Accelerated BSN students experience poverty through simulation

Last March, faculty members Teri Boese, Dr. Adelita Cantu, Dr. Marion Donohoe and Martha Martinez traveled to Kansas City, Missouri for a facilitator training on the Simulation of Living in Poverty (SLiP) simulation program. The goal of SLiP is to translate how poverty impacts the behaviors and decisions people make, particularly when it comes to their healthcare. Armed with a better understanding of what it is like to live in poverty, students will be better prepared to provide patients with compassionate and competent care when they become practicing nurses. On June 24, the fourth-semester accelerated BSN students experienced a cutting-edge poverty simulation in what proved to be an enlightening and invigorating session.

The simulation was offered as part of a Population Focused Health course that examines how vulnerable populations live in poverty. Nursing faculty decided that SLiP was a good fit for this course because it would enhance what the students are learning in theory by enabling them to experience it first hand in practice. After completing the simulation, Dr. Cantu said, “SLiP helps students to understand not only the patient in front of them, but the community in which they live. Students are capable of providing culturally proficient sensitive care to our most vulnerable populations.”

During the simulation exercise, students were assigned a family unit and a role within that family. They had to fully assume the identity and function as a person living in poverty. They were given a certain amount of money and belongings and had to figure out how to pay child care and rent, how to get bus fare to go to work and how to handle unexpected life events. The scenarios were all based on real families and their experiences. Nursing student Justin Williams said, “I found it to be a great learning experience that will benefit us all and allow us to provide more effective care. It was a unique experience that differed from almost everything we’ve done thus far in the program.” A debriefing session took place immediately after the simulation that allowed students to discuss their feelings and frustrations during this exercise.

The SLiP exercise advances School of Nursing objectives by teaching culturally proficient care, helping students understand the dynamic of social determinants of health and how it impacts community behavior, as well as enhancing interprofessional care and learning. “The SLiP activity was a great experience,” said nursing student James Edwards. “Having grown up in poverty and watching a single mother do everything she could to give me and my brothers the opportunities to not have to live like that, is a blessing. I understand how poverty can be perpetual for some and how it can be a very difficult trial to get out of, especially if the world and its events are not in your favor. I just wanted to say thank you to the faculty for opening my eyes even further!”
During the fall 2013 semester, the school will offer another simulation for traditional nursing students along with some medical students, Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics staff and a community representative. The school will also offer the simulation in September 2013 to a community-based organization. SON faculty will continue to evaluate how students, employees, and health care professionals integrate the SLiP experience into their clinicals as well as practice. Dr. Marion Donohoe summarized the experience by saying, “It was a dream come true for me... collaborative faculty offering innovative education for nursing students who will become our nursing leaders of the future.”