A New Breed of Nurse is Being Born

Wendy Gaus had been a video producer and director for 20 years.

Barbara Nuss was a mother of five college students who returned to the work force after years of community service.

Carla Glasbrener was a non-profit executive and grant-writer for community agencies.

Today, these three women are nurses of a different stripe. They are part of the first group of 13, ages 25-61, who have paved the way for a new kind of master’s degree from SSU aimed at alleviating the nursing shortage throughout the region.

A majority of them entered this second career as a result of layoffs or changes in family situations. Until now, it would have been almost impossible for them to imagine nursing as a mid-life career opportunity.

But with the development nationwide of the Direct Entry Master’s of Nursing program, students with previous non-nursing backgrounds and a bachelor’s degree can consider it. This master’s program is conducted primarily online in 18 months, considerably shorter than traditional nursing programs. It leverages the life-skills that students already possess from their previous experiences in the workplace, and that has made a difference to the hospitals that have eventually employed them.

The DEMSN program is SSU’s Nursing Department’s attempt at increasing both the volume and the quality of nursing graduates. “The United States is in the midst of a nursing shortage that is expected to intensify as baby boomers age and the need for health care grows,” says Melissa Vandeveer, DEMSN director.

Following graduation and the successful completion of a certification exam, DEMSN graduates assume the newly designated certification of Clinical Nurse Leader. It is the first new role designation in nursing since the family nurse practitioner emerged in the 1970s.

The DEMSN’s accelerated program and individualized training is possible because of a unique partnership with three local hospitals - Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa, Kaiser Permanente Medical Center of Santa Rosa and Queen of the Valley Hospital in Napa. All were seriously interested in being involved in a pioneering a new national model that would impact the quality of nursing in their communities.

“It is allowing us to raise the bar for clinical excellence and nursing professionalism in the area,” says Carol Weis of Sutter. “We need someone who has the skills to manage patient care issues at the system level who isn’t removed from the bedside.”

Jessica Eads, Director of the Nursing Center of Excellence at Queen of the Valley, is optimistic about the model noting that the DEMSN students “bring greater maturity and commitment to the study of the nursing as compared to the more traditionally-trained student. They all feel empowered to participate at a higher level than most of the graduates who start work here.”

Each of the graduates was paired with an experienced nurse who functions as a mentor. They provided direct care to patients almost from day one to learn the world of the staff nurse. But the long-term goal is to focus on the bigger picture. This nurse will champion innovations that improve patient outcomes, ensure quality care and reduce health care costs as well as integrate emerging science into practice.

Gaus’ need to quickly re-enter the labor force was key in selecting this program. “As the sole breadwinner, and also an older student, it was necessary for me to become employable relatively fast.”

Prior to nursing school, Carla Glasbrener
Patricia Nourot, friend, mentor, and colleague to many within the School of Education, unexpectedly passed away in August 2006. Nourot was actively involved with the School of Education from 1988 to 2004. She began teaching in the early childhood program in the mid 1980s and became an Assistant Professor in the School of Education in 1988. She assumed leadership as Coordinator of the Early Childhood credential and MA programs in 1990 and continued in that role until her retirement in 2004. She was a friend and role model to her students and a scholar of high stature in the community, state, and nation. Throughout her career she worked closely with school districts in Sonoma, Napa, and Solano Counties toward the goal of high quality education for preschool, primary, and elementary age children. Donations may be made to the Patricia Nourot Early Childhood MA Scholarship Fund.

Bruce Walker, Sonoma State University’s Chief Architect Bruce Walker died at the age of 47 due to a heart attack on November 6, 2005 at his home in Healdsburg. Walker was responsible for overseeing millions of dollars in construction projects from blueprints to operational buildings. Walker was involved in every step of the construction process for many buildings on campus. He volunteered and shared his knowledge at St. John’s Catholic School where he was the lead on two $1 million expansion projects, which included a new gymnasium dedicated in his name. In 1998, Walker joined Sonoma State and coordinated the completion of the Jean and Charles Schulz Information Center. Walker helped in the construction of the new recreation center, remodeling of Salazar and Darwin halls, and launching of the Green Music Center.

Rand Link, former vice president for student affairs, passed away on October 5, 2006, after battling cancer. Link was a recipient of the “Leadership Excellence Award” at the 2005 CSU Alcohol Advisory Councils on April 22, 2005. He began his career at Sonoma State in the student career center but quickly became actively involved in student affairs. Link was the founder of the Student Advocates for Education program. He was involved in all aspects of student affairs and worked particularly with 18 and 19 year old students living in the residential community. He came to Sonoma State in 1970 from the greater Los Angeles area. Link received his master’s degree from Ohio State University and his doctorate from UC Berkeley. His wife Ileene, children Mark and Elizabeth, father Irving Link and sister Gale Wachs, survive him.

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Classes were reassigned around campus and some were held at the Santa Rosa Junior College.

Built in 1967 at the height of the push to get more students into science, Darwin Hall became “a prisoner of its time,” says senior engineer Keith Marchando. “Today we have a building that can change with the demands of the future.”

“We are a building code ahead of ourselves in energy efficiency,” notes Marchando, who says the new building now requires 40% of the energy it once needed for daily operations.

For more on the renovation and the opening day celebration, visit www.sonoma.edu/darwinhall.

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Carla Glasbrener (left) works at Sutter Health under the guidance of mentor Jenny Drew

earned a Bachelor’s in Human Biology from Stanford and a Master’s in Public Health from Boston University.

For her, the transition to the frontlines of health care was enhanced by the clinical and leadership skills further developed in the DEMSN program. She now works at Sutter as an ICU nurse.

Barbara Nuss wanted “something to do in my later ‘baby bloomer’ years that would allow me to be of service, to possibly travel, and have flexibility with my other life choices.” She now works part time at Queen of the Valley Hospital and teaches anatomy at Santa Rosa Junior College.

Karin Reese, Director of Nursing Excellence at Kaiser Permanente Santa Rosa, says the CNL will hopefully help with nursing retention as well as patient satisfaction. “The CNL will be better equipped to solve the issues that constantly frustrate nurses. Patient care will be better because we will be able to track nursing-related problems and address them at higher levels,” she says.

Vandeveer noted that the first DEMSN students from SSU passed their State Nursing Boards with flying colors with 100%, when the national average hovers around the 85% mark.