Next Generation Nursing Leaders

While UConn prepares for the massive science, technology, engineering and math initiative called Connecticut Next Generation, the School of Nursing is already preparing tomorrow’s innovative nurses. In order to educate seniors as innovative leaders in nursing science and practice, the senior leadership class has taken a new direction this year, co-taught by Dean Regina Cusson, associate professor Dr. Art Engler, and alumna Dr. Maria Tackett ’72 BS, ’94 MS, EdD, CCRN, CEN, UConn School of Nursing adjunct faculty member. Together, they engage seniors in innovative management and leadership.

Dr. Tackett explains that she and Dean Cusson, "wanted to move away from a didactic approach…and use the class time in a more dynamic way… to correlate the theoretical concepts to real day to day practice in the clinical setting." The students have the opportunity to connect with practicing nurses and get a firsthand look at what is being done in hospitals and other sites. This is made possible by the use of technology, allowing the students to teleconference with nurses at Hartford Hospital. Students are able to see technology being used that could not be brought to the classroom, and clinical nurses are able to provide guest lectures without too much time away from the bedside since they do not have to travel.

One example of such technology is an early ambulation device called EARL (Early Ambulation Restores Life) which allows patients in the intensive care unit to walk. A Hartford Hospital nurse involved in the development of the system was able to show the device via live video, explain it, and answer students’ questions in real time. She was also able to address what could happen if an emergency arose.

Students are able to see how didactic learning from a textbook or lecture can be implemented in the real world. For example, the course featured a session on change theories that was correlated with a discussion via teleconference with a Hartford Hospital nurse who used these concepts when she was involved in changes to the uniforms there. Students were also able to speak with recent graduates to discuss managing various patient groups, time management, and prioritizing patient care. The lessons are more meaningful when students see them being used in practice. “Students have been very engaged in identifying potential innovations conceived as part of their clinical courses,” says Dr. Engler. “They are actively involved in developing their ideas."

continued...
Next Generation Nursing Leaders ...(continued)

The class also discusses other leadership issues, like integrity. Students are given the chance to share examples they have witnessed where practicing nurses acted with integrity in advocating for their patients. Students also discuss situations in which integrity may be violated and what the appropriate responses are in those situations. Students develop communication skills and engage in self-exploration, discovering their vision and passion for nursing. Homework assignments allow them to examine different organizations’ missions and values and to analyze whether those align with their values. These discussions and assignments will help students in the job interview process, help them find the right place to work, and help them on the job.

The class is not only enjoyable for the students, but for the instructors as well. Dr. Tackett has taught the class in the past, but noted that she, “especially enjoyed it with Dr. Cusson’s direction,” and, “appreciate[s] the opportunity to try some new approaches in the classroom and the leeway to look at innovation and try to incorporate it into [the] coursework.” She feels energized by working with students and enjoys having the chance to impart her wisdom to the next generation of nurses. As a nursing director for neurology, trauma and orthopedics at Hartford Hospital and a retired lieutenant colonel, Dr. Tackett has a lot to share.

By taking this class, Dr. Tackett hopes that, “students gain better preparation to transition from an undergraduate student role to professional practicing nurse.” In other words, she hopes they become Next Generation Nurses.

[Three vertical dots]