

Nursing students look at whole health

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Ansily Tulensru was hospitalized in May 2016, and after weeks of recovery, struggled to get back on her feet and deal basic needs, let alone long-term goals.

The Monmouth resident went to the Polk County Resource Center seeking assistance from the Salvation Army, and was offered something she wasn't expecting — help with her health care.

The center, Capitol Dental, Northwest Human Services, Polk County Family & Community Outreach, Polk County Health Department Salem Health West Valley Hospital and Willamette Valley Community Health are working in a partnership with Oregon Health & Science University's School of Nursing at Western Oregon University. The program has nursing students working with service agencies to help people with needs, including health insurance and health care.

Tulensru, 33, said the program has been a life-changer for her.

"When they first met me, I was in need of health insurance," she said.

She had been told she qualified for the Oregon Health Plan, but struggled to get her coverage. The program placed her with a student to help her work through the insurance "jungle of chaos" and then onto a plan to manage her health.

"They help you explore resources and options and help you find things that didn't know where there," she said.

The program is called "Interprofessional Care Assess Network" or I-CAN, and partnerships are paid for through a two-year grant from Willamette Valley Community Health, the local coordinated care organization.



Patti Warkentin, left, with the new group of students from Oregon Health & Science University School of Nursing, Monmouth Campus during their first week of helping clients at the Polk County Resource Center in Dallas.

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OHSU has similar I-CAN programs in Portland, Ashland and Medford and Klamath Falls, with one in development in La Grande. Polk's program is the first to place nursing students with service agencies outside the medical or dental fields.

Nursing students meet with clients in a peer counseling format to help them address other health needs aside from insurance and immediate care. That includes long-term planning and edu-

cation so clients can learn to manage their own health.

If that sounds like its outside traditional definition of "nurse," it's meant to be.

"By working one-on-one with patients, these students can assist in developing personal health objectives, provide support and education, and guide individuals toward securing ongoing health care with the goal of creating self-sufficiency in addressing health and wellness issues and needs," said

Angie Doherty, the associate dean of the Monmouth campus OHSU school of nursing.

She said the program helps nursing students understand what may be behind some patients' health struggles.

That was the case for Keri Joyce, a nursing student who participated in the program last year.

Joyce said she helped a lot of clients with applying for the Oregon Health Plan and

had four ongoing clients with more complex issues. Those cases taught her valuable lessons about how to approach caring for patients.

"As a nurse you go in to a hospital, and sometimes you work with a patient for a day and they are gone, and you don't understand why so many people are coming into hospitals, why so many are having trouble navigating the health care system and landing themselves in the

emergency room," she said. The I-CAN program has nursing students going to a client's home, finding out what other issues patients must address outside of health care.

"Whatever the barrier might be, you just learn a lot about the community you are living in and working in, and the clientele that you see, regardless of where you work as a nurse or as a nursing student," she said.

Patti Warkentin, an instructor with the OHSU School of Nursing at WOU, said the program and others like it could be a model for the future of health.

She said doctors and nurses will always be needed to treat the sick and wounded.

"But It doesn't need to be the place where such a large percentage of our health care dollars are spent," she said.

More resources could be directed toward prevention education, with nurses helping people learn about their health and how to take control of it.

Doherty said the program will provide data and progress reports to Willamette Valley Community Health to see how the program is improving outcomes for patients.

Brent Defoe, the director of the Polk County Family & Community Outreach Department, who oversees the resource center, believes the program's focus on both the immediate (food and shelter) and long-term needs of clients will be successful.

"What the I-CAN students can do through home visiting with clients and then long-term planning and some case management, has the potential to change lives," he said. "This will save countless dollars in the future, and I strongly believe that the data from this model will incite and excite other communities to adopt it."

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