uniform felt like a natural path. He chose the Air Force, trained as a helicopter mechanic, and began what would become the first chapter in a life shaped by service.

BY TERRA OSTERLING

"I was stationed at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which is a training base," Bolles said. "My day-to-day mission was to keep the helicopters ready for those crews, and I knew I had their lives in my hands."

Today, 26 years later, Bolles again holds lives in his hands as a 2025 graduate of the UB School of Nursing's accelerated bachelor's degree program. The highly competitive program is designed for students who have already earned a bachelor's degree and are ready to begin a new career chapter in nursing.

NEW ROLE, FAMILIAR ROUTINE

After his first chapter of military service, Bolles began his second as a police officer in western New York, where he served 17 years with the Batavia Police Department. The career shift followed a brief stint working as a machinist in a small shop – a job that helped him to realize he wanted more from his work.

"It was one year of working on critical infrastructure [giant pumps for wastewater treatment plants], and I appreciated how important that was, but that first winter of downtime was enough to push me to find more. It was pure luck that I found the civil service exam for law enforcement," Bolles said.

A high score and his veteran status earned him an immediate position with the department.

Law enforcement was a good fit and fulfilled what Bolles had not initially realized was missing from his life: A greater sense of purpose. He felt more fulfilled through serving the Batavia community and, eventually, leading a team of officers.

In addition to serving as a patrol officer, Bolles advanced to become a field training officer. He later led the department's emergency response team, served as chemical munitions instructor and earned a promotion to sergeant.

← After his first chapter of military service, Eric Bolles began his second as a police officer in western New York, serving 17 years with the Batavia Police Department.

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A NATURAL PROGRESSION TO NURSING

“Even though law enforcement often showed me a negative side of the human condition, I still had to build rapport. That’s how we deescalated crises — we focused on helping people feel heard,” Bolles said.

There were, he added, numerous times he and his fellow officers arrived first on scene where someone needed medical help, but they were restricted from performing life-saving procedures. All they could do was wait until Emergency Medical Services (EMS) arrived to take over.

“Most police officers do not have the type of personality that is comfortable with that feeling [of not being able to help], me included,” Bolles said.

When he was nearing retirement, he already knew having a greater sense of purpose was key to his happiness. This is when he began to envision nursing as his third chapter. Bolles credits his wife, Stacy, as the ultimate partner through each career transition. He saw nursing as a meaningful vocation that could move with them, especially as their three children reach adulthood.

THE PAST AND FUTURE ALIGN AT UB

“When I found out UB has the ABSN degree, it seemed too good of an opportunity not to at least take a shot at it,” Bolles said.



UB has long been part of his personal community. The campus is close to home, his father retired from the university after working in its lab facilities, and his brother earned an accounting degree from UB.

“UB was the best match for me and my family,” he said.

Bolles noted that his career in law enforcement gave him a unique perspective on bedside nursing. While the patients he encountered during clinical rotations were experiencing difficult situations, he often found that they were more grateful and positive than those he typically encountered as an officer.

Outside Millard Fillmore Hospital, nursing students Mike Davitt, Julia Jeon, Eric Bolles, Justin Victor, Danielle Hurtado, Jessica Murphy and Andrew Zielinski join instructor Dr. Evangella Harville to mark the successful conclusion of their clinical rotation.





← Eric Bolles (right) during tech school at Fort Eustis, an Army base in Virginia, around July 1999, seated on a Blackhawk helicopter.

BOLLES' EXPERIENCES AS A NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT AND HIS TEAM-FOCUSED OUTLOOK **INSPIRED HIM TO COORDINATE SELF-DEFENSE CLASSES** FOR HIS NURSING COHORT.

Forging rapport with these patients came naturally, and he leaned into the time he could spend with them as a student. One patient stood out:

"I was assigned to a woman on palliative care in one of my rotations. She was not totally aware of what was going on around her but that doesn't really change how you treat or talk to a person. Later in the day, I walked into the room and her daughters were with her," he recalled, "They were facing her, but she was facing the doorway. When she met my eyes, she smiled so big, and her face lit up so brightly, that it startled her daughters who immediately turned to see what caught mom's eye. That look on her face is something that will stick with me forever," Bolles said.

The moment offered a brief but meaningful relief from the stress in the room. It also brought back a memory from years earlier, when his cousin was dying from complications from Cystic Fibrosis – a moment that left a lasting impression on him.

"His last few months were in an ICU and in more pain than I've ever seen, Bolles said. "He woke up when I visited and hit me with the same kind of smile."

WHEN SKILLS BECOME SOMETHING MORE

Bolles steps into nursing without trepidation thanks to another important skill: adapting to high-pressure environments. As a law enforcement officer, he learned to prepare psychologically and physically while racing toward unpredictable situations.

He said this ability to stay calm in hectic situations translates directly to nursing, especially when a patient is in crisis. He saw this often during his capstone rotation at the Buffalo VA Medical Center intensive care unit.

"Stress can cause tunnel vision and impact fine motor skills and auditory processing, so I've trained myself to take deep breaths and keep my eyes moving laterally to interrupt those limitations but still get the benefits of an adrenaline dump," he said.

Bolles' experiences as a non-traditional student and his team-focused outlook inspired him to coordinate



self-defense classes for his nursing cohort. Some of his classmates – most of whom are young women – have taken part in the sessions, which are instructed by a former Batavia Police Department colleague turned firefighter.

If a sense of purpose has been Bolles' driving force, then creating community wherever he goes has been his impact. He recalls a conversation with a patient during his VA rotation – an exchange that centered on not how much you do in life, but the meaning behind what you do.

"While I've done a lot of different things and plan to do more, it's not about jamming in as much as you can," he said. "It's about watching for opportunities. You build a life that way."

↑ Eric's wife, Stacy – his steadfast partner through every career chapter – pins him at a ceremony signifying the completion of his academic program and his initiation into the nursing profession.

CELEBRATING THE CLASS OF 2025



COMMENCEMENT

COMMENCEMENT AWARDS

SIGMA THETA TAU,
GAMMA KAPPA CHAPTER AWARD
Amanda Maki (DNP), **Sophia Anne Justo** (BS)

ETHAN CHRISTIAN '12 MEMORIAL AWARD
Ella Gooding (BS)

SHIRLEY D. DEVOE NURSING AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNICATION
Michael Pereira III (DNP),
Elizabeth Greenwald (BS)

DR. S. MOUCHLY SMALL AWARD
Cali Karpinski (DNP), **Justin Victor** (BS)

RUTH T. MCGROREY AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE IN NURSING
Madison Amico (BS)

ANNE WALKER SENGBUSCH AWARD
FOR LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL AND
COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES
Michael Turner (DNP), **Pamela Nichols**
(DNP), **Edwina Fang** (BS), **Tammy Le** (BS)

RUTH GALE ELDER AWARD FOR
EXCELLENCE IN NURSING RESEARCH
Rena Kessel (DNP), **Caitlin Nye** (PhD)



Most Trusted, Least Supported:

The Urgent Need for Investment in Nursing

BY

SARAH GOLDTHRITE, *Director of Communications, University at Buffalo School of Nursing*

ANNETTE WYSOCKI, *Dean, University at Buffalo School of Nursing*

IMPACT

CHANGING

Nursing, the largest group of professional providers in the health care workforce, is in dire need of support.

While nurses are often romanticized with stereotypical labels like “the heart of health care” or “angels in scrubs,” these sentimental monikers mask a harsh reality: The nation’s “Most Trusted Profession” receives an alarmingly small share of philanthropic funding.

A sobering report recently published by the American Nurses Foundation revealed that nursing – despite being indispensable to the functioning of health care systems, ensuring positive patient outcomes, reducing costs, and improving the health and wellness of our communities – receives a mere 1% of donations made to the health care sector.

Here’s why investing in nursing and nursing education is essential for the future of health care.

BEYOND COMPASSION: NURSES AS THE DRIVING FORCE IN HEALTH CARE

Nurses aren’t just compassionate caregivers; they’re scientists, clinicians, leaders, researchers and advocates. Whether coordinating complex patient care, driving research breakthroughs or leading health initiatives, nurses fortify the health care system with critical expertise and innovation individually and collectively.

They stand on the front lines of public health crises, risking their own safety to safeguard ours – a reality the world witnessed firsthand during the COVID-19 pandemic. In rural and underserved communities, nurses are often the only accessible source of care.

By improving patient outcomes, reducing costs and strengthening public health, nurses remain essential pillars of modern medicine.

UNDERSTAFFED, UNDER STRAIN: THE REAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE NURSING GAP

Despite their indispensable role, the U.S. faces a growing nursing shortage with serious implications for patients and communities. The Health Resources and Services

Administration projects a shortage of more than 300,000 full-time RNs in 2027.

A shortage of registered nurses raises the risk of serious consequences for patients. Decades of research show that having too few nurses on a team increases preventable deaths and weakens patient outcomes. Baccalaureate nurses alone improve all-cause mortality by 25%, and studies compiled by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing consistently show that hospitals with higher proportions of bachelor’s-prepared nurses have lower patient mortality, fewer medical errors and improved overall patient outcomes.

Insufficient staffing means less time for each patient, more room for errors and delayed care – even in emergencies. It also fuels burnout, which magnifies these issues. Together, these conditions drive up patient mortality and erode overall health outcomes.

THE URGENCY OF INVESTING IN NURSING EDUCATION

Qualified applicants being unable to enroll in nursing programs only compounds the challenges facing health care. Faculty shortages, budget constraints and limited clinical training opportunities force schools to turn away more than 65,000 qualified applicants per year, while rising living costs shut out students who can’t afford to pursue or complete their studies. Without a significant boost in external funding and resources for nursing students and nursing faculty, the looming threat of burnout grows, and our ability to fill these essential roles dwindles, ultimately undermining the stability of our entire health care system.

TOGETHER, WE CAN SHAPE THE FUTURE OF HEALTH CARE

Nurses have earned more than just words. More than applause or hollow praise. More than wooden spoons drumming on metal pots. They deserve action, understanding and unwavering philanthropic support.

Philanthropy is one of the most effective ways to drive that change. Every contribution — no matter the size — can create measurable impact, from funding scholarships that ease financial barriers for nursing students to supporting faculty development and expanding access to clinical training opportunities. These investments don't just change the lives of students — they improve care for every patient those nurses will go on to serve.

The urgency of this moment cannot be overstated. An aging population, persistent nurse shortages and the aftermath of recent global and national health crises have placed unprecedented strain on our health care system.

The time to invest in schools of nursing is now. Imagine a future where hospitals and clinics are fully staffed with highly educated nurses who are equipped to meet every challenge with scientific judgement, skill, compassion and leadership. This isn't just a vision — it's an achievable reality, and you can help make it happen.

JOIN US IN BUILDING A STRONGER, HEALTHIER FUTURE.

Investing in nursing students and faculty isn't just an investment in health care — it's an investment in your family, your community and a future where everyone has access to skilled, compassionate care.



During COVID-19, nurses carried the health care system through its darkest moments. Even as the nation's most trusted profession, nursing remains the least supported in terms of philanthropy in the health care sector.

Key: Student Faculty

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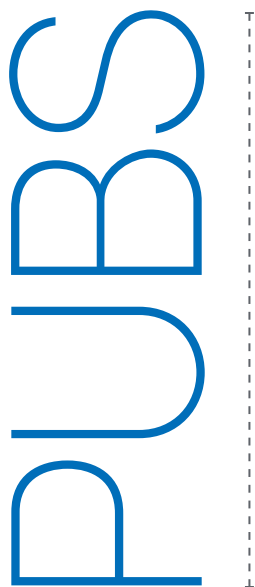
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SLEEP: THE OVERLOOKED VITAL SIGN

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