WHEN HOPE IS LOST
FROM THE DEAN

As we continue to navigate the COVID pandemic and hope to begin to emerge from it, faculty, staff, students, alumni and donors have shown their steadfast commitment to excellence, as well as their resilience and tenacity, that the Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing is known for.

I have long held the belief that nursing needs to be grounded in its own disciplinary goals and science, while collaborating with others. To that end, I am pleased to share this issue of Cara Personalis. The stories in this issue reflect the innovative, dynamic, creative and compassionate ways the Valentine School community fosters our rigorous scholarly environment while conducting a robust research program and supportive environment for our students.

Our cover story features the standard-setting research of Irene Riddle Endowed Chair and Professor Verna Hendricks-Ferguson, who studies approaches to care of families coping with end-of life care for their children battling life-threatening cancer.

You also will find the second in a series of stories about Hemak Professor Denise Côté-Arenasal, a Fulbright scholar, who spent last summer, as well as the summer of 2021, in Scotland conducting her vital research in the care for couples who have lost their babies.

Another story shares the innovative approach Associate Professor Devita Stallings is using to help underserved patients, particularly those of color. Her research centers on the creation of a cell phone application that could bring medical care to underserved patients, particularly those of color, so that they can have access to health professionals at the touch of a button.

Dr. Stallings’ research points to an inescapable truth: Our educational endeavors must focus on diversifying the nursing workforce to mirror the population we serve. This issue features the initiatives Dean Emeritus and Professor Teri Murray, the Valentine School’s chief diversity and inclusion officer, and her team have created as a part of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Scholars Program established for minority student at the Valentine School.

I am delighted we are featuring Alumna Patricia Hemak and her husband, James, in a story about their generous contribution that has funded the establishment of a maternal-neonatal simulation lab. The lab opened last spring and will be dedicated at the Patricia A. and James Hemak Maternal & Neonatal Suite during Homecoming weekend. It provides a safe space for students to engage in real-world experiences in controlled settings. I hope you can join us for the official celebration.

We also introduce new staff and faculty who have joined the School of Nursing and learn about those who have made notable strides and achievements in these pages. As I read each story, I am struck by how each individual brings Cara Personalis to our collective Jesuit education. As this issue reflects, the Valentine School is a very special community, indeed—one I am proud to be a member of. I hope you enjoy reading about it.

Sincerely,

Danny G. Will, O.N.S., RN, P.A.N.O.N.-BC, CNE, FAAN
Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing

Supporting Characters

Heidi Rezucha, O.N.S., RN, P.A.N.O.N.-BC, CNE, FAAN
Professor Emeritus

Sharon J. Johnson, O.N.S., RN, P.A.N.O.N.-BC, CNE, FAAN
Professor Emeritus

Sandra R. McDonald, O.N.S., RN, P.A.N.O.N.-BC, CNE, FAAN
Professor Emeritus

Judy T. Powers, O.N.S., RN, P.A.N.O.N.-BC, CNE, FAAN
Professor Emeritus

Jean J. Hickey, O.N.S., RN, P.A.N.O.N.-BC, CNE, FAAN
Professor Emeritus

Cara Personalis is published annually by the Saint Louis University Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing and is mailed to students and friends.

PUBLICATION CREDITS

Irene Riddle Endowed Chair
Managing Editor, Communications
Elaine Stille
Assistant Editor
Jessie Taylor
Art Director, Design

PHOTO CREDIT

Steve Oehl 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11
James W. Healy 2, 3, 10, 11
Peter Arnett 4, 7

© 2023, Saint Louis University. Rights reserved.

For more information about the magazine or to submit story ideas, contact
Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing
H-977, SLU Campus Center
St. Louis, MO 63101-1459
www.slu.edu/CVSON
susan.boyer@slu.edu
**Valentine School Holds No. 2 Spot in Missouri**

Saint Louis University’s Trudy Beach Valentine School of Nursing ranked No. 2 by U.S. News & World Report in its best programs for nursing majors in the state of Missouri. Zippia ranked the programs based on data from the institutions to determine which ones offer the best career opportunities for nursing majors. Schools were last ranked in 2019 for this report. Specifically, the website’s rankings were based on:

- CareerResults, including mean earnings six and 10 years after graduation
- Nursing-Strength Program: Performance, including the admissions rate, graduation rate, average cost of attendance and median amount of debt.

**School Named No. 10 in U.S.**

In 2022, Zippia ranked Saint Louis University’s Trudy Beach Valentine School of Nursing as the No. 10 college nursing program in the country. This is the second year in a row that the school has made the Top 10 list. Zippia collects data and reviews of colleges and universities across the country, analyzes and ranks them. It notes that the most popular major of SLU is nursing.

**Faculty Honors at Midwest Nursing Research Society**

Three Faculty Honored by Midwest Nursing Research Society

Three Trinity Beach Valentine School of Nursing researchers were honored for their work at the annual Midwest Nursing Research Society’s (MNRSS) 46th Annual Conference that was held March 19–22 in Schaumburg, Illinois.

Denise Côté-Arseneault, RN, CCRN, FAAN, and Assistant Professor Lawrence St. Louis were named the 2019-2020 recipient of the Midwest Nursing Research Society’s Outstanding Young Investigator Award. St. Louis was honored for her outstanding research on the effects of weight loss on health outcomes for overweight and obese individuals.

Côté-Arseneault, whose Fulbright experience is featured on pages 16 and 17, was honored in the spring for her outstanding contributions to the field of nursing. She was a Fulbright Scholar, she was honored in the spring for her outstanding contributions to the field of nursing. She was named the 2019-2020 recipient of the Midwest Nursing Research Society’s Outstanding Young Investigator Award.

**Nursing Faculty Named as National Accreditation Reviewers**

Associate Professor Margaret Bultas, Ph.D., RN, CNE, CPNP-PC, has been selected to serve as a reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). An independent corporation founded in 1893, the HLC is one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States.

**Murray named Reineit Fellow**

Professor and Dean Emeritus Murray named Reineit Fellow

Professor and Dean Emeritus Murray, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, was selected as a Reineit Center Distinguished Scholar and Inclusion in Nursing Award Teaching Fellow 2020-2021. Murray, who has more than a quarter century of experience in administrative leadership and in a variety of roles, became the Trinity Beach Valentine School of Nursing’s Chief Officer of Diversity and Inclusion after stepping down as dean of the School at the end of 2019. Murray and her colleagues have been awarded more than $6.4 million in a series of Nursing Workforce Diversity Grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, to be used over a 15-year period beginning in 2010. Murray is interested in the social determinants of health, population health, and the interplay between social environment and health outcomes to achieve individual and community-level health equity. (Murray, her program, her colleagues and students are featured on pages 6-8)

**St. Louis Magazine honors SLU nurses among its 2022 Excellence Award Finalists**

**Two Grad Programs Make the Rankings**

For 2023, U.S. News and World Report has ranked the Valentine School of Nursing in the Best Grad Schools survey.

**Nursing Faculty Named as National Accreditation Reviewers**

Associate Professor Margaret Bultas, Ph.D., RN, CNE, CPNP-PC, has been selected to serve as a reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). An independent corporation founded in 1893, the HLC is one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States.

**Murray named Reineit Fellow**

Professor and Dean Emeritus Murray named Reineit Fellow

Professor and Dean Emeritus Murray, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, was selected as a Reineit Center Distinguished Scholar and Inclusion in Nursing Award Teaching Fellow 2020-2021. Murray, who has more than a quarter century of experience in administrative leadership and in a variety of roles, became the Trinity Beach Valentine School of Nursing’s Chief Officer of Diversity and Inclusion after stepping down as dean of the School at the end of 2019. Murray and her colleagues have been awarded more than $6.4 million in a series of Nursing Workforce Diversity Grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, to be used over a 15-year period beginning in 2010. Murray is interested in the social determinants of health, population health, and the interplay between social environment and health outcomes to achieve individual and community-level health equity. (Murray, her program, her colleagues and students are featured on pages 6-8)

**St. Louis Magazine honors SLU nurses among its 2022 Excellence Award Finalists**

**Two Grad Programs Make the Rankings**

For 2023, U.S. News and World Report has ranked the Valentine School of Nursing in the Best Grad Schools survey.

**Nursing Faculty Named as National Accreditation Reviewers**

Associate Professor Margaret Bultas, Ph.D., RN, CNE, CPNP-PC, has been selected to serve as a reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). An independent corporation founded in 1893, the HLC is one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States.

**Murray named Reineit Fellow**

Professor and Dean Emeritus Murray named Reineit Fellow

Professor and Dean Emeritus Murray, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, was selected as a Reineit Center Distinguished Scholar and Inclusion in Nursing Award Teaching Fellow 2020-2021. Murray, who has more than a quarter century of experience in administrative leadership and in a variety of roles, became the Trinity Beach Valentine School of Nursing’s Chief Officer of Diversity and Inclusion after stepping down as dean of the School at the end of 2019. Murray and her colleagues have been awarded more than $6.4 million in a series of Nursing Workforce Diversity Grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, to be used over a 15-year period beginning in 2010. Murray is interested in the social determinants of health, population health, and the interplay between social environment and health outcomes to achieve individual and community-level health equity. (Murray, her program, her colleagues and students are featured on pages 6-8)

**St. Louis Magazine honors SLU nurses among its 2022 Excellence Award Finalists**

**Two Grad Programs Make the Rankings**

For 2023, U.S. News and World Report has ranked the Valentine School of Nursing in the Best Grad Schools survey.

**Nursing Faculty Named as National Accreditation Reviewers**

Associate Professor Margaret Bultas, Ph.D., RN, CNE, CPNP-PC, has been selected to serve as a reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). An independent corporation founded in 1893, the HLC is one of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States.
VALENTINE SCHOOL welcomes new faculty and staff

Brittania Cole, MSN, RN
Instructor
Brittania Cole joined SLU in the fall of 2021 as a faculty member, teaching Nursing Care of the Older Adult. Prior to coming to SLU, she worked at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Missouri Baptist Hospital, both in the St. Louis region.

In 2013, Cole earned her baccalaureate degree in nursing at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, and in 2019, she completed her master’s degree in nursing at Webster University. Her interests are focused on teaching strategies, specifically methods for building community in the classroom, establishing an effective teaching style using the flipped classroom model, interactive learning and storytelling, as well as holistic nursing. She coaches students through nursing skills and techniques and covers principles learned from a didactic portion of nursing to assist them with applying that knowledge to a clinical setting.

Carolyn Layfitt, MSN, RN
Saint Louis University Alumna
Carolyn Layfitt (BSN ’04, MSN ’19) returned to SLU in the fall of 2021 as a faculty member of the Valentine School. Layfitt serves as clinical resource coordinator.

Layfitt graduated Summa Cum Laude, earned a Critical Care Certificate and was a member of the SLU Pre-Rad Grad program. When she was matriculating for her master’s degree, she focused her studies on becoming a perinatal clinical nurse specialist educator.

Alison Kuhn, DNP, APBN, FNP-BC, CEN
Assistant Professor
Alison Kuhn became a faculty member at the Valentine School in 2021. Her focus is to build the curriculum and guide students through the MSN program, including simulation lab development.

Kuhn has taught courses in the Family Nurse Practitioner Program and the Doctor of Nurse Practice Program. She is continuing her teaching in the Community Health Nurse Practitioner Program. She earned her Bachelor’s in Community Health Nursing at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

Kuhn has been teaching in the School of Nursing at SLU since 2013. She has taught in the Community Health Nurse Practitioner Program and the Doctor of Nurse Practice Program. She earned her Master’s in Community Health Nursing at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

Working in both critical care and labor and delivery, Layfitt has started her own practice in critical care and labor and delivery at the St. Louis Children’s Hospital. She is currently working as an RN for the Children’s Hospital at SLU.

Joy Stark, RN, MSN, CCRN
Assistant Professor
Stark joined the School of Nursing in 2021 as an adjunct faculty member. She is currently working as an RN for the Children’s Hospital at SLU.

Prior to coming to Saint Louis University, Farley worked in a relationship analyst at Bank of America, where she was elected to be part of the opening team of the new facility in Clayton. Before that, she worked at Bank of America in Ohio.

Marion Abars
Assistant Professor
Abar’s educational background includes a Master’s degree in Public Health and a Master’s degree in Business Administration. She has worked in health care administration, including leadership roles in hospitals and health systems.

Diana Llamas, MSN, RN, CNL
Assistant Professor
Dr. Diana Llamas teaches in the Department of Nursing at SLU. She has been involved in community service at the St. Louis Children’s Hospital and has worked in a variety of settings, including hospitals and clinics.

Prior to coming to SLU, she taught in the St. Louis University School of Nursing. She has also taught at other institutions, including the University of Arizona and the University of Southern California.

Stuck has taught ABPN Child Health Nursing, ABPN and ABPN Complex Care Practice, and Health Assessment. In her teaching, she educates undergraduate students to develop clinical skills and bridge theory to patient care.

“It is an exciting time for everyone at the Valentine School as we have so many new dedicated and driven educators and staff members who are enhancing our teaching, our research and our daily activities here.”

“Thank you to everyone who has supported us through this transition,” said Professor Jeri Murray. “Our goal is to ensure that our students receive the best possible education and training as they prepare for their future careers in nursing.”
Challenges abound in college. Students struggle with issues of financial obligations, academic pressures, developing self-enforced study habits and even finding friends. For minority students, it can be even more complicated.

"Coming to a University can be a tough transition," Seger said, "especially if you aren’t connected with people who share similar lived experiences of those from diverse backgrounds."

Seger was happy to be awarded a scholarship and become a member of the second cohort in a program established to help minority students be successful at the Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing. More recently, he and other members of that second cohort have become Scholar Navigators, taking their involvement in the program to a new level, as mentors of fellow minority students in the same program.

"We collaborate regarding NCLEX preparation, interviewing for jobs, moving elsewhere after graduation, class work, tips for studying and more," he said. "We all have amazing advice to share with each other, not just me but to them, and I love that we can always depend on each other to lift each other up."

**WURKAR Creates the Program**

Established by Dean Emerita and Professor Teri A. Murray, who is the Valentine School’s chief diversity and inclusion officer, the program provides financial, academic and emotional support to help them achieve success in school and beyond.

"It’s so important in any educational environment to have faculty, staff and student mentors, who look like the students and can relate to their specific experiences," Murray said. "It grows students the power to envision themselves in the role, and to think, ‘I, too, can become a nurse.’ Without seeing someone who looks like them, students struggle with envisioning how they can successfully become a nurse. Representation matters!"

Last year, Murray secured a $2.06 million Nursing Workforce Diversity Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration. The funding is the third in a series of grants that has provided a total of more than $5.4 million that was first awarded in 2008 and will extend until 2022 with that latest grant.

Along with Seger, medical oncology nurse Amanda Bulteers (T21), pediatric nurse Alexa Santamaria (T22), Jannette Sabagur, senior record to be a nonresident/NCLEX candidate, and Lauren Ramirez, senior who is Hispanic and plans to become an emergency room nurse and eventually a family nurse practitioner, round out the second cohort of Scholar Navigators.

"The DEI Scholar Navigators help students navigate their educational process," Murray said. "Mentoring is inspirational, it gives the student the opportunity to imagine the possibilities of their success."

**The Value of Mentorship**

She pointed out the importance of having professors talk about the programs and just grow the program so there is more diversity at SLU.

"I hope what this program can do for SLU is get exposure on multiple fronts," Bulteers said. "A lot of people have never heard of this program."

Bulteers, who is white Hispanic, said she sees tremendous value and potential in the program.

"I have made some of my closest friends through my cohort, and having each other as a support system has been helpful," she said. "It helps because we can talk about something we are struggling with and also how we can be better nurses."

Murray concurs.

"Mentoring is the way to invest into the next generation of nurses. It’s making it forward. And when you help students, you are in essence, touching the lives of every patient the student touches in their future practice."

As a part of their program and training, the cohort was mentored by Assistant Professor Krista Simmons, who served as the project coordinator for the Nursing Workforce Diversity Program. In this role, Simmons was responsible for the day-to-day management of the program.

**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the Truly Busch Valentine School of Nursing**

The Truly Busch Valentine School of Nursing is committed to fostering a community where all faculty, staff and students are respected, accepted and valued. We strive to excellently advance diversity, equity and inclusion and support efforts to embrace the unique attributes of every person. We are determined to provide excellence through recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce and student body by creating a climate that is respectful and supportive of everyone’s races. Our School of Nursing is committed to opportunities that promote equity in our community, and in our educational and research practices. We strive to reduce health disparities and deliver culturally humble and high-quality health care. We acknowledge the inequities of power, access, opportunity and resources in our society that result in health disparities (e.g., quantitative differences in health status, quality of care and health inequalities (e.g., power imbalances between groups of people).**
"Mentoring is one way to invest into the next generation of nurses, it’s paying it forward. And when you help students, you are in essence, touching the lives of every patient the student touches in their future practice." TEIR A. MURRAY, DEAN EMERITA AND PROFESSOR

“The Nursing Workforce Diversity Award Program, objective is to assist underrepresented nursing students in successfully matriculating through the nursing program,” Simmons said. “The program addresses key retention strategies including academic support, mentorship and financial support.”

“I have found it rewarding to watch the DEI Scholar Navigators develop confidence in themselves and their ability to mentor others,” Simmons said.

“Is it heartwarming to hear them share academic and personal success strategies with their mentees. The NWD Team is extremely grateful that the DEI Scholars’ Navigators were willing to share their time and wisdom with their mentees.”

They also met regularly with University Resident Specialist Caitlin Taylor, who designed the training program for the DEI Scholar Residents, and also participated in panel discussions and group meetings with Murray.

“Caitlin Taylor is an amazing resource for students at the School of Nursing,” Salgado said. “I had what I considered great experience as a student under her. She taught me a lot about managing my time, and most importantly, it has given me ample resources.”

Nurse Educators also expressed appreciation and gratitude to Assistant Professor Katrina Simmons, MSN, ANP-C; CLI, CLI, and former Retention Specialist (now training and and their fellow cohort members, all of whom have impacted their nursing experiences. They are always going to spend time with my fellow cohort members and know that I wouldn’t be judged, but actually get to be myself with someone who does have gone through the same thing,” Taylor said. “It became so close, and that made it much easier for us to learn on each other and on the program resources given to us.”

Sanzanam, a Spanish-Mexican American, said she appreciates that the Valentine School is making efforts to ensure student success and also for helping to send more minority nurses into the workforce.

“Teachers put that attention on us and help us to be prepared, but right now, nursing does not have diversity in the workplace,” she said. “That’s a problem because minorities are coming to the hospital. But who do they see the most in the hospital taking care of them? Not people who look like them or speak the same language.”

Murray and her team focus on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Support

Murray’s work has made her a leader in advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and support in academic nursing programs and in the healthcare community.

For more than a decade, Murray has sought to address disparities in the nursing workforce by attracting and retaining more minority students. She has led initiatives to increase the number of minority students in the nursing workforce, and has been recognized for her contributions to advancing diversity in nursing education.

For example, Murray has led efforts to recruit and retain more minority students in academic nursing programs, resulting in increased diversity in the nursing workforce.

Murray and her colleagues have worked to develop and implement strategies to address the recruitment and retention of minority students, including developing pipeline programs for minority students and creating mentorship opportunities. They have also worked to create a more inclusive and supportive environment in the nursing school, including developing diversity and inclusion initiatives within the school.

Murray and her colleagues have been recognized for their work in advancing diversity in nursing education, including receiving the American Nurses Association’s diversity leadership award and the National League for Nursing’s diversity excellence award.

Murray’s work has been profiled in various publications, including The Journal of Nursing Administration and The American Journal of Nursing.

The journal has featured Murray’s work on diversity in nursing education, including her efforts to increase diversity in the nursing workforce, the challenges of recruiting and retaining minority students, and the importance of creating a more inclusive and supportive environment in academic nursing programs.

Murray and her colleagues have also been featured in various media outlets, including The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, discussing their work on diversity in nursing education and the importance of creating a more inclusive and supportive environment in academic nursing programs.

Murray’s work has been influential in advancing diversity in nursing education, and her efforts have been recognized by various organizations and awards. She has served as a leader in promoting diversity in nursing education, and her work has helped to create a more inclusive and supportive environment in academic nursing programs, resulting in increased diversity in the nursing workforce.
When Hope is Lost: Communication provides compassionate care for parents of children with terminal cancer.

Verna L. Hendricks-Ferguson, PhD, RN, FPCN, FAAN, Irene Riddle Endowed Chair at the Trinity School of Nursing, leads with compassion.

The groundbreaking research has conducted and published studies that are changing the nursing standard of care when addressing the needs and issues experienced by parents of children dying of cancer.

Hendricks-Ferguson has created the full body of her research that has led to prestigious and plentiful recognition and funding for Hendricks-Ferguson. In April, St. Louis Magazine named her the top nursing researcher for 2022. Around the same time, the Midwest Nursing Research Society honored her as a senior scientist at its annual meeting.

Another example of the accolades she has received was in November of 2019 when the March of Dimes named Hendricks-Ferguson “Nurse Legend of the Year.” Prior to that recognition, Hendricks-Ferguson received the Leadership Award in Palliative Nursing from the national organization Hospice/Palliative Nurses Foundation and Project: Death in America, and in 2018, she was received as the inaugural Distinguished Nurse Scientist by the Midwest Nursing Research Society. Palliative and End-of-Life Care Research Group.

These awards and accolades acknowledge the profound impact Hendricks-Ferguson’s research has made in the area of parents of dying children and in the study of palliative and end-of-life (PC/SLC) communication practices by pediatric oncology providers with those parents of children with poor prognosis cancer.

To say their work is significant is an understatement, Hendricks-Ferguson has pioneered research in this area. It was in care she recognized and found difficult to treat as business as usual, and even more difficult to ignore.

“It actually was when I was working as a clinical instructor at a pediatric hospital that I discovered that parents were not receiving information about palliative and end-of-life care early and even when it was clear that their child’s diagnosis had exhausted all known medical treatments and there simply was nothing more modern medicine could offer to save the life of the child,” she said. “I discovered it bothered me for years.”

FILLING A VOID

In 2005-2008, as a NIH/NINR T32-funded postdoctoral fellow, Hendricks-Ferguson began looking into the literature and found that little had been explored, so she began her own research.

“In my clinical observations, I was troubled that the majority of parents and the majority of parents learned very little and very late, information about palliative and hospice care support to make an informed decision about their child’s cancer care due to a poor prognosis and diagnosis,” she said. “I started doing literature searches and found that documentation that little training on palliative care communication was included in the entry-level education for all health care providers (nurses and physicians), and of the papers I did find, the communication piece was what was often missed or neglected.”

Hendricks-Ferguson decided to do something about it, and so she set on a path of inquiry and discovery that would reshape nursing in terms of palliative care. It has led her to nearly 20 years of federally funded research totaling more than $92.5 million.

“In my first study, I interviewed parents in the St. Louis area who had a child who had received hospice care during the last week of the child’s life in the family’s home,” she said. “We asked parents when they would like to have received information related to palliative and end-of-life (PC/SLC) care.”

What she learned ignited a passion to make a difference.

“We ask if they would be receptive and consider receiving information about the purpose and benefits of palliative and end-of-life supportive care,” she said. “The majority say they would, or would have liked, to have those opportunities, and they wanted to have it even when their child was first diagnosed or at least when the child’s cancer treatments had failed to cure their child or improve their children’s prognosis.”

Hendricks-Ferguson recognized the undeniable truth that parents of a dying child would learn when they discovered the limits of modern medicine and the hard reality that medical treatments and protocols cannot cure every patient. The idea was to help parents cope with their child’s terminal diagnosis.

“This troubled me, and I wanted to make a difference,” she said. “I wanted to try to help parents, to inform them and help before their child is dying.”

At the time, Hendricks-Ferguson was completing her doctorate and noted that there was a lunacy about engaging in discussions of potential negative outcomes with parents. She decided to try to find out why and to learn more about how to bridge the gap between what parents need and what they were being offered.

“When she began her research, Hendricks-Ferguson said she found that her work would have to be done in small steps.”

“Nobody had ever done this before because it is really hard for physicians to engage in discussions about stopping cancer treatments and transferring to hospice care,” she said. “The literature has shown approximately 50 percent of physicians do not believe it is a good idea to introduce early palliative and end-of-life care because it may decrease parents’ hope away.”

There are several reasons for this.

“It might have been their training, their mentor, their religious belief, their lack of training or their clinical experience with a family,” she said. “There are multiple factors that stop physicians from engaging in early discussions about the benefits of palliative care and end-of-life care.”

Even when physicians decide to do this, she said, they face the matter of opening up a discussion.

To fill that void, Hendricks-Ferguson has conducted three preliminary studies in an effort to create protocols that study and foster communication between medical teams and parents of children dying of cancer.

OFFERING COMPLETE CARE

In an recent study, published in Cancer Nursing in 2019, Hendricks-Ferguson along with Joyce E. Haase, PhD, RN, FAAN, of Indiana University, explored and described parental perspectives about receiving an early palliative care and end-of-life (PC/SLC) communication intervention. The communication plan they established was titled “Communication Plan Early through End of Life Intervention” (COMPLETE), and it was offered by an interprofessional team of physician and registered nurse providers.

As part of the study, 50 parents were interviewed about their experience participating in the COMPLETE communication plan. In a summary of her findings, Hendricks-Ferguson and Haase wrote that COMPLETE “promotes realistic hope and meaningful dialogue by parents connecting with health care providers as a team, and… benefits of COMPLETE helps parents to make informed decisions.”

As part of the study, 50 parents were interviewed about their experience participating in the COMPLETE communication plan. In a summary of her findings, Hendricks-Ferguson and Haase wrote that COMPLETE “promotes realistic hope and meaningful dialogue by parents connecting with health care providers as a team, and… benefits of COMPLETE helps parents to make informed decisions.”

As part of the study, 50 parents were interviewed about their experience participating in the COMPLETE communication plan. In a summary of her findings, Hendricks-Ferguson and Haase wrote that COMPLETE “promotes realistic hope and meaningful dialogue by parents connecting with health care providers as a team, and… benefits of COMPLETE helps parents to make informed decisions.”

In my clinical observations, I was troubled that the majority of parents learned very little and very late information about palliative and hospice care support to make an early informed decision about their child’s cancer care due to a poor prognosis and diagnosis.9

Verna Hendricks-Ferguson

In the COMPLETE communication plan, Hendricks-Ferguson and Haase developed protocols for teams composed of a nurse and a doctor to speak with parents over a three-session protocol that allows them to determine where the parents are in their emotional journey and what they need to help them through the loss of their child.

“Over three sessions, the doctor and nurse meet with the parents,” Hendricks-Ferguson said. “Very gently, they assess where the parents are to forge a therapeutic alliance.”

To do this, the team asks parents what they would like to know about all care options (i.e., cancer treatment options and palliative care support) for their child and what they would prefer to receive.
In that study, Hendricks-Ferguson and Hassn noted that further study would be necessary to provide more data by broadening the program to a much larger and wider range of parents whose children have a terminal or life-limiting cancer diagnosis. That is the research Hendricks-Ferguson and her colleagues are working on now.

ON GOING RESEARCH

Hendricks-Ferguson’s current study, funded by the National Institutes of Health and National Cancer Institute, was approved in August of 2019; but it was placed on pause during 2020 because of the onset of COVID-19 in the United States. Due to COVID, this study will not be completed until 2021 or 2022. For that, she is working with clinical teams from around the country who are interviewing parents and collecting qualitative data.

“We have about 35 parents now enrolled,” Hendricks-Ferguson said. “So we are working on teams in six states.”

Along with Missouri, there is a team in Wisconsin, Colorado, Texas, Delaware and two in Georgia. There was an additional team in South Carolina but they pulled out to conduct their own competing research project. Hendricks-Ferguson is pleased that her intervention is so well received by parents. Moreover, her preliminary findings show that early caring conversations about PC/ECOL support are helping parents cope and make informed decisions early during emotionally catastrophic circumstances for their child and family.

In the proposal for her latest study, Hendricks-Ferguson refers back to her previous studies’ findings.

“As their child’s end of life parents often suffer from emotional distress, uncertainty about available options, fear hope that focus on care rather than palliation, decision making and disinformation with communication with health care providers.”

At the time the proposal reports, Health care providers confirm difficulties in communicating with these parents.”

To overcome these difficulties and strengthen support of parents who are suffering in these situations, Hendricks-Ferguson’s latest study aims to improve pediatric research in parent communication by incorporating a standardized PC/ECOL communication intervention into the standard of care.

The NIH funding and the efforts of researchers making strides in improving standardized care are helping change medical science cancer.

“It is an exciting time for more increasing providers’ receptivity to engage in early palliative and end-of-life care discussions with parents,” she said. “Over the last 10 to 20 years—I believe care is really going to improve for parents and children—that we will see real change.”
Heart health at the tap of an App

Possible Game Changer

Devita Stailings, Ph.D., RN
RN to BSN Option Coordinator
Associate Professor

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:

ST. LOUIS UNIVERSITY - Vatter Center of Nursing

Plane a virtual patient to have a dedicated phone app. The app would include features to help manage hypertension, including setting reminders for medication and appointments, tracking blood pressure, and providing education about hypertension. The app would also include a feature to connect patients with their healthcare providers, allowing for easy communication and access to medical advice. This approach would leverage technology to improve health outcomes and increase patient engagement.
Stressed Midwives, Rainbow Babies and the value of perinatal palliative care

by ELIZABETH KENNEDY-WILLET

The following story offers the reader an intimate look into the research and experiences of St. Louis University President Dean Côte-Armstrong, PhD, RN, CNOR, FNP, FAAN, the Valentine School’s Patricia and James R. Hemphillian professor of maternal-child nursing, who is a Fulbright scholar. Traveling to Scotland and the United Kingdom last summer to study the culture, as well as the nuances and perspectives of that country, and her fellow researchers, have offered the perspectives of a child.

FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR

Since returning from her summer in Scotland, Côte-Armstrong has spent the past several months pouring over interviews, data and research encounters with those at the center of perinatal loss of a child.

“My project in Scotland was a broad study looking at the nature of perinatal bereavement support,” she said.

While based at Edinburgh Napier University in Edinburgh, Scotland, Côte-Armstrong focused on how pregnancy and infant deaths were addressed in Scottish culture, specifically the way it was handled through the eyes of bereaved parents, midwives (the primary care provider for pregnant women within the National Health Service) and those who provide bereavement care.

The Fulbright scholar conducted extensive research through interviews with several midwives and parents, including two couples and several single parents. In addition, she observed three bereavement support groups on Zoom, viewed media coverage, explored a variety of websites and visited a very special clinic for perinatal bereavement support and care.

Côte-Armstrong and her husband Peter Armstrong, an architect, also served as Fulbright ambassadors, meeting people, visiting landmarks, exploring culture and traveling throughout the country, exchanging ideas. While much of the interactions were informal, Côte-Armstrong did have an academic talk, as well.

THE RAINBOW CLINIC

That iteration for a speaking engagement came from the Rainbow Clinic, which is part of an academic hospital at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom. The clinic was established to provide additional support to parents preg-nant again after the perinatal death of a child.

It was one of the highlights of Côte-Armstrong’s Fulbright scholar experiences because the clinic was established in large measure based on her research, along with the recognition that the country’s National Health Service could do more to help pregnant parents who are anxious and worried due to a prior perinatal death.

“The clinic derived its name from the term ‘rainbow baby.’ A rainbow baby is a moniker used for a child born in parents who have previously suffered the loss of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death. The term references a rainbow appearing after a thunderstorm.

Côte-Armstrong gave a formal talk to the faculty and health care workers at the Rainbow Clinic about her latest research and her work as a Fulbright scholar. She said it was gratifying to visit, something she has been wanting to do since she learned about the clinic in 2019.

Her time at the Rainbow Clinic allowed her a close-up view of the U.K.’s National Health Service and its provisions for the parents she studied.

The Role of Midwives

Ultimately, Côte-Armstrong said she learned a great deal from her Fulbright study on the role and experiences of midwives, as well as how those experiences impact parents, nurses, doctors and other health care providers.

Much of the bereavement support occurs through charities and academic clinics, rather than the National Health Service, Côte-Armstrong said.

“In Scotland, there are charities that provide perinatal bereavement support to these parents who have suffered the loss of a child or, as in Peter’s work, birth,” she said.

She also discovered the struggles of midwives, and how those struggles have contributed to a national shortage of these workers and programs, as well as issues for parents needing their skills and support with perinatal death.

“I did learn that the National Health Service controls all of their health care for women who are experienced in women’s health and midwives work under difficult circumstances,” she said. “They do not have much time to give bereavement support.”

In fact, the report limits the care provided to parents for up to year after birth, and it is a testament to the care of midwives and nurses.

“I was told that no one continues their pregnancies, but instead, they get on with their lives and start a new family,” she said. “I got to hear parents express themselves both positively and negatively. They were trying to see it through their lens. There was very limited support in the National Health Service for continuing a pregnancy.”

Côte-Armstrong said she was not surprised the National Health Service was what she did not hear.

“Just as a single parent speaks about the role of faith in their bereavement,” she said. “It didn’t ask them about their spiritual identity. I let them talk. I have done so many interviews with bereaved parents. It was striking. We met an American couple who shared that it was a pretty poignant culture.”

Rainbow Babies

Preterm figures, Instagram and national news also provided insights into the culture of Côte-Armstrong’s study. Toward the end of her stay, the Fulbright scholar watched in real time the unfolding of a rather prominent story of perinatal loss. “Last August, Carrie Johnson, United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s newest wife, announced they were expecting a ‘rainbow baby,’” she said. “Johnson really felt that John Leslie and his wife Chrissie Virgin and Prince Harry and Meghan Markle could share their stories of loss, which she should share, too.”

The story was covered throughout the U.K. In fact, The London Times reported the story quoting Carrie Johnson who described herself as a “horrified” over the loss of her baby through miscarriage earlier that year. The Times wrote: Carrie Johnson, who made the announcement on Instagram with a photograph of a Christmas bubble shaped like a pram with the caption: ‘Helping for my rainbow baby this Christmas.’

Carrie Johnson’s Instagram revolution resonated with Côte-Armstrong’s 20 years of research focusing on parent experiences of pregnancy after a perinatal death. Over her career of studying parents like the Johnsons, she has found that parents do suffer the loss of their child, as well as the loss of their future with that child.

Côte-Armstrong said her research showed that parents who choose to become pregnant again often feel themselves riding the emotional rollercoaster that comes after that initial loss, which Carrie Johnson expressed on Instagram, writing: “At the beginning of the year, I had a miscarriage, which left me heartbroken. I feel incredibly blessed to be pregnant again, but I’ve also felt like a hug of nerves.”

In December after her return, Côte-Armstrong learned that the Johnsons had welcomed a healthy baby girl, Romy Iris Charlotte, or Carrie Johnson, back into Instagram, to announce the child’s name: “Romy after my mom. Rosemary. Iris (from the Greek, meaning rainbow. Charlotte (after) Rosie (an name we miss so much.”

The Value of Perinatal Palliative Care

Overall, Côte-Armstrong’s time in Scotland as a Fulbright scholar reinforced much of her previous research, which documented the reality that bereavement support is vital and helpful to parents who find themselves in those situations.

“One good support, they can do anything, but they’re sad, she said. “And with poor care, they are more heavily burdened.”

In Scotland, particularly at the Rainbow Clinic, Côte-Armstrong said she found that parents in those settings were getting the support they needed. She returned in July 2022 to continue to examine the experience and realities of care across the pond in Scotland and the U.K.

“There are a lot of wonderful nurses and physicians providing supportive care. Those who are there with those families, they inject hope into families: hope for today, and hope for the moment.” CÔTE-ARMSTRONG

The illustration above shows the role and responsibilities of nurses, and the skills and knowledge that this perinatal palliative care coordinator approach brings to the care of parents who have experienced the loss of a baby. Illustrated by Krogh, Denise and Karen Stover

PHOTO CREDIT: View more photos on the Fulbright Center website.
Genesity and Gratitude

Since hanging up her scrubs, retired alumnus Patricia Hemak (BSN ’94) has dedicated her efforts to leaving a legacy of generosity and gratitude.

Her latest endeavor supports the creation of a simulation birthing suite for students at the Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing. It will be dedicated during Homecoming weekend.

When it opens, The Patricia A. and James Hemak Maternal & Newborn Suite will provide opportunities for students to learn maternal medical care that will extend beyond birthing to include the entire family’s care within a safe environment.

“I want to give back to SLU and the Valentine School,” she said. “My SLU education transformed my life. As the School of Nursing, I found role models and mentors who truly inspired me.”

Hemak said she had wanted to become a nurse since the age of 12 but had not initially thought of attending SLU.

When she was in high school at Dollege, her homeroom teacher, Sister Ann Louisa, started the Future Nurses Club.

Through the club, Hemak met Sister Mary Teresa Noth, Ed.D., FSN, dean of the SLU School of Nursing from 1966 to 1982, who encouraged her to take the admittance exam that also could provide a scholarship opportunity to attend SLU’s School of Nursing.

“I think she saw the potential in me, and she certainly helped me facilitate that path,” Hemak recalled, noting that taking that exam proved to be life changing. She did so well on it that the University awarded her a four-year academic scholarship.

“I had not thought of going to college for nursing because of the expense,” she said. “That scholarship allowed me to become the first woman in my extended family to go to college.”

Hemak grew up living with her mom, younger sister and grandparents, who were born in Slovenia and immigrated to the United States. Hemak, her mom and her sister moved in with her grandparents after her father was killed in an off-base accident during his service in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

Hemak knew her family simply could not afford to send her to college, so she had planned to become a nurse through a three-year program. She said she was thrilled and excited about attending the University and the program exceeded her expectations.

“Many of my fellow nursing students became acquainted with pediatrics, but my SLU education lit my passion for maternal nursing. I found so many wonderful mentors,” she said. “Sister Caritas, in particular, was inspiring and really encouraged me. She and Marguerite Roby, a maternity teacher, possibly one of the first African American instructors at the School of Nursing, taught me so much not only in class but by example.”

“I watched these nurses who were both practicing and educating at the same time,” she continued. “I wanted to do what they did. They were very committed to those clients and to teaching us. They were dedicated to making us as prepared as possible. I learned so much from them.”

After leaving college, Hemak earned her master’s degree and became a nursing educator herself. She moved around the country because of her husband, Jim’s career with Johnson & Johnson Achievement, and was licensed as a nurse in seven states: Missouri, Hawaii, California, Illinois, Washington, Colorado and Minnesota. Still, her love for SLU and the Valentine School has been constant—so much so that this is not her first gift to the University and the School.

In 2015, she and Jim made an investment that established the Hemak Endowed Professorship of Maternal Child Nursing. “This endowed professorship represents the expansion of this passion for nursing practice, education and research,” she said at the time, noting that it “has the potential to transform health care in the area of maternal-child health.”

“I want to give back to SLU and the Valentine School. My SLU education transformed my life. At the School of Nursing, I found role models and mentors who truly inspired me.”

PATRICIA HEMAK (BSN ’94), MSN

This new project will continue her efforts to expand educational opportunities for students and faculty.

Hemak’s gift expands the simulation settings available for nursing students’ training, which is very exciting, said Joann Hrubetz Dean and Professor Danny G. Willis, D.N.S., RN, PMHCNS- BC, CNE, FAAN. The Hemak’s support of the expansion is truly an investment in SLU’s students and the future of maternal medical care, he noted.

“We are blessed to have the generosity of Patricia and James Hemak to advance and upgrade our nursing learning space,” Willis said. “Students will be afforded the benefit of high technology while learning with expert faculty and each other. The Patricia A. and James Hemak Maternal & Newborn Suite will be showcased and celebrated at Homecoming 2022. This is truly a dream come true for us!”

Hemak said she is excited about the simulation lab and that she relishes embarking on this new project with the Valentine School and the University.

“I’m just one story among many,” she said. “I am glad I had the career I did and that I married a man who supports the causes I love, and that is why we are helping the Valentine School create this new lab. It is exciting to see the impact you can make on the students and faculty and the University.”

“Birth of a Sim Lab

Simulation Suite delivers real-life learning in safe setting.

Students studying maternal-newborn nursing can learn clinical skills in a new birthing simulation lab at the Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing.

In the lab, students encounter three “false” patients and two “babies” who present them with a range of symptoms and medical conditions. The new space, which upgrades and improves an existing simulation lab, will be dedicated during Homecoming weekend as the Patricia A. and James Hemak Maternal & Newborn Suite.

ALSO: Several year-old Michael Madden, 2, eagerly finds out about his “patent,” in the newly established birthing simulation lab, a place where students can feel safe making attempts at providing appropriate care for their patients’ mock and young. RIGHT: The Sim Lab’s nurses’ “baby” times out during drills.

INSPIRED GIVING Patricia Hemak (center) and her husband James Hemak (right) stand with her mentor Sr. Mary Caritas Noth at an event at the Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing several years ago. Noth passed away in 2018.
Preceptors benefit, just as their students do

Volunteering as a preceptor not only impacts the lives of students, it can also set preceptors themselves on a new trajectory, as Jocelyn Hendrix Driscoll and Professor Danny G. Willis, D.N.S., R.N., PMHCNS-BC, CNE, FAAN, attest.

“The real world, lived experience of collaboration that happens between a preceptor and student provides the icing on the cake in nursing education,” he said.

Willis speaks from personal experience. He became a preceptor at Touro University Department of Psychiatry in New Orleans, guiding BSN nursing students from Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center.

As much as his students benefited from the experience, it proved to be truly life changing for Willis.

“Being a preceptor is the best,” said Willis. “My own entry into my doctorate, and eventually into becoming a faculty member, came from my experience precepting students when I worked as a psychiatric mental health nurse.”

Willis said he highly recommends alumni consider being a preceptor and working with Tulane School of Nursing. In that role, alumni help shape the future of nursing students. It is an important part of what the Valentine School can offer its students.

Want to be a preceptor?

To learn more, contact Carolyn Layloff, MSN, RN, Clinical Resources Coordinator, Valentine School of Nursing: carolyn.layloff@slu.edu or 314.977.6653

The real-world, lived experience of collaboration that happens between a preceptor and student provides the icing on the cake in nursing education.”

— Danny Willis, Joan Hrubetz Dean and Professor

Mary Egan Whitworth, BSN, RN, MSN, ARNP, FAAN, FACN, FANNA, along with agriculture student and school counselor, received the University’s highest honor for alumni achievement. She is one of many Mahaffies who have evolved into leaders in their field, something in Mary’s family and across Touro. “I can see this in my family and our students who have become leaders in their field,” she said. A lifelong adherent of dedication to those closest of the University’s mission. Watch for alumni news about Mahaffies in the next issue of Care Prospects.

SEPTEMBER 24-26: Homecoming 2022 Weekend. The weekend will include the dedication of the Patrica A. and James Hines Mascall, Jr., Northern Sun, a celebration to make history through the generous support of Hispanic (BSN 46) and her husband.

APRIL 14, 2023: The Grace and William Porter Lecture System: Health’s New High, 280 E., R. S. N., PROOF with the Williams and Justine Cowen Chair in nursing research, is executive director for nursing science, professional practice and quality improvement and a fellowship, professor at George Washington University. Her research is focused on how patients-centered family conferences can be matched with care provided. (c) All rights reserved.

MARCH 6, 2022: The Trinity and Christena Valentine Lecture Series

To ensure that our loyal alumni keep up with all happenings at the Valentine School, be sure to keep an eye on our email, alumni and website postings.
Pioneering a remarkable future for all.

The Valentine School of Nursing counts on our generous alumni to partner with us in our efforts to create a future that serves a higher purpose and seeks the greater good through the power of a Jesuit education. With a gift to the Valentine School of Nursing, we can continue to shape and advance our students’ experiences as we prepare them to be compassionate, ethical and contemporary practitioners in their various nursing careers. To make a gift to the Valentine School of Nursing, contact Michelle Cohen, senior director of Development at michelle.cohen@slu.edu or 314-977-8723.