

By Jim Enright

# The Human Experience of Nursing is Beyond Borders



When you fly from Denmark to Oregon, you'll cover about 5,000 miles. You'll add distance when you spend time in Framingham, Massachusetts, and Seattle, Washington. And when you arrive in Portland and begin working at OHSU, you'll characterize the journey you've taken as "coming full circle."

You'll do that if you are Lissi Hansen, Ph.D., R.N., describing the arc of a career that began as an assistant nurse in Reballegaard Nursing Home in Denmark and now continues as assistant professor of clinical research in the School of Nursing at OHSU. Hansen has journeyed from caring for end-of-life patients in Denmark to researching end-of-life issues at OHSU. And while she didn't know that one of her earliest nursing interests would in time become her passion, she does know that each experience along the way motivated her to learn more, do more and be more.

"When I started working as a nurse in the intensive care unit at a hospital on the East Coast, it struck

me that the ICU treatment for a lot of elderly patients was much more aggressive than in Denmark. I began to question the appropriateness of these treatments and knew then that I wanted to go back to school so I could learn more about caring for the elderly."

Moving to Washington in 1991, Hansen waited while Washington State University in Vancouver translated Danish academic credits into American academic units before accepting her into its bachelor's of science in nursing program in 1992. Getting into the program, Hansen says, "got me hooked on furthering my education, and research really started to interest me. I needed to move forward with my education to be able to begin making changes."

Mentored as a Ph.D. student at OHSU by Patricia Archbold, D.N.Sc., R.N., F.A.A.N., Elnora Thomson Distinguished Professor, and Barbara Stewart, Ph.D., professor emeritus, Hansen focused her interest on end-of-life decision-making, especially as the process involves family caregivers.

Recruited to the OHSU School of Nursing in October 2003, Hansen engages her interest through teaching, research and clinical collaborations that blend high tech and high touch. "We need the clinical trials and the controlled studies, but we also need the other part: studying the human experience of what we do so we can learn from it and improve the quality of our practice." Lissi Hansen circled 5,000 miles taking off from and touching down in that human experience – and, oh, how far she has come.

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## From Cattails to Canyons, From Marshfield to Malheur

**A**nne Greenlee, Ph.D., is, literally, most at home on the range. Whether the expanse of Africa, the farm lands and marsh fields of central Wisconsin or, now, the vast canyons and rolling wheat fields of eastern Oregon, rural landscapes and the people who settle there stimulate her curiosity, focus her research and connect her to community.

In her work, she investigates the effects that exposures from rural environments have on reproductive and neurological health. In her life, she thrives on helping people understand what this means for them. She's as apt to be addressing a community forum, walking people through the science and explaining the terminology, as she is to be analyzing samples in the laboratory for toxic effects.

"I believe very strongly in not keeping the science in the lab," she says. "People need to know about the information that is coming out of research – not only because their tax dollars and their contributions to foundations support so much research, but also so they can make informed decisions for themselves about the meaning and consequences of what we are learning."

Greenlee first saw the unique relationship between health and rural environments as a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa. She later explored the health effects of rural environmental exposures for 12 years at the Marshfield Medical Research Foundation in Marshfield, Wisconsin. The newly appointed associate professor at the OHSU School of Nursing and the OHSU Center for Research on Occupational and

Environmental Toxicology, funded by the School of Nursing, the Oregon Opportunity and Eastern Oregon University came to the school's La Grande Campus in August. Greenlee says she was drawn to OHSU equally by the beauty of the natural and built environments, the commitment of La Grande's citizens to making eastern Oregon a magnet for students and science, and the opportunity to expand the scope of her work through collaborative relationships.

Those relationships, she asserts, are essential to bringing research projects to rural clinical practices, to evaluating their effectiveness, and to developing the ability of nurses to translate research into application. "We need to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies, especially in rural communities – and human-to-human connections are critical to this. That's where and why nurses are so important: their interactions translate research findings into community health. Nurses connect with people and assess what's effective and what's working."

She calls the opportunity that awaits her in La Grande a culmination of her research, her interests and her experience. No doubt, a persistent question will guide her pursuit of that opportunity in Oregon as it has elsewhere: "How does the science translate to application, and how do people find this out?"