“I saw the impact you could have on health care,” she said.
*See article in this issue of Connections*

Randi Powell Sexton, F.N.P.

Northern Cheyenne tribal member Randi Powell Sexton, Reservation in Montana and an anthropology degree from Leone where she shadowed a midwife – profoundly influenced the direction her life took.

“I saw the impact you could have on health care,” she said after her return from Africa. Instead of going into anthropology, she applied to the OHSU/ASHland nursing program, graduating in 2015. “I wanted to be a nurse-midwife but was exposed to emergency medicine and thought it was the coolest thing to save lives,” she recalls of her three years in the ER. “Seeing trauma for that long wore on me, and I decided I wanted to work with people to prevent the disastrous impact of not having access to care.”

Next step: Portland’s OHSU campus for a family nurse practitioner degree. She got help from HealthIL STEPS and says that “it connected me with other students and diverse populations that I want to devote my life to.”

Since completing the program in June, Sexton been working with the Coosita Indian Tribe in Longview, Wash. “I love my job and am seeing diverse patients of all ages with all kinds of disease states.”

Sexton’s long-term goal is to serve as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Public Health Service where she can be assigned to a vital Indian reservation. As she enters the third generation, along with her mother and grandmother, to bring health services to tribes through the IHS. The job would entail weeks-long stints in underserved reservations, typically in remote Navajo and South Dakota regions. “I can’t imagine doing anything else,” she says.

*See article in this issue of Connections*
Diversity, equity and inclusion in action

By Cathy Carroll

From curating anti-racism resources to unconscious bias training, the commitment to advancing a diverse, culturally competent learning community and workforce is moving forward at the School of Nursing.

Karen Reifenstein, Ph.D., R.N., Senior Associate Dean of Student Affairs and Diversity, said the most recent phase of diversity, equity and inclusion work began last spring with strategic planning for priorities for the coming year.

SoN Professor Joanne Noone, Ph.D., R.N. said Dr. Reifenstein has helped focus on inclusion and campus climate this year by implementing forums for faculty, staff, and students to start dialogue around such issues. “Both of us are structuring webinars and bringing in speakers to look at different frameworks for equity and inclusion for our school,” said Dr. Noone.

The webinars are planned for November and December and the SoN Diversity in Inclusion and Campus Climate this year by implementing forums for faculty, staff, and students. She tapped the expertise of Dr. Noone to help create this compilation of resources. Dr. Noone is also project manager of Advancing Health Equity through Student Empowerment & Professional Success (HealthSTEPs) and Diversity Team project director.

The resources are posted on the SoN’s Diversity Section. It includes a range of options, from the podcast, “How to Talk About Race and Racism,” to media devoted to understanding Oregon’s exclusionary history as well as its civil rights work, to recommended reading, such as “Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race,” by Reni Eddo-Lodge.

This summer, the SoN also launched Unconscious Bias Training for undergraduate and graduate nursing students led by the OHSU Center for Diversity and Inclusion. Numerous studies conducted across the country have shown how unconscious bias contributes to imbalances in hiring, promotion and compensation for certain racial, ethnic and gender groups.

“The two-hour training was offered on all five campuses this summer and fall, from Ashland to La Grande. Shifting to a virtual platform allowed for the training to be more easily accessible to a wider audience,” Dr. Reifenstein said.

Although plans for much of this work have been underway for a few years, a sharper focus for racial equality across America prompted the higher visibility response by the recent demonstrations from around the world.

“The 2020 protests have triggered conversations within nursing and nursing education nationally about the need for change within our systems,” said Dr. Noone. “The conversations have happened not only at schools of nursing education, but within our hospital and healthcare systems,” she said. “This has had an impact on people’s understanding of the systemic need for change.”

Research to explore health equity

By Cathy Carroll

A new research collaboration between the nursing schools of OHSU and the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) seems almost as if it was guided by destiny. The study, which involves comparing the cultural beliefs around end-of-life decisions in the two states, supports the long-term goal of improving care of Hispanics of Mexican origin. At the same time, it leverages some of the School of Nursing’s signature elements — health equity science and gerontology research — to offer new ways of elevating the experiences of nursing students. The goal of the collaboration is to advance knowledge in the fields of palliative and end-of-life care.

Hector A. Olvera-Alvarez, Ph.D., P.E., senior associate dean of research at OHSU School of Nursing, said the elements required to launch the project quickly came together to support a broader objective. “One of the aims of my office is to increase our capacity to train the next generation of nursing scientists,” he said.

“OHSU is ideally positioned to do this because we have a more diverse group of future nursing scientists who embrace the challenge of procuring health equity.” For two decades, his office had focused on health disparities in Hispanic populations.

In Oregon, the Hispanic community growth rate is fourth in the U.S., comprising 12 percent of the state population. Partnering with UTEP, where the Hispanic population is 87 percent, can help Oregon understand how to address the aging needs of its Hispanics; and UTEP can gain insight into the experience of Hispanics beyond its regional population.

Dr. Olvera-Alvarez, principal investigator of the UTEP project, had also known that he had an abundance of expertise among the faculty at OHSU, such as that of Lissi Hansen, Ph.D., R.N., principal investigator of the OHSU project. She will lead the pilot project to determine differences in cultural factors associated with end-of-life preferences and advance-care planning among undergraduate nursing students, their parents and grandparents.

Dr. Olvera’s passion for palliative care began when she was an ICU nurse and saw elderly patients from nursing homes receiving aggressive life-sustaining treatment, including intubation when their advance directives prohibited it. As an immigrant from Denmark, she said she and her students can share their struggles with language and cultural differences while pursuing an education.

“It’s important for nursing scientists who teach undergraduates to be role models for opportunities in addition to bedside nursing,” said Dr. Hansen. “Often undergraduates don’t know there is a path for nurse scientists and what they can bring to the table — and even more so with diverse ethnic groups.”

Co-Principal Investigator at UTEP, Dr. Guillermina Rincon Solis, said, “Some Latinos have not considered that they have a voice in their treatment plan. This is an opportunity to bring attention to the topic and prepare individuals to have that conversation.”

The research project has two components. The first is to recruit participants from OHSU’s SoN students and their families. The second will recruit students and their families from the school of nursing at UTEP. Each project received $25,000 in Hartford Award for Research and Practice funds from the Hartford Center for Gerontological Excellence at OHSU.

Alumna of the year emphasizes nurse-led care

Nicole Bennett, D.N.P., PMHNP-BC ’09 and founder of Williamette Health and Wellness, has been selected as the OHSU School of Nursing Alumni Association’s Alumna of the Year for 2020.

“Since graduation, Nicole has dedicated her career to nursing practice with our most vulnerable populations, children and adolescents struggling with mental health issues,” said Margaret Scharf, D.N.P., P.H.N.M.P., F.N.P., OHSU Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Program Director. “After working in health promotion and prevention research for 12 years, she pursued a career in nursing in order to impact the lives of children with mental health issues.”

Since founding Williamette Health and Wellness, Dr. Bennett has expanded both the scale and methodology of delivering psychiatric and mental health care to children, adolescents and adults.

“She serves the underserved, Oregon’s children with mental health problems, their families, and shares her expertise with the community, statewide and nationally,” said Dr. Scharf. “Her practice promotes the treatment of children, adults and families and has expanded to include counselors and family therapists’ services which includes parenting classes in the evenings for working parents.”

Dr. Bennett received her award at the OHSU School of Nursing Winter Completion Ceremony on December 10.

Social distancing

We asked our community to send in their photos of how they practice safe social distancing, masks on, and good hand hygiene.

Send your photos with a caption to Christi at richardc@ohsu.edu.

Social media campaign

Above and right: OHSU Nurse-Midwifery Program Director and midwife, Dr. Cathy Emel, embraced new protocols during COVID-19 to teach students in a safe environment. This shows students wearing their masks learning the art of midwifery during a skills lab.

Top: Sadie Boccard’s three year old son was able to meet his new brother through the birthing center’s lobby windows. Sadie is a Klamath Falls student.

Second row left: Love wins, even in a pandemic. Monmouth student, Aubrey Applegate, sent in this wedding photo. She said, “My husband and I just got married last week, and we celebrated our honeymoon with social distancing, wearing a mask, having hand sanitizer at all times, and antibacterial wipes for public spaces! We made the best of it and stayed safe at the same time!”

Second row right: Nick Miel, Interim Program Director of Statewide Simulation on the Monmouth campus, sent in this photo of his family on a recent hike at Silver Falls State Park.

On the cover:

The cover photo was sent in by Dr. Ginger Kuller, assistant clinical professor on the Portland Campus. She said, “The photo was taken July 10 in one of the classrooms at MRSC/RLSB. I sent the pic to my family with the caption I am at work!”

“After a great deal of planning and re-planning amongst School of Nursing faculty, SimOps, SoN Administration, OHSU, Oregon Health Department, Oregon State Board of Nursing, etc. on July 10, I had my first face-to-face experience with a clinical group of students since before the end of Winter term. In this pic: I am working with a clinical group of Summer Ac Care students in the first course in their program of study, Health Promotion. The students are practicing taking blood pressures. In addition to the wearing of face masks, face shields are required when students are together in skills labs. We observe strict infection precautions in all of our skills lab shoes.”

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