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For Immediate Release

Two Indiana public universities receive federal funding for new acute care nurse practitioner program

A grant from the Division of Nursing of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is funding an acute care nurse practitioner program (ACNP) for graduate students at two Indiana public universities. University of Southern Indiana School of Nursing and Health Professions, as the lead agency, and Indiana University School of Nursing asked for funding to meet the critical need for advanced practice nurses in the acute care areas in rural and urban settings. The grant, with first year funding of \$323,330, is for three years.

Sixteen students—10 at USI and six at IU in Indianapolis—are enrolled in the program. Students are admitted to USI or IU, and the home campus awards degrees. USI and IU faculty share instruction. The classes are delivered to students through distance education technology.

"It's a step in educating professionals for the changing health care delivery system," said Dr. Sheila K. Melander, USI associate professor of nursing and one of the faculty members in the new program. A nine-year veteran of the USI nursing faculty, Melander enrolled in post-doctoral studies at Vanderbilt University to prepare for her leadership in the program.

"Faculty of the Indiana University School of Nursing are thrilled to join with USI in a stellar collaborative effort to offer this new program for graduate students," said Linda Finke, associate dean of the IU graduate nursing program. She added, "A joint nursing degree with an acute care nurse practitioner major is the first of its kind in the state of Indiana."

The acute care nurse practitioner is a nurse with advanced assessment and diagnostic skills. Many people are familiar with the role of the family nurse practitioner in providing primary care with an emphasis on prevention of illness and treatment of common illnesses. The acute care nurse practitioner takes care of the acutely ill.

The first ACNP certification examination was given in December 1995 by the American Nurses Credentialing Center. Since that time approximately 800 acute care nurse practitioners have been certified. Five years ago there were five programs preparing nurses for the ACNP role; today there are 62 programs, a testimonial to the growing recognition that this role provides opportunities for nurses and can make possible better patient care.

In 1995, Colleen Walsh, USI instructor in nursing, was among those who took the first certification exam. After many years as an orthopedic clinical nurse specialist, she became an ACNP.

Walsh said that ACNPs treat patients using recognized protocols and guidelines. The ACNP can treat a specific problem following protocols and then evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment. If further intervention is needed, the ACNP discusses the situation with the physician and helps develop a revised plan of care. The ACNP role is still so new that protocol development is ongoing. ACNPs can prescribe medication, make rounds, and manage patient care.

Melissa L. Vandever, program coordinator of graduate nursing, said, "Across the country the ACNP is contributing to quality, cost effective health care. We anticipate that graduates of the USI/IU collaborative program will become outstanding providers of care to patients with acute and chronic illness."