



A Focus on Self-Care, Resilience and Wellness Puts Students First

By Liza N. Burby

Burnout, an established occupational hazard for nurses who are expected to thrive under pressure, is a phenomenon brought to the forefront by the COVID-19 pandemic that's contributed to a significant shortage in nursing staff and educators. That's why the College of Nursing and Public Health (CNPH) is equipping the next generation of nurses with the skills and competencies in the areas of self-care, resilience and wellness—values long supported by the American Nurses Association (ANA) Code of Ethics.

"We've always understood the value of and the need for self-care for nurses," said Professor Marilyn Klainberg '63, MS '77, EdD. "Even before the impact of the pandemic, it had been documented that nurses experience high rates of stress, which can lead to depression, anxiety and burnout."

That's why Dr. Klainberg and her colleague, Clinical Associate Professor Deborah Ambrosio-Mawhirter '81, MS '95, EdD, have been strong proponents of teaching nursing students the importance of taking care of themselves so that they can take care of others. Since September 2022, they've made self-care and resilience a focus of the College's curriculum.

The College is one of only 10 schools in the United States—and the only one in New York state—selected by

the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) in February 2023 for an important pilot training initiative designed to improve self-care and resilience among future nurses.

Duty to Self and Others

Dr. Ambrosio-Mawhirter said they started with Provision 5 of the ANA Code of Ethics. "It states that a nurse owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to promote health and safety, preserve wholeness of character and integrity, maintain competence, and continue personal and professional growth," she said. "That was the starting point and our foundation to integrating the concepts of self-care in the curriculum."

In CNPH's N387 Introduction to Professionalism course for sophomores, five modules were developed; students learn how to prevent burnout. The self-care modules' content includes importance of self-care in nutrition, sleep, meditation, exercise and socialization. In addition, the senior students in the N483 Transitions to Professional Practice develop an individualized resilience plan prior to graduation. Dr. Ambrosio-Mawhirter pointed out that both classes emphasize that it's not a stigma to take care of one's mental health, and they promote on-campus student services.

“Students have a lot of anxiety, so we try to help them through that. By teaching them different modalities for relaxation, for maintaining health and seeking help when needed, we find that they are very receptive to self-care practice.”

—Dr. Ambrosio-Mawhirter

“Students have a lot of anxiety, so we try to help them through that. By teaching them different modalities for relaxation, for maintaining health and seeking help when needed, we find that they are very receptive to self-care practice,” she said.

The two colleagues also put together a CNPH faculty committee with the goal that self-care can be ingrained in the culture of nursing from the beginning. They’ve asked them to engage students in “wellness breaks” during classes and, in some classes, students volunteer as wellness monitors.

“Every hour that person decides what type of small breaks that the class is going to have. It can be a five-minute meditation, breathing exercise or even a game like Simon Says,” Dr. Ambrosio-Mawhirter said.

Expansion Plans

Dr. Klainberg said that CNPH Dean Deborah Hunt, PhD ’12, has been very supportive of their efforts. They already have 15 faculty members who are promoting this concept in their classrooms. While this practice is being used with the undergraduate program, eventually they hope to move to the graduate level—and to expand it throughout Adelphi University. In fact, Dr. Klainberg said they recently presented the Faculty Senate Executive Committee with the concept of using one- to five-minute wellness breaks during classes for breathing exercises, movement or water breaks for all students.

All of these projects are among the goals established in 2021 when the CNPH was selected by the AACN as the only New York institution to participate in a national initiative. Called “A

Competency-Based Approach to Leadership Development and Resilience for Student Nurses,” the initiative came with a Faculty Tool Kit, including learning resources, tools and strategies.

Adelphi’s program leaders, Drs. Klainberg and Ambrosio-Mawhirter—who nominated the University for this opportunity—designated a \$10,000 grant from Johnson & Johnson to produce videos about meditation, mindfulness and self-care. Rev. Janet Hand, a former faculty member, talked about self-care and its importance in “Unity Consciousness and Holistic Self-Care Practice.” Jean Watson, PhD, presented her care theory in “Caring Science.” A third video, “Mindful Self and Patient Care and Presence,” was presented by Sue Penque, MS ’80, PhD. The videos are also being shared with the College’s clinical partners.

The grant was also used for CNPH’s on-campus Nurses Week celebration, which ranged from yoga classes, healthy food and chair massages for students to Dr. Watson’s virtual lecture on “Caring Science Universals of Human Caring—Foundation of Nursing Discipline.”

Coming soon are lavender patches for aromatherapy breaks that will also be available in Adelphi’s Mindfulness Center. Dr. Klainberg said that students have been responding well to these efforts. “For many of them, they really are not into self-care. They feel very stressed. So the awareness that this is an important component to them being successful in their career and in their lives is making a big difference for them.”

Dr. Pajarillo Forms Nurse Educators Organization

CNPH Professor Edmund J.Y. Pajarillo, PhD, last year founded the National Consortium of Academic Nurse Educators (NC-ANE), which now has 28 members from across the United States.

Dr. Pajarillo, NC-ANE’s inaugural president, said, “We strongly believe that the nursing crisis is rooted in the long-standing shortage of academic nurse educators who are not attracted

to come [to] or stay in academia because of poor work-life balance.”

To correct that problem, he said, members have conducted research on the topic, written articles for publications, scheduled a presentation at the Western Institute of Nursing conference, Salt Lake City, Utah, in April and applied to present at other conferences.

