

Nursing education at Marian continues to grow in size, degrees and training

M

arian University's School of Nursing has "good bones."

Birthing from the St. Agnes School of Nursing at a time when the Sisters saw economic and educational value in merging their nearly 60-year-old training program with a degree-granting institution in 1966, Marian's nursing graduates can trace a lineage that runs locally deep and nationally wide.

And while course content may look considerably different a century after the Sisters of St. Agnes began teaching nurses in Fond du Lac, much about the character of current classes feels the same.

In the complex and changing world of medicine, this locally administered nursing education program continues to produce nurses who care for patients physically and emotionally, both body and soul.

"Our students learn to treat their clients as individuals, assessing the needs for each client and family—rather than grouping clients into illness or surgery categories, like 'gallbladder patient,'" said Professor and School of Nursing Interim Dean Pat O'Connor, an alum who joined the faculty in 1981. "I think the founders would be proud to see how their commitment and dedication lives on through the nursing students and graduates of Marian University."

Making the transition

After the forward-thinking Sisters and administrators encouraged the transition to a nursing program culminating in a college degree, Marian educators further expanded degree and program offerings.

Graduate degrees include a master of science-nursing (MSN) degree with a focus as adult nurse practitioner or nurse educator, and a registered nurse-bachelor of science-nursing/master of science-nursing (RN-BSN/MSN) degree for registered nurses who want to complete baccalaureate or master's degrees.

Certificate programs focus on palliative care, parish nursing and an online nurse educator option. Along with a full liberal arts foundation, undergraduate nursing clinical sites provide training in medical/surgical,

BY MONICA M. WALK | SPECIAL TO THE REPORTER

rics and nursing homes, ensuring graduates' ability to work in all of these areas.

Programmatic growth culminated in restructuring the Nursing Studies Division into the School of Nursing in 2005; enrollment includes students from 14 states and 13 countries. Annual summer camps for high school students considering nursing as a profession were launched in 2006.

High-demand major

Students know the school's educational offerings, and nursing is a high-demand major at Marian. It's also tough. Rigor is necessary because health care has become so complex, noted Associate Professor Nancy Noble.

Clinical Site Coordinator Katie Hughes knows every Marian nursing student, matching each with hands-on clinical placement sites all over the state for real-world nursing experience.

"We place high demands on our students from day one," she said. "Not because we want to set anyone up to fail, but because we want them to succeed at the highest level possible. They end the program with a huge sense of accomplishment for getting through such a rigorous program. They are proud to represent Marian in their workplace, and we are proud of them for taking their journey with us."

Assistant Professor and alum Karen Roberts recalls her own formative student clinical experiences on the medical/surgical floor of St. Agnes Hospital.

"There was a lot of camaraderie when I was a nursing student, and I think that still holds true today. There are tough courses and it helps to have the support of your fellow students," she said. "We have a responsibility to do the best for patients at all times; integrity was, and is, expected."

Partnership thrives

"We have partnered with Marian for a long time and work very closely to provide clinical experiences for students on a regular basis," said Agnesian HealthCare Human Resources Director Tammy Pitts. "Because we are both founded by the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes



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Bill Daley, far right, director of oncology and diagnostics at Agnesian HealthCare, addresses members of Marian's nursing camp. Participants include Nicole King, Jennifer Beiswenger, Courtney Krueger, Samantha DeRidder, Erin Stonecipher, Erika Griffith, Marie Tobianski and Katelyn Ritchie.

(CSA), the values taught at Marian make their graduates well-prepared for a career in a mission-based organization like Agnesian HealthCare. Marian is a direct partner with us in developing nursing professionals for the future."

The performance of Marian nursing graduates on the licensure exam has consistently been at or above the national mean, and employment rates have been just as strong. A recent Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel section featured area nurses nominated for exceptional practice: First runner-up Jessica Gelhar (BSN 2008) and third runner-up Julia Means (BSN 1996) are Marian alums.

New leader's view

"The strong performance of graduates lies in the outstanding work of the faculty to ensure that the curriculum is current and relevant, reflecting the needs of the health-care environment," said Dean of the School of Nursing Julie A. Luetschwager, who arrives on campus July 1. "I am looking forward to becoming a part of the Marian University School of Nursing culture, and being part of carrying the history we bring with us into the future of nursing education."

Though still a female-dominated field, with roots in religious sisterhood, nursing is diversifying.

"We have nursing students from many different backgrounds," noted Janet Wermes, secretary to the dean, "and all stages of life...from new high-school graduates, to people seeking a second degree, to older students seeking a change in their life path."

In this centennial year of nursing education in Fond du Lac, residents can celebrate the benefits of "good bones" and longevity.