DEAN’S MESSAGE

DEAR COLLEAGUES, ALUMNI, AND FRIENDS:

What an exciting time to be a Volunteer nurse! In August, we welcomed new and returning students for a new year on Rocky Top. Our enrollment has reached an all-time high of 924 and continues to grow. A special thanks to you—all our alumni and supporters—for the role you play in the recruitment of our high-caliber students.

As nurses, advanced practice nurses, nurse leaders, and nurse researchers, we are constantly challenged to find innovative and effective ways to provide seamless, affordable, and safe quality care that will produce improved health outcomes.

In this edition of The Volunteer Nurse, we share some of the amazing work of our faculty and students who are advancing science and making a difference in the lives of people, families, and communities. You will learn that our PhD program is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year! We also graduated our 100th PhD graduate in August. It’s amazing to think about all the ways our 100 PhD graduates have made—and continue to make—significant contributions to nursing practice, theory, education, research, science, and administration.

You will read about Lisa Lindsey’s first-of-its-kind research in pediatric end-of-life care, which will directly inform a current national policy. You will also learn about what our faculty is doing to stem opioid addiction. This work is needed now more than ever before.

The College of Nursing remains committed to meeting health care challenges and addressing critical health needs by preparing nurses who have a broad understanding of the profession, public policy, leadership, and health care systems. The work of our faculty, students, and alumni is advancing science and making a difference in the lives of people, families, and communities.

Once again, I extend my gratitude to you for your loyal support of the College of Nursing through its impact in our region, state, and world.

Go VOLS!

Victoria Niederhauser DhPhN, RN, PCCNP-BC, FAAN

Dean and Professor

Twitter @VolnursingDean

THE VOLUNTEER
Nurse
FALL 2019

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OUR MISSION
We are catalysts for optimizing health through nurse-led care by integrating education, practice, research, and technology. We define health broadly and impact it by addressing policy and social issues through advocacy and leadership. Fueled by our commitment to communities, families, and individuals, we use partnerships to create innovative solutions that improve health for all.

OUR VISION
Leading Care, Creating Partnerships, Improving Health

Victoria Niederhauser
Dean; Professor
Robert A. Lavin
Executive Associate Dean for Academic Affairs; Professor
Tami Wyatt
Associate Dean for Research; Torshchear Professor
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CONTACT US
The Volunteer Nurse is published by the UT College of Nursing. Comments and letters can be sent to the editor at UT College of Nursing, Communications, 1200 Volunteer Blvd., Knoxville, TN 37996, volnurse@tennessee.edu.

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College Receives $7.5 Million, Largest Gift in Its History

The College of Nursing has received the largest gift in its history with a generous gift of $7.5 million from Sara Croley (BSN ’00) and her husband, Ross. The purpose of the gift is twofold, with $5.5 million supporting the college’s building renovation and expansion and $2 million establishing the Sara Rosenbaum Croley Endowed Dean’s Chair.

Renovated and Expanded Building Will Allow Needed Growth in Nursing Programs

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job growth rate for registered and advanced practice nurses will exceed that of most professions over the next 10 years, with 1.2 million registered nurse vacancies expected nationwide between 2014 and 2022. In Tennessee, a recent workforce projection study estimates a 40 percent rate for registered and advanced practice nurses will exceed that of any other occupation.

Dean Victoria Niederhauser announced the milestone gift at the college’s 11th annual NightInGala celebration on October 4. Pending approval from the Board of Trustees, the renovated space will be named the Croley Nursing Building in recognition of this generous gift.

The College of Nursing is continually turning away highly qualified applicants because of a lack of space and resources. The competitive nature of admission into nursing programs means our students are some of the best and brightest—the fall 2019 incoming BSN freshman class has an average GPA of 4.2, the highest of any college of nursing, and an average ACT score of 30.

To meet the continued workforce demands in our state and beyond, the college has reached a five-year plan to increase annual enrollment in its three programs by about 55 percent—going from 880 students in 2018 to 1,259 in 2021. Keeping pace with this growth, the college also plans to increase the number of faculty and staff members.

The college doesn’t have the physical space to meet its growth goals, however.

It currently operates from a 41-year-old 42,000-square-foot building, which houses 100 faculty and 33 staff members and delivers nursing courses to more than 920 undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty members are doubled or even tripled in offices, and students don’t have room to study or interact with classmates. The college is also bursting at the seams in its high-fidelity Health Innovation Technology and Simulation Laboratory in Temple Hall.

Three obstacles have opened the door to opportunity in the form of plans for a major renovation and addition. The resulting state-of-the-art building, approximately 100,000 square feet, will be a home for learning, advising, interdisciplinary collaboration, student activities, and research. It will also include a bigger and better simulation lab that incorporates the growing and changing needs of the populations served by nurses.

“This renovated and expanded building will provide students and faculty with an experiential learning environment that is inclusive and welcoming—that fosters collaboration and supports the growing academic and research mission of the College of Nursing,” said Niederhauser.

As an alumna, Sara Croley recognizes the need for more nurses.

“Having worked as a nurse for many years, I have cared for people during some of their most difficult moments. Nurses play such an important role in people’s lives. UT is turning away students with a 4.0 GPA—and, more importantly, the desire to be a nurse—for because of a lack of space. Ross and I are investing in the future of nursing in Tennessee. We hope this gift opens a door of opportunity for many more amazing nurses to enter the workforce.”

The $60 million anticipated cost for the project will be funded through a combination of donations and state funds, and the college has set a campaign goal to raise $10 million in private support. In addition to their donation, the Croleys have agreed to serve as campaign chairs.

The investment is one that is certain to pay off for Tennessee. About 90 percent of our Bachelor of Science in Nursing students work in Tennessee after graduation, with an estimated 45 to 60 percent remaining in the Knoxville area.

More information about the building and its fundraising campaign can be found at nursing.utk.edu/buildingcampaign.

This gift is an endorsement of our confidence in Dean Niederhauser and her vision for the College of Nursing. We know Tennessee needs more nurses, and we feel our gift will be a catalyst in fulfilling this vision.”

― Sara Croley  
UT College of Nursing 2018

Niederhauser Named to Sara Rosenbaum Croley Endowed Dean’s Chair

Niederhauser has been named to the newly created Sara Rosenbaum Croley Endowed Dean’s Chair. It is the first endowed dean’s chair for the college and the third for the university.

The endowed funds directed by the dean will be used to support student success, enhance learning experiences, and further the mission of the college.

“This gift is an endorsement of our confidence in Dean Niederhauser and her vision for the College of Nursing,” said Sara Croley. “We know Tennessee needs more nurses, and we feel our gift will be a catalyst in fulfilling this vision.”

Niederhauser is a board-certified pediatric nurse practitioner, a Robert Wood Johnson Executive Nurse Fellow, and a fellow of the Academy of Nursing. She has served as dean since 2011. The focus of her scholarly activities is in the area of child and adolescent health promotion and disease prevention, with an emphasis on immunizations and childhood obesity.

“Dean Niederhauser leads with integrity, vision, and a strong commitment to the mission of the college,” said Provost David Munderschedl. “She is admired by her faculty, staff, colleagues, and members of the community. This endowment recognizes the importance of our nursing college and the critical role of the dean. It further enables Dean Niederhauser to continue propelling the college forward.”

During Niederhauser’s tenure as dean, she has led the college to improve educational experiences for students, recruit exemplary faculty members, significantly increase research funding, and expand enrollment to meet an increasing nursing workforce demand. Enrollment in the College of Nursing continues to reach an all-time high year over year, and the MSN program’s US News & World Report ranking reached the top 25 for public institutions in 2019.

“This endowment funds the College of Nursing dean’s position in perpetuity, which will have a deep impact on the mission of the college,” said Niederhauser. “I am extremely grateful to Sara and Ross for the opportunity to be the first dean to hold the chair.”

The endowment will be enhanced through the Chancellor’s Faculty Challenge, which funds interest income immediately on all new gifts and five-year pledges in support of faculty.
Nurse Anesthesia Concentration
Elevated to DNP

The college recently received approval from the Council on Nursing Education for Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Educational Programs to admit an inaugural cohort of DNP students for the nurse anesthesia concentration in fall 2019. This is the last concentration in the College of Nursing to move from a Master of Science in Nursing to a Doctor of Nursing Practice.

The DNP curriculum will offer nurse anesthesia students expanded content in leadership, policy, evidence-based practice, and quality improvement. Additional content in physiology, pathophysiology, and coexisting disease is also being implemented.

Students will couple coursework with a scholarly project at the culmination of their educational program.

Nurse Anesthesia Program Director Julie Bonom gives credit to the team of faculty and administrators who joined her in developing the curriculum and completing the application. “It was definitely a team effort and involved a lot of hard work, but the expanded curriculum enables nurse anesthesia students to apply the highest level of scholarship to their anesthesia practice.”

College of Nursing Becomes First Standalone Nursing Program to Receive SSH Accreditation in Teaching and Research

The college’s Health Innovation Technology and Simulation Program has received full accreditation in research and teaching from the Society for Simulation in Healthcare.

“I feel honored,” said Suam Hefert, simulation director. “The society is a prestigious group of interprofessional health care providers dedicated to improving practice and care of patients. The training we are able to provide through this pedagogy allows us to train nurses in prevention of error and recover the mistakes which can potentially occur happen in the simulation lab—not on actual patients.”

There are currently 63 accredited simulation programs worldwide and only two in Tennessee. The College of Nursing is the first standalone nursing program to be accredited in both teaching and research.

The SSH Lab— an organized research unit with a multidisciplinary partnership between the College of Nursing and UT’s Tickle College of Engineering—provides simulated educational experiences for undergraduate- and graduate-level clinical courses. Its mission is to advance simulation and innovation by upholding standards of practice for simulation and advancing knowledge of innovation, technology, and simulation through research.

The college’s three simulation facilities replicate patient care environments. The high-fidelity HIT Lab has more than 7,600 square feet of simulated space, and the low-fidelity Learning Lab and Physical Assessment Lab facilitate skills learning. In these spaces, health care providers learn to apply cognitive, technical, and behavioral skills using an interdisciplinary approach.

“SSH accreditation in both research and teaching exemplifies the excellent learning environment we have created for our students and that we are an innovative test bed for the development of new health technology,” said Dean Victoria Niederhauser.

Hutson Induced as Fellow of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners

Professor Sadie Hutson was one of 65 nurse practitioners selected as a fellow of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners in June 2019. Hutson is a professor of practice in the College of Nursing Honors program from 2012 to 2017.

Her research expertise is in the area of chronic illness among rural and underserved populations. Hutson studies the advanced care planning needs of persons living with HIV/AIDS as well as the human consequences of being at high genetic risk of cancer.

Her work has been funded by the National Institutes of Health, the American Cancer Society, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other sponsors.

Hutson has a BSN from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and both an MSN and a PhD in nursing from the University of Pennsylvania. She is a board-certified women’s health nurse practitioner and has served as director of the intercollegiate cancer risk assessment program at the University of Kentucky.

She has published her work in several high-impact peer-reviewed journals and collaborates as an adjunct scientist to the Clinical Genetics Branch of the National Cancer Institute, where she completed pre- and postdoctoral fellowships. Hutson’s induction into the academy was based on her outreach in clinical cancer genetics to patients in eastern Kentucky as well as her recognition of her scientific trajectory as being uniquely clinically grounded, producing data that can be easily carried over into direct health care interventions.

“Dr. Hutson’s exemplary scholarship and clinical practice are recognized through this elite honor,” said Dean Verna Niederhauser. “She is a role model for nursing students, and her work has positively impacted her patients and the community at large.”

The AANP recognizes nurse practitioner leaders who have made outstanding contributions to health care through clinical practice, research, education, or policy.

Baker Center and College of Nursing to Host Diplomacy Lab

This fall, a group of UT students will learn more about health care systems in the Americas thanks to a Diplomacy Lab hosted through a collaboration between UT’s Howard H. Baker, Jr. Center for Public Policy and the College of Nursing.

The Diplomacy Lab program is a partnership between the US Department of State and a small group of American colleges and universities to conduct research in areas of interest for policymakers. Every semester the Department of State issues requests under specific topics and universities bid to host the labs.

“The Diplomacy Lab is a great opportunity for students to work directly with the Department of State,” said Katie Cahill, director of the Baker Center.

It is possible to learn about health policy in the classroom and through reading. However, to gain a deeper understanding, immersion in the policymaking process is necessary—“learning by doing,” Myers said. “This class also will offer students the opportunity to be part of a working interdisciplinary team.”

At the end of the semester, students will produce a 20-page report that will be shared with the Department of State.

Previous UT-hosted Diplomacy Labs have researched issues such as social media and democracy in China, fake news, and affordable energy in Kenya.

“When considering potential solutions for global issues, it is important to consider what others have already done, what works, and what doesn’t.” Through this research, students can help decision makers be better informed,” said Cahill.

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“When considering potential solutions for global issues, it is important to consider what others have already done, what works, and what doesn’t.” Through this research, students can help decision makers be better informed,” said Cahill.
Lindley to Be Inducted as Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing

Associate Professor Lisa Lindley has been named to the American Academy of Nursing’s 2019 class of new fellows.

Lindley teaches quantitative methodology and health care economics courses in the graduate nursing program. Her research focuses on health care systems and policy interventions that promote quality accessible hospice care for children and their families. She has expertise in advanced statistical techniques, data management, and claims-based data. She has received a professional fellowship, career award development, and research project grant from the National Institutes of Health and a dissertation award from the US Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and she is a fellow in Palliative Care Nursing.

She is also an active member of the Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association and Pediatric Palliative Care Special Interest Group. She received her doctoral degree in nursing from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master’s degree in business from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

A Beneficial TRIP

TRIP most describes the first year of the five-year project known as TRIP—officially Transforming RN Roles in Community-Based Integrated Primary Care through Student Academic Practice Partnership. The project, which is funded through a $2.6 million grant from the US Health Resources and Services Administration, is training BSN students to practice in community-based integrated primary care clinical settings beginning in the fall of 2018. Through one-on-one clinical practice with coaches and preceptors, interprofessional simulations, and education conferences with pharmacy and nutrition students, this leadership project, together with the collaborative curriculum redesign, is preparing future RNs for versatile roles in nursing and health care.

Lindsey Burke-Merton and Nan Gaylord are stepping into new leadership roles in the College of Nursing.

Burke-Merton is now assistant dean of finance, administration, and operations. Her 11 years at UT have included service in the Office of the Provost, the UT System Information Technology Department, and the Office of Social Work in addition to the College of Nursing. She has a bachelor’s degree in environmental economics and a master’s degree in health and human services.

Gaylord is now serving as associate dean for practice and global affairs, engaging with partners at the community, regional, national, and international level to identify faculty practice opportunities and clinical education experiences. Gaylord has a BSN from UT and an MSN from the University of Colorado. She also has an MA in philosophy and medical ethics and a PhD in educational psychology, both of which she earned at UT while developing the College of Nursing’s Primary Care Health Center. A board-certified pediatric nurse practitioner and pediatric mental health specialist, she has also served the college as coordinator of the Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Program. She is a coauthor of the widely used textbook Burns’ Pediatric Primary Care and the recipient of over $2.5 million in private and government funding as well as numerous awards for her teaching, research, and service.

Gaylord and Burke-Melton Take on New College Leadership Roles

Lindsey Burke-Merton and Nan Gaylord are stepping into new leadership roles in the College of Nursing.

A leadership program designed and implemented by Dean Victoria Niederhauser through the Haslam College of Business Graduate and Executive Education Program complements the clinical context of TRIP. The leadership program, known as TRIP_L, provides professional development for UT nursing faculty and practicing nurses and staff at CHS. The first TRIP_L cohort of 22 participants is completing its first year and the second cohort will complete the program in 2022.

The team that has given TRIP such a great start in its first year includes faculty members from the College of Nursing and the Department of Nutrition on the UT Knoxville campus and from the UT Health Science Center College of Pharmacy in Memphis, as well as staff members from Cherokee Health Systems and UT’s Haslam College of Business and evaluators from UT’s Social Work Office of Research and Public Service.

The DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Faculty was presented to Clinical Instructor Erin Morgan during the college’s spring commencement ceremony. Nominated by students and fellow faculty members, Morgan was chosen through a blind review process by a selection committee.

Morgan’s nominators said she is the epitome of a nurse and teacher who is both passionate about her work and compassionate toward students and patients, and this is why she deserves the award. Morgan leads by example and shows unconditional encouragement, patience, respect, genuineness, and kindness. Her knowledge and actions remind students why they chose to become a nurse.

A collaborative program of the DAISY Foundation and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Faculty is a national recognition program that honors teachers for their commitment and inspirational influence on future generations of nurses.
Acclades

Joel Anderson received funding from the Pat Summit Foundation for an online caregiver education program that will include personalized education related to physical activity, sleep, social engagement, and nutrition. The project includes collaborators in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling in UT’s College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences and the Ohio State University College of Nursing. Anderson was awarded a Travel Grant from the Gerontological Society of America at the organization’s annual meeting in Boston in November 2018. He also received an R01 grant from the National Institute on Aging for a project that will collect comprehensive data on the experiences of LGBTQ+ adults providing care for someone with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia. The research team for the project includes other UT faculty members as well as collaborators at the Ohio State University; the University of California, San Francisco; and Johns Hopkins University.

Lora Beebe received the Annie W. Goodrich Distinguished Licensure Award from the Institute of Living in Hartford, Connecticut.

Lynn Beeler was promoted to assistant professor.

Tami Bland was promoted to assistant professor.

Tracy Brewer received the Lauren Barnes Research Award. This award is given to a faculty member in the College of Nursing who is leading cutting-edge pediatric nursing research.

Mary Lynn Brown was selected for the Outstanding Classroom Faculty Award by the 2019 BSN graduating class.

Sharon Davis was promoted to assistant professor in clinical nursing sciences.

Terry Durbin has been named a 2019 ELAN Fellow by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. ELAN—Elevating Leaders in Academic Nursing—is a youth fellowship focused on enhancing executive leadership skills. She was also promoted to clinical associate professor.

Virginia Fowler received the Community Engagement Campus Award from UT’s Office of Research and Engagement for her work with the Precious Pins Project.

Nan Gaylord was recognized by the American Academy of Nursing as an Edge Runner in fall 2018 for her model “Interprofessional Practice at the Vine School Health Center: A School-Based Nurse-Managed Clinic.”

Pamela Hardesty was promoted to professor.

Susan Hébert completed the National League for Nursing Leadership Development for Simulation Educators Fellowship in 2018. She was also selected for the Sigma Theta Tau International Gamma Chi Chapter Graduate Scholarship.

Susan Hébert, Rebecca Koszalinski, Sheila Taylor, and Tami Wyatt received the Success in Multidisciplinary Research Award for the 2019 National Institutes of Health Training Institute for Dissemination and Implementation Research in Health.

Susan Hébert, Sheila Taylor, and Tami Wyatt received the Barudis Award for Technology Innovation in Health Care Education for their simulated electronic fetal monitoring application.

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Virginia Fowler received the Community Engagement Campus Award from UT’s Office of Research and Engagement for her work with the Precious Pins Project.

Nan Gaylord was recognized by the American Academy of Nursing as an Edge Runner in fall 2018 for her model “Interprofessional Practice at the Vine School Health Center: A School-Based Nurse-Managed Clinic.”

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As the nation needs nurses now more than ever, it also needs people to teach those nurses and to conduct nursing science research. The United States is suffering both a nursing shortage and a widespread nursing faculty shortage. The results of not filling this gap could be dire. “If nursing doesn’t have faculty to teach these students, we won’t have nurses to care for the aging population,” said Sandra Thomas, chair of the College of Nursing’s PhD program. “Furthermore, if we don’t have nurses to participate in research, we will lose their unique insights and advocacy for the patients.”

A recent survey conducted by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing finds that US nursing schools are experiencing a downturn in PhD enrollment, which has dropped 10 percent since 2014. UT’s College of Nursing is answering the call to stop the shortage. Celebrating its 30th year, the college’s PhD program has about 100 graduates who have gone on to teach the next generation of nurses and conduct research that has changed policies and improved patient care.

The program started in 1989 as a partnership between UT’s Knoxville and Memphis campuses. The National Institutes of Health had just launched its National Institute of Nursing Research division, opening the door to funding for nursing science and helping elevate the importance of nursing research. At UT, nursing doctoral students began collaborating with colleagues from other disciplines across campus such as engineering, social work, and psychology. Over the years, doctoral student research topics have ranged from the effects of human touch on preterm infants to the effects of fatigue on cancer patients to helping Iraqi refugees resettle in America. While they cover a wide array, they all fit within the five research thrusts that guide the college’s scholarship: improving child and...
family health, promoting global health, advancing care of aging populations, improving psychiatric and mental health, and creating innovative solutions.

These five scholarship areas make up the College of Nursing’s research model and align with the current needs of the nation. The research program teams up faculty and students to tackle some of the nation’s most pressing problems—for example, the opioid epidemic, which PhD graduate Julie Worley / 13] saw firsthand as a psychiatric nurse in private practice. She noticed the phenomenon called doctor shopping, where people with opioid addiction fabricate symptoms of an illness, go to the doctor, get a prescription for an opioid, then do so it all over again with another physician. They tax the health care system further by getting expensive tests such as MRIs or X-rays in the course of gaining access to painkillers.

Worley tapped into the expertise of the college’s faculty to publish game-changing research findings that thrust doctor shopping into the headlines, provided recommendations for prescribers on how to prevent or reduce it, and helped inform state databases to keep track of prescriptions.

“We are always adapting and growing and recruiting new faculty and students that bring new expertise and foci,” said Thomas.

The access to the nursing faculty’s expertise and experience in improving child health was one of the main reasons Kayla Jones decided to begin study in the PhD program this fall. Jones has a passion for pediatric oncology and immunotherapy, and she’s excited about following this career path to make a difference in the care of children battling cancer.

“When beginning my search for PhD programs, I wanted to attend somewhere that would cater to my specific research interests of pediatric oncology, had a top-rated program, and that the faculty were genuinely interested in my success as a PhD student,” said Jones. UT met the criteria, “I knew this was where I was meant to be.”

Jones will be in the BSN to PhD program, which fast-tracks students to their doctoral degrees, bypassing a master’s program, so they can begin research early in their career. Many nursing students with bachelor’s degrees go into practice before they have family responsibilities—so I want to cut back on working and focus more on doing their coursework. Thomas notes there are a few funding mechanisms such as the Johnson Foundation to double the number of PhD nurses.

This program goes straight from a bachelor’s to a doctoral program, which mirrors hard sciences programs. This new approach aims to attract those students who are passionate about research and train them as a scientist early on,” explained Thomas, noting that practice is not intended to prepare nurses for a research role.

Kayla was also attracted to UT because she was honored with funding from the J. Wallace and Katie Dean Graduate Fellowship. Finding funds is a major barrier for many students who must work while doing their coursework. Thomas notes there are a few funding mechanisms such as the Tennessee Fund for Graduate Excellence and some competitive grants within the graduate school, but says the college lacks adequate resources to support all students’ studies. She does whatever she can to find financial help for them.

“Most of our students are teaching in schools of nursing, they’re going to school, they have family responsibilities—so I want to lighten their load as much as I can so they can cut back on working and focus more on their research,” said Thomas.

Thomas has been with the program since its inception and is continually moved by the impact the PhD students have on the program and in the world as they go on to teach, conduct research, and share their findings.

“I love teaching the next generation of nurses and helping them change the world with their research and advocacy,” she said.

And UT nursing students will continue to do so at a time that’s critical for our nation. J

Celebrating Sandra Thomas

As the College of Nursing’s PhD program marks 30 years, so does Sandra Thomas.

Thomas was instrumental in designing and launching the program. She wrote the proposal mapping out the program’s philosophy and curriculum for evaluation by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission before it approved the program in 1988. Four years later, Thomas was named chair—a position she has held ever since.

Thomas came to UT in 1983 with a strong passion for research. She’s a nationally recognized researcher in the field of anger and violence and an expert on phenomenological approaches to teaching and research. She has published more than 150 articles, chapters, and books. Two of her books were honored as Book of the Year by the American Journal of Nursing. Thomas has also served as editor of Issues in Mental Health Nursing since 1997 and sits on several boards.

Most notable, however, may be Thomas’s unwavering and tireless dedication to her students and the PhD program. For three decades, she’s overseen curriculum, recruited and mentored students, and sought student funding. She has chaired 39 dissertations and served as a member of 75 other dissertation committees.

“Sandra’s commitment to our students and contribution to the college are truly invaluable,” said Dean Victoria Niederhaus. “Because of her, so many students have gone on to conduct life-changing research and work that are making a difference in communities nationwide. Not to mention the difference she’s made in our students’ lives by helping them achieve their career goals.”

“I was excited at the beginning,” Thomas said. “And I still am. It’s a great privilege to work with these students and foster and mentor them in research. It gives me great joy.”

In fact, it gives her so much joy that despite celebrating 36 years at the university, Thomas has no plans to retire.

“I don’t see why someone has to retire just because they hit a certain chronological age,” she said. “There’s nothing I would like better than teaching and working with bright students and interesting colleagues.”

As Thomas puts it, she’s “still having fun.” J
Knocking Down Barriers to Fight the Opioid Crisis

By Whitney Heins

B ack in 2011 on a crisp November afternoon, Sharon Davis was sitting in a health seminar at UT’s downtown conference center with her undergraduate students. They were learning about substance abuse during a presentation by the interim professor of nursing remembered. What felt wrong to Davis, then about to embark on her doctoral work, was that these women were being vilified. “I didn’t know anything about the science of addiction, but I didn’t like how these women were being talked about and treated,” she said. “So I decided then and there that my work moving forward would be related to substance abuse.”

Fast-forward eight years and Davis, along with College of Nursing colleagues and students, is waging a war on the growing opioid crisis in Tennessee. Their work is needed now more than ever.

The epidemic has been ravaging the state for decades and is only getting worse. Between 1992 and 2016, prescription medication overdose deaths in Tennessee increased 577 percent. From 342 to 1,631. In 2017, there were 1,269 overdose deaths involving opioids in the state—a rate of 19.3 deaths per 100,000 persons, considerably higher than the national rate of 14.6 deaths per 100,000 persons.

East Tennessee, part of rural Appalachia, is hit particularly hard because of its history of poor economic opportunities, inadequate transportation, and limited treatment services. That’s why Davis is leading a consortium to tackle some of these barriers and help stem the crisis. Armed with a one-year planning grant from the US Health Resources and Services Administration’s Rural Communities Opioid Response Program, or RCORP, Davis gathered community members ranging from corrections officers to doctors in 10 East Tennessee counties to assess the needs in their areas and develop strategies to address them. The RCORP East Tennessee Consortium started work last September by diving into data, conducting surveys, and hosting town hall meetings to see what areas need attention.

The consortium is looking at solutions such as using telehealth to improve care for babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome, or NAS. An RCORP implementation grant for $1 million over three years will allow the team to continue their work with the consortium and to develop and implement programs addressing prevention, treatment, and recovery. These programs will be delivered to youth, health care providers, and community groups.

Sharon Davis, clinical assistant professor, is also working to topple barriers by changing policy and assessing interventions to improve care for babies with neonatal abstinence syndrome, or NAS. One of her research projects is studying the effectiveness of cuddling and music therapy with babies going through withdrawal.

“Even with pharmacotherapy, sometimes these babies can be very upset and irritable and cry excessively. Many have tremors and issues with eating and sleeping. Our study is looking at the effectiveness of these nonpharmaceutical interventions on calming infants and improving these symptoms,” Tourville explained.

Tourville and her team are gathering dozens of babies’ heart and respiratory rates and Finnegan scores—which measure signs of upset and irritable and cry excessively. Many have tremors and issues with eating and sleeping. Our study is looking at the effectiveness of these nonpharmaceutical interventions on calming infants and improving these symptoms.”

Jennifer Shaefer, a 2019 PhD graduate, is also determined to help improve the lives of babies with NAS. Shaefer spent 18 years treating these babies in a neonatal ICU and wondering what happened to them after they left the hospital. Her dissertation sheds some light. Shaefer conducted a longitudinal data analysis and found that babies with NAS tend to have language delay until age five.

The ultimate goal for Shaefer, as well as Davis and Tourville, is to help save lives and put an end to the pain that’s devastating so many in our region.

“Young people are losing parents. Children are losing parents,” said Davis. “This is an epidemic that is all-inclusive.”

The nurses say if they help even one person, that’s making a big difference.

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Improving End-of-Life Care for Children

By Whitney Heins

Before Lisa Lindley, associate professor of nursing, was a researcher or a hospice nurse, she worked in human resources in private industry, where she helped employees’ families navigate insurance. It was there she was introduced to many of the unknown hardships that the parents of ill children face.

“I remember several children had brain cancer and the parents would max out their plans after the first month of treatment and be frozen off their insurance,” recalled Lindley. “At the same time, I knew these insurance companies were signing multimillion-dollar contracts with our company.”

This injustice shone a light on the need for these families to have the support of all the voices they could get and lit a fire inside Lindley to be one of those voices.

“I felt compelled to help in any way I could,” she said.

Lindley became a hospice nurse and later a child health services and policy researcher. For almost a decade, she has researched how children and their families can get access to quality end-of-life care. Now she is at the helm of a first-of-its-kind study that will seek to understand if a new approach can improve the quality of life for children with terminal diseases. Called the Pediatric Concurrent Care Research Project, the study launched last year with a $1.5 million grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research—part of the National Institutes of Health—and will run until May 2022.

The need for the research became especially significant with the signing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known as the ACA, in 2010. The law changed the options parents have when faced with the horrific choice of how terminally ill children will spend the end of their lives. Before the law, when a pediatric patient was given less than six months to live, parents had two choices: continue treatment, or stop treatment and enter hospice care. With the ACA, health providers are now federally mandated to offer concurrent care—continuing treatment while in hospice—to Medicaid and CHIP (Children’s Health Insurance Program) patients under 21, giving parents another option.

“We want to know whether or not concurrent care is more effective than standard hospice care when it comes to overall quality of life of the pediatric patients and their families, as well as symptom management in end-of-life stages of their disease,” explained Lindley.

Lindley will collaborate with a postdoctoral fellow and researchers from four other institutions across the nation to conceptualize, interpret, and disseminate the results. The project has a website—pedeolcare.utk.edu—and social media feeds to communicate updates and findings.

“We want to be able to provide evidence to clinicians and families to help them make some choices as to what the best care for their patients and children is,” said Lindley. “We also hope this study has a policy impact. If our research finds something not quite working well, we can provide evidence to policymakers and advocates so the laws can be modified or changed to make them more effective.”

Lindley’s desire to be a voice for terminally ill children and their families remains strong as she works to provide guidance to clinicians, policymakers, and the more than 30,000 US families annually who face the heartbreaking decision of how their child will spend their last remaining days.

“This project is a way for me to bring my areas of interests and experience together to help those families and children get the quality of care they need,” shared Lindley. “I want to make it better for them.”

She is analyzing data from more than 20,000 patients 21 years old and under who died in the US with a terminal illness between 2011 and 2013. It took a full year to compile the data from Medicaid, because a detailed and extensive data management plan was needed to keep the sensitive information secure. Working with the Advanced Computing Facility, a division of the UT–Oak Ridge National Laboratory Joint Institute for Computational Sciences, Lindley has created a secure working environment and is now ready to clean and crunch the data. Outcomes she will examine include: how long a child stayed in hospice, how many times they sought ER care, and how symptom management was handled.

“The benefit of concurrent care is that it doesn’t take away the hope,” explained Lindley. “It provides parents with the hope that a different approach is out there that may help their children.”

But the effectiveness of concurrent care has never been scientifically evaluated. That’s where Lindley’s study comes in.
Why Do More Nurses Work for Covenant Health?

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Erin Blaydes, RN
Parkwest Medical Center

Gabrielle Thress
Artie Ruth Reilly Scholarship Recipient
Gabrielle Thress is a full-time undergraduate nursing student with dreams of attending graduate school to become either a family or pediatric nurse practitioner. Thress has a deep desire to learn and understand what she is taught, which has made it difficult for her to imagine stopping at an undergraduate degree. She received the Artie Ruth Reilly scholarship, which will aid in helping her reach her goals.

“I know this is my life’s calling: to serve others as a medical professional. This scholarship is instrumental in allowing me to pursue this. I truly cannot relate the depth of my gratitude. This has actively enabled me to go achieve the dreams I never thought were possible.”

Collin Ashmore
NightinGala Scholarship Recipient
Collin Ashmore joined the accelerated BSN program in summer of 2019. He was previously a Spanish teacher. Ashmore’s goal is to one day be a critical care or trauma nurse.

“I want to be responsible for people’s lives, and, more importantly, I want to have knowledge to make those lives better in their most challenging moments. The NightinGala Scholarship reminds me that I can achieve my dream, helps me to achieve that dream, and encourages me to live up to my dream.”

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Notes of Gratitude
Students express thanks for the generosity of their scholarship donors.

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Mikenna Orzech made the decision to leave her home state of California to study nursing at UT. “Choosing to go to the University of Tennessee was the biggest decision I have had to make in my life. While I do not regret this choice, it has made for a stressful time during nursing school,” she said. Orzech is a full-time undergraduate student, working two jobs to help pay for school and additional living expenses.

“With nursing school getting increasingly difficult, I was forced to make the choice of giving up shifts at work or to take out more student loans so I could dedicate more time to schoolwork. This scholarship truly changes my life by enabling me to study more without having to stress about using savings for food or school supplies. This is more than just money. It is a weight being lifted off of my shoulders, more nights studying, and encouragement to push forward. Thank you for fueling my dreams!”

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The 2019 recipient of the Volunteers Nursing Champion award is Poppy Buchanan. This award recognizes an individual who is committed to improving health care and has made significant contributions to the nursing profession and an impact on the community. Buchanan received her BSN from Vanderbilt University in 1961. She began her nursing career working as a public health nurse providing home visits in Nashville, where she also taught public health nursing at Vanderbilt. For 35 years she worked as a summer camp nurse in rural Alabama. This was where she realized that nurses were best at influencing the health of a population and individuals. It was through this experience that she became interested in nurses who might own and operate their own clinics, particularly in rural areas far from major health care facilities.

In 1999 Buchanan visited Kenya and became involved with Kenyan nurses who own and operate private clinics, which provide about 45 percent of the country’s health care. She wanted to assist nurses in that work and founded a nonprofit organization, Burning Bush Inc., supported by her successful real estate investment company. She contributed funds to build a permanent health center, owned by a Kenyan nurse, that serves a population of 20,000 people in rural central Kenya. Together with her husband, she established a microloans program that has provided for sustainable community development. Burning Bush also financed the development of the WAKA School of Nursing in Kenya, which is graduating its first class in May 2020. The UT College of Nursing is in the process of connecting with WAKA for global education exchange.

The Buchanans’ relationship with the college began when Poppy met a UT nursing student at a conference and learned of the good work being done by the college’s Center for Nursing Practice. Buchanan and her husband, who has established a microlending program that has provided for sustainable community development, have a population of 20,000 people in rural central Kenya. Together with her husband, she established a microloans program that has provided for sustainable community development. Burning Bush also financed the development of the WAKA School of Nursing in Kenya, which is graduating its first class in May 2020. The UT College of Nursing is in the process of connecting with WAKA for global education exchange.

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Don’t miss the eleventh annual NightinGala, held on Friday, October 4 at Cherokee Country Club. Visit UTMedicalCenter.org/jobs to learn more about joining our team.
Many wonder how Robin Smith, a 1985 College of Nursing graduate, ended up in the Tennessee House of Representatives. Those wondering sometimes include Smith herself. But knowing that Smith is a passionate person who always follows her heart, it’s not so curious.

Growing up, Smith always had books on politics in her room. Her favorite colors were red, white, and blue, and her first dog’s name was Nixon. She always loved politics but never thought about it as a profession.

Instead, she wanted to work in health care. That’s because as a girl she suffered from severe asthma—so severe, she had to get allergy shots weekly. And while most kids would shudder at the thought, Smith enjoyed going to get them. Odd. But not odd when you consider why.

“I had this eccentric nurse, Nurse Kiki, who made it fun,” said Smith. “And seeing her, this nurse, who took care of us and tried to make us better with our limitations, made me want to do something in health care.”

Smith started asking for microscope and stethoscope kits at Christmas, and after high school she set off to study nursing. Upon her graduation from UT, Smith worked in the cardiac medicine and transplant program at the University of Alabama, Birmingham, Hospital. She had moved to Chattanooga for a grant-supported job at Erlanger Hospital when funding fell through.

“And that’s when life happened,” said Smith. She decided to launch her own health care sales and marketing consultancy, volunteering in local campaigns on the side to quench her thirst for politics. Volunteer work became formal work, and in 2007 she was elected chair of the state Republican Party, running close to 30 campaigns in one cycle. During that time, her own district’s candidate was forced to drop out and suggested that she run.

Smith followed her heart and was elected to represent the 26th District in 2018.

“It was never really planned. I never set out to have a career in politics,” said Smith. “But I had a natural interest and am crazy enough to say yes to things. But what I learned in the College of Nursing is that you have to be prepared for the circumstances that come before you.”

As a state legislator, Smith combines her passion and experience in health care and politics in her role as chair of the Health and Life Insurance Subcommittee. She makes use of her experience and expertise to tackle issues that affect citizens everywhere in state. For example, she’s working to increase access to telemedicine—especially useful for those in rural areas. She’s trying to end surprise billing so people aren’t hit unexpectedly with medical costs. She’s also trying to ensure that drug rebates go back to patients instead of their insurance companies.

“We’re letting health care be hijacked by the health insurance network. It’s not about access to health care. It’s about access to health insurance coverage, and that needs to change,” she said.

Smith’s heart has always led her to help people, whether she’s in a hospital room or in the General Assembly. Only time will tell where her heart will lead her next.

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about working with individuals with disabilities. Too many medical schools worked with the college to give the students an opportunity to learn. For several reasons. One, Doc Claussen asked me. In looking at what's happening in our world today. I just finished his latest book, Turmoil in the Middle East. It helps to get a better understanding to what we are dealing with the nursing profession.

MY GREATEST WISH FOR THE COLLEGE: To get their new building to be able to handle the number of students they presently have and be prepared for the growth in their enrollment. This building would be able to handle the number of students they presently have and be prepared for the growth in their enrollment. The college does an outstanding job in training quality nurses. Dean Niederhauser and her faculty do an outstanding job. I am continually more impressed by the training they are giving our future nurses. We work with the college to give the students an opportunity to learn about working with individuals with disabilities. Too many medical students do not have that opportunity. Also I have served on the Health and General Welfare Committee since I've been in the Senate. I've come to a better understanding of the critical role that nurses play in health care, more about their qualifications, and more about the shortage. And as a graduate of UT Knoxville, I like to find ways to give back to my alma mater. Nursing pursing a master’s and doctoral degree at the same time. Most students in the BSN-PhD program bypass a master’s because they know they want to do research, but Bayless felt that eliminating the clinical component would lessen the quality of her research.

“I want to understand the patients’ perspectives and feel connected to clinical nurses. Plus I need to hold a baby at least once a month,” laughed Bayless, who is studying to be a pediatric nurse practitioner. She’s conducting her clinical work at Vino School Health Center with Professor of Nursing Nan Gaylord, serving students with limited access to health care. Her dissertation work picks up where her bachelor’s honor work left off—helping children who are suffering from asthma. As an undergraduate, Bayless worked with Professor of Nursing Tami Wyatt on tablet-based educational materials for pediatric children.

“I remember the feelings of terminology and learning how to visualize my anatomical lung so that I could breathe easier,” she said. Most kids are diagnosed after the age of five, when they can be educated in school about their disease. However, for children younger than five and their families, there are few educational resources to help them learn about the disease and good behavioral habits. Her undergraduate research worked to fill that gap.

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