

Health on the Horizon

Nurses' education includes alternative medicine.

By Alexandra Arch

Leaving her family and community wasn't an option for Tamara Stambaugh, so for many years she couldn't take the next step in her career. Stambaugh had worked as a registered nurse for 20 years, and had long dreamed of becoming a nurse practitioner. When a local, innovative program providing a graduate-level nursing education became available, Stambaugh jumped at the opportunity. She got more than she initially bargained for.

Stambaugh was one of the seven students who graduated in June 2004 from one of the John and Robin Jaqua graduate nursing programs. In 2001, the Jaquas pledged \$170,000 over a three-year span to bring higher nursing education to Lane County. Facilitated through Oregon Health Sciences University, the program offered three local graduate programs as well as a baccalaureate degree.

But the Jaquas' donation carried an interesting stipulation: Incorporate a holistic emphasis into the program. In addition to the standard curriculum, they hoped to promote various alternative medical disciplines, defined as healing practices not readily available in most hospitals such as acupuncture, massage, yoga and therapeutic touch. Often referred to as a holistic approach, these practices focus on the entire person, not just a

physical ailment or body part.

With a Ph.D. in Jungian psychology, Robin Jaqua said alternative healing addresses both the mind and body of a patient, which is necessary for the healing process to occur. "The psyche and the body cannot be separated," she said. "We have got to treat the whole or complete individual, not just the physical. Nurses are in a position to bring their own holism to the holism of the patient."

The nursing students learned about alternative medicine through clinical experience, weekend seminars and the Acorn Lecture Series, which focused on an integrative approach to healthcare. The first few lectures drew as few as 30 people, but about 300 by the end of the series.

"It is important being able to ask the questions of a patient – what else is going on in your life?" said Monica Dostal, an OHSU nursing instructor for the Lane County program and family nurse practitioner. "Articulation and communication skills as well as intuition can play a big role."

Holistic care wasn't presented in Stambaugh's undergraduate nursing curriculum several decades ago. In fact, she wasn't aware of many alternative medical disciplines before the Jaqua program, but the information resonated with her. "I loved feel-

ing inspired and full of hope about the medical profession," she said. "The potential to heal with the most simplistic tools amazed me."

for Stambaugh. Medical insurance doesn't cover many alternative treatments, and alternative medicines such as herbs haven't been researched in clinical studies. "Alternative

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— Robin Jaqua



Catherine Salvesson and Robin Jaqua

The training has also changed the way Stambaugh works as a nurse practitioner. For a school project she researched the links between evening primrose oil and eczema, an inflammation of the skin which causes itchiness or scaling. Her study showed the oil worked. Stambaugh treated her daughter, who suffered from eczema, with oral doses of evening primrose oil, and the inflammation cleared up. These "miraculous results" impressed even her boss who started prescribing evening primrose oil to patients.

Despite some positive results, alternative medicine raises more questions than answers

healing is more than just pills," Stambaugh said. "It's a lifestyle." But she hopes to incorporate some of what she learned into her traditional patient care.

Meanwhile, the Jaqua nursing program's future in Lane County is up in the air. Catherine Salvesson, RN, Ph.D. and OHSU's Lane County Program Administrator continues to provide graduate-level nursing education throughout the state as well as giving students an experience in integrated medicine. She said future local programs will likely take another form. "The program in Eugene was a huge piece of that journey," Salvesson said.

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