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SPRING/SUMMER 2021

R U T G E R S N U R S I N G

One Year Later

2020 Grads Reflect on Life at the Pandemic Frontline



RUTGERS



One Year Later...

Welcome to the second issue of *Rutgers Nursing* magazine, themed “**One Year Later**” and published a little more than one year after our world was turned upside down as we faced multiple tragedies.

Those tragedies, of course, include a lethal pandemic, social isolation, economic hardships, the realities of racial disparities and social injustice, and the struggles experienced by nurses who worked countless hours fighting to save lives – without relief and, all too often, without adequate personal protection.

One year ago, the faculty at Rutgers School of Nursing converted more than 100 face-to-face courses to a remote learning format within just a week’s time. **One year ago**, we accelerated our curriculum to graduate 354 new nurses a few weeks early so that they could support their weary nursing colleagues. **One year ago**, we began to offer additional resilience and stress management workshops to assist our students, faculty, and staff as they adapted to the events that surrounded them.

One year later, I am filled with pride for the achievements of our faculty, students, and staff. They not only met the challenges that we faced last year, but they have continued the pursuit of excellence, reached new heights of accomplishments, and continued to prepare outstanding new nurse clinicians, nurse leaders, and nurse scientists.

These accomplishments include:

- The establishment of the Dean’s Committee on Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias, that prepared a multifaceted strategic plan with measurable goals, timelines, activities, accountabilities, and metrics aimed at eliminating all traces of racism and bias within our academic community and beyond.
- Top 20 rankings by *U.S. News & World Report*, indicating that, yet again, our DNP and master’s programs are among the best in the nation.
- Receipt of the Best Schools for Men in Nursing Award for the third year in a row.
- More than \$3.7 million* in new NIH research funding over the last year, and a rise in NIH award rankings by the Blue Ridge Institute of Medical Research.
- Launch of a new Pediatric Acute Care Nurse Practitioner specialty to our DNP degree program – the only such program in the state of New Jersey.
- Launch of a new undergraduate curriculum that embraces population health and incorporates the new CCNE Essentials.
- Awards and accolades received by our faculty members, including the appointment of our own Jeffery Kwong (DNP, MPH, AGPCNP-BC, FAANP, FAAN) as the co-medical director of the HIV & Aging initiative of the American Academy of HIV Medicine.

So, where are we **one year later**? We remain saddened by the tragedies of last year but persist in our dedication to excellence in nursing education, patient care, research, service, and scholarship, as we work to eliminate health disparities and social injustices.

As you explore this issue of *Rutgers Nursing* magazine, I hope that you enjoy reading more about us...**one year later**.

Linda Flynn, PhD, RN, FAAN

DEAN AND PROFESSOR, RUTGERS SCHOOL OF NURSING

* Funding total represents collaborative effort with corresponding faculty at Rutgers Institute for Health, Health Care Policy, and Aging Research.

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ONE YEAR LATER

2020 Grads Reflect on Life at the Pandemic Frontline

THE PANDEMIC'S NEWEST NURSES HELPED BATTLE COVID-19 CRISIS

March 2020. A time of exhilaration and relief. Graduation day was near, much like every year before. Students took a deep breath; they had almost finished their studies; they were almost ready to begin new careers.

But suddenly everything changed. COVID-19 swooped in, infecting hundreds, then thousands in New Jersey and New York; hospitals overflowed with critically ill patients; health care professionals struggled to manage the crisis; nurses across the country traveled to New Jersey to work side by side with their colleagues.

In May, Rutgers School of Nursing (SON) graduated more than 350 bachelor's degree students three weeks early. And the state of New Jersey granted new grads emergency temporary licenses so they could start work right away. With hospitals and agencies in dire need, the soon-to-be nurses moved out to join the battle. Three of these graduates from the class of 2020 provide a glimpse of their experiences.

Hospitals were in dire need. New nursing graduates were needed to enter the workforce immediately. They were ready — and able — to step into their new and challenging roles.

DONNA McFADDEN (MA, BS, BA, RN)

Despite 12 years' experience as an outpatient mental health care provider, Donna McFadden began her first nursing job at an urban New Jersey medical center with some trepidation. A graduate of SON's accelerated, second-degree Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, this Newark native already held an undergraduate degree in psychology and a master's in counseling and was used to working in crisis situations. Her goal has always been "to empower people to learn to fix their problems," she says. "I returned to school for nursing so I could address the whole person, both mental and physical concerns."

The nursing program, she says, was "intense and challenging," preparing her well for what lay ahead. "My mom was a nurse and I worked with nurses. I knew their work was hard."

She accepted a job on the oncology unit, which had suddenly been transformed into a COVID-care unit at the start of the pandemic. "I brought with me my background of holding people's



(L-R) Donna McFadden, Ashley Lopez, McFadden with mask.

hands, of trying to understand how each patient was feeling. But with the demands of COVID-19 care, there wasn't time to slow down for one individual patient. That was very hard for me."

Strangely, she says, with COVID cases on the decline, "I'm even busier now. We're trying to fix a year of neglect of conditions like uncontrolled diabetes and heart failure."

She hopes to be able to blend nursing and mental health care in the future. McFadden's advice to future nursing students: "It's difficult, but you can do it. Be part of a study group. Nursing is teamwork. Start learning to work on a team while you're still in school."



ASHLEY LOPEZ (BS, RN)

A graduate of New Brunswick Health Science Technology High School, and the first in her family to pursue college, Ashley Lopez says that a nursing career has been her goal since childhood. She entered the four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in fall 2016, and finished in May 2020, during the peak months of COVID-19 in New Jersey. She quickly landed a job in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), happy that the state issued emergency licenses for nurses in May, allowing her to start work while studying for her Boards.

COVID-19 rarely infects babies, but “policies and protocols affecting families with newborns in the NICU changed because of COVID-19,” she says. The large unit with an open floor plan

houses 50 to 60 infant patients and, generally, parent visitation is encouraged around the clock. But COVID-19 safety protocols included limiting visitation to two-hour stays, twice per day, while enforcing social distancing, to protect families and staff. In situations where parents felt they might have been exposed to the virus, “we Face Timed with them, making sure they were OK, and tried to help them through the period of not seeing their newborns.”

Looking back to day one of her job, Lopez says, “COVID-19 impacted all of us, but definitely the adult ICUs were hit much harder. The hospital as a whole came together in response to the challenging times.”



Seta Bairamian

“Humanity, compassion, vulnerability, listening, and building trust are fundamental to both acting and nursing.”

SETA BAIRAMIAN (BFA, BS, RN)

After earning an undergraduate degree from NYU in theater and applied theater, and nine years working in that field, Seta Bairamian switched careers, graduating from Rutgers’ accelerated, second-degree nursing program in August 2020. “Humanity, compassion, vulnerability, listening, and building trust are fundamental to both acting and nursing,” she says. She had considered a nursing career while in high school, and kept revisiting her grandmother’s riveting stories gleaned from a

life-long nursing career. Spending time with her father when he was very ill and hospitalized for a month also made a profound impact. “I started to realize how much nurses do,” she says.

Now working as a COVID vaccinator for a New Jersey health care system, Bairamian looks forward to specializing in acute care nursing. “I’ve gained confidence on the job and learned it’s OK to take your time and follow unexpected routes and to pursue learning experiences wherever they are.” ■

New Degree, New Role in a World Changed by COVID

COVID-19's relentless spread across the New York area in Spring 2020 clearly impacted John Tomasello (DNP, APN, CRNA) and his experiences as a practicing nurse and soon-to-be nurse anesthetologist.

A few years after beginning his RN career in 2013, Tomasello enrolled in the three-year Nurse Anesthesia DNP program at Rutgers School of Nursing. After completing the demanding coursework and clinicals, he was looking forward to graduating in May 2020 and getting on with his new career.

But in March 2020, "there was a sudden change," he remembers. "Everybody was talking about COVID-19. We had enough clinical hours to graduate, so our anesthesia faculty encouraged us to help out where we could."

While he had studied to become a nurse anesthetologist, Tomasello, and many of his classmates, initially took jobs as RNs in intensive care units. "I signed on with a classmate to work at a hospital in Queens, where we were desperately needed."

"In my previous ICU job, each nurse took care of two patients. We did our best to control the variables and manage each patient's care so well," he explains. "Last March, with just a four-hour orientation, we were on our own in a massive hospital, each caring for four critical patients. They were so sick, all intubated, some on continuous dialysis, with no central monitoring. I had to learn to stay calm amid chaos. It was like a wartime situation."

In the beginning of May, hospital life started normalizing. Tomasello passed his boards in June and was credentialed as a certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA) in August 2020. "CRNAs have an expert knowledge of intubation and ventilator management," he points out. "While elective surgeries were on hold, CRNAs were on intubation teams and overseeing the care of ICU patients."

August marked the tail end of the COVID-19 crisis in area hospitals, Tomasello notes, and operating room cases started up again. Today, he works at two major North Jersey



John Tomasello

hospitals, where "it's business as usual for CRNAs now," he says, "except there are some patients who are COVID positive and need surgery, and there are surgeries related to the side effects of COVID-19. We are seeing an uptick in patients with a variety of clots and long-term respiratory complications. COVID has become part of their permanent medical history."

"I see each patient as a new challenge," he says. "I ask myself, 'What do I need to prepare and do for this particular person, so that they are safe and comfortable throughout the surgical period?' Because CRNAs are the patient's best advocate." ■



Caroline Dorsen, PhD, FNP-BC, Associate Dean of Advanced Practice and Clinical Partnerships; Clinical Associate Professor.

Caroline Dorsen — Growing Her Vision

NEW ASSOCIATE DEAN IS A CHAMPION OF HEALTH CARE ACCESS

School of Nursing's new associate dean of advanced practice and clinical partnerships, Caroline Dorsen (PhD, FNP-BC), grew up discussing social justice at her family's Greenwich Village dinner table. "Even as a very small child, we spoke frankly about injustice in the world," she says. "No topic was off limits."

At UC Berkeley, where she studied anthropology as an undergraduate, she became increasingly interested in the question of how to reduce social disparities. With many of her friends volunteering at the "infamous" Berkeley Free Clinic, Dorsen "quickly saw the power of health care to change lives," and was hooked.

As a health educator at the clinic, and later at Planned Parenthood, she worked alongside nurse practitioners and was impressed. "They were smart, collaboratively minded advocates and caregivers. This was the height of the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco, and young people my age were getting sick and dying. My interest in nursing was awakened and my lifelong dedication to LGBTQ health was born."

Anthropology and nursing were closely linked for Dorsen—anthropology providing the framework to study family, gender, health care, housing, food insecurity, and community, and nursing providing avenues to actualize change. So, she set about earning her professional credentials: a BS in Nursing from New York University; an MSN from Yale; a PhD and post-doctoral work at NYU.

Dorsen has now worked as a nurse and family nurse practitioner for more than 20 years. Her focus throughout has been trying to improve access to care and meet the health needs of diverse groups of patients. Her passion for primary care came from her desire to "form ongoing relationships with patients, especially historically hidden and marginalized populations such as the LGBTQ community." Teaching

has also been a focus of her career over the last 18 years. Before coming to Rutgers, she served on the faculty of NYU's Rory Meyers College of Nursing where she launched a family nurse practitioner program. Teaching and advising advanced practice students, she urged them "to always think of human beings in the context of their lives. Being a good clinician means always hearing what patients have to say and learning who they are."

In 2020, happy with her career, she nevertheless was "ready for a new challenge and excited by Rutgers School of Nursing's vision for advanced practice education," she says. "I like the school's bigger-picture perspective, and its diverse student population." She was interviewed, hired, and began her job entirely virtually during the COVID pandemic's most critical months.

Dorsen, who is also a clinical associate professor at the School of Nursing and an associate professor in the School of Public Health, aims to strengthen already-forged clinical, academic, and community partnerships locally, regionally and nationally. She'll work closely with other health care professionals as part of Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences (RBHS). "I see great opportunities for us to break down some silos in health education and practice at Rutgers, which research suggests will both increase provider satisfaction and improve patient outcomes."

Advocacy for the nursing profession is also among her passions. "Early on, I saw something special about how nurses relate to patients," she says. "COVID has shined a light on the value of nurses, but also how hard our jobs are. As a mental health advocate, I know that nurses can't do the hard work they're doing without the support they deserve. I want them to get that support and recognition." ■

“Fetch the Nurse”

One Faculty Researcher Studies the Impact of Racism and Microaggressions on Nurses

It was 1970, and Charlotte Thomas-Hawkins (PhD, RN, FAAN) was at the beginning of her career. She had earned her nursing diploma at Temple University Hospital School of Nursing that spring and was starting her first RN job at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. So, when she walked into a patient’s room and was asked to “fetch the nurse,” she felt a sense of deflation she remembers to this day.

Thomas-Hawkins is Black, and even now, minority nurses are still facing racism, both subtle and overt, including the assumption that, because of their color, they couldn’t possibly be “the nurse.” That experience set Thomas-Hawkins to asking questions about the effects of bias that would one day impel her to become a researcher. And one of her research topics would be nurses’ experience of racism and how it impacts their emotional health.

She completed a phase of that research in fall 2021, as the U.S. was starting to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. In fact, it was the pandemic, and nurses’ experience of it, that originally inspired this study.

In the spring of 2020, New Jersey was grappling with the third highest number of COVID cases in the Northeast, and

Thomas-Hawkins—associate professor and interim associate dean of Nursing Science at Rutgers School of Nursing—began to wonder how nurses were handling the effects of a uniquely grueling year.

“I was interested in the level of worry that nurses had regarding COVID,” she says. But the past year had been marked by yet another consequential event—the killing of George Floyd, an African American, at the hands of white Minneapolis police officers. “My experience as a minority nurse is that we constantly live with this subtle level of interpersonal racism,” says Thomas-Hawkins. She wondered how the entwined stresses of COVID and workplace racism affected nurses, particularly nurses of color.

She surveyed 778 nurses in New Jersey hospitals who worked closely with patients. It was a diverse sample—60 percent white and the remainder non-white or multiracial. The results revealed a high level of what Thomas-Hawkins called “emotional burnout,” which was reported by 68 percent of the nurses overall, though minority nurses reported a higher level of emotional distress compared to their white counterparts. More than half of respondents overall felt that work was hardening them emotionally; 43 percent were de-

pressed; and a third reported dissatisfaction with work/life balance. A majority worried about COVID; almost half were dissatisfied with their jobs; and nearly 20 percent planned to leave their jobs.

It was her questions about racial climate and racial microaggressions—small-scale comments or actions, intentional or unintentional, conveying racial bias, hostility, or disrespect—on which respondents were clearly divided by race. Black nurses experienced more negative workplace racial climates and a higher number of microaggressions, especially from coworkers and patients. “To my knowledge,” says Thomas-Hawkins, “the quantifiable and harmful experiences of workplace racism by nurses is a new finding, and it’s not something that can be ignored.”

She’d never set out to do groundbreaking research—in fact, she’d never set out to do research of any sort. That changed back when she got her master’s degree in nursing from the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing and moved from an inpatient floor to the outpatient dialysis unit at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. There, she was struck by the fact that nurses did the lion’s share of the work, and there never seemed to be enough of them. She began to wonder how that low level of nurse staffing affected patient out-



Charlotte Thomas-Hawkins, PhD, RN, FAAN, Interim Associate Dean of Nursing Science; Associate Professor; and Director, Center for Healthcare Quality.

comes and decided to start researching the question.

As an advanced practice nurse, however, she found she didn't have time for research. So as much as she mourned leaving clinical practice, she decided to get her PhD and, in 2000, joined the faculty at Rutgers School of Nursing.

She adapted quickly. "I learned how to teach," she says, "and discovered that I liked it." A great pleasure is helping students surmount their academic struggles, as a professor once did for her. "When I see the lightbulbs go on in their heads," she says, "that's what keeps me going on."

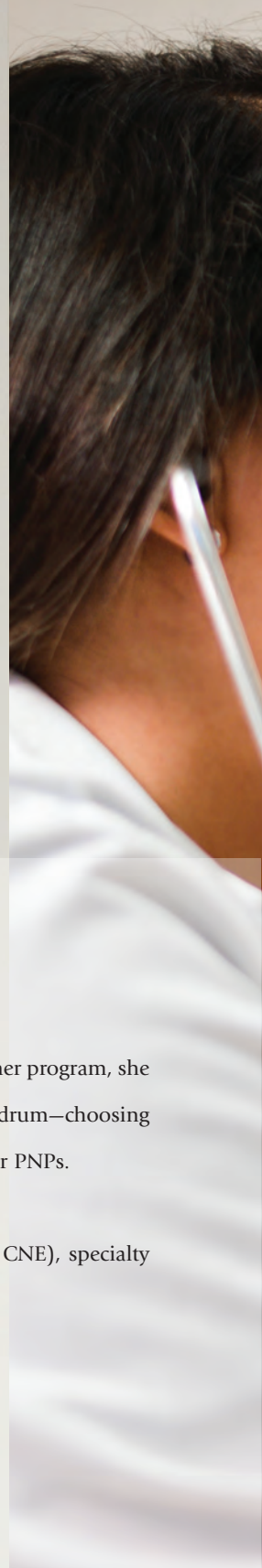
With 27 studies under her belt, research continues to be a driver. At the time of this writing, Thomas-Hawkins was preparing the first of three manuscripts to report her findings on how racism impacts nurses' emotional health. She hopes at some point to study how nurses' experience of racism also affects patient care. As a researcher, she says, "you always have more questions." ■

Caring for Our Young: New Pediatric NP Programs

Angela Otto-Ryan (DNP, RN, CBC) was in an enviable position.

Two weeks before her May 2021 graduation from Rutgers School of Nursing's Primary Care Pediatric Nurse Practitioner program, she was weighing two job offers, both involving work with underserved populations. Over the next decade, her conundrum—choosing among multiple offers of employment—is likely to become increasingly common for pediatric nurse practitioners, or PNPs.

"There is a forecasted critical shortage, over the next 10 years, for PNPs," says Margaret Quinn (DNP, RN, CPNP, CNE), specialty director of the PNP program at Rutgers School of Nursing, "especially in rural and underserved areas."





Angela Otto-Ryan conducts a pediatric assessment with Nora, her three-year-old daughter.

“There is a forecasted critical shortage, over the next 10 years, for PNPs,” says Margaret Quinn, specialty director of the PNP program at Rutgers School of Nursing, “especially in rural and underserved areas.”



Margaret Quinn, DNP, RN, CPNP, CNE, Clinical Associate Professor and Specialty Director for the Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Program.

The School of Nursing is rising to address that shortage. In addition to its flagship four-year Primary Care PNP program, it also offers a post-master’s certificate in pediatric primary care for nurse practitioners. And this spring, the school launched two new pediatrics programs, a Dual Primary/Acute Care PNP doctor of nursing practice degree—the only one in the state of New Jersey—and a Pediatric Acute Care Post-Master’s Certificate.

Quinn has also been able to secure two grants, one from the Wells Fargo/Edward W. & Stella C. Van Houten Memorial Fund to support scholarships for students in the Pediatric Acute Care Post-Master’s Certificate program and the other, from the New Jersey Health Foundation, to fund the development of a pediatric simulation suite. The suite will offer the first pediatric-sized task trainers at the university and will allow PNP students and others in the School of Nursing to practice highly specialized procedures like spinal taps and umbilical line insertions.

It’s this level of attention to detail that makes the school’s PNP programs so competitive. The flagship primary care PNP program, for instance, offers a comprehensive curriculum comprising health promotion and the treatment of mild, complex, and chronic illnesses among children. It also requires a minimum of 585 clinical hours designed to expose students to a wide variety of clinical settings. (The new dual PNP program, beginning in fall 2021, will require 900 clinical hours.)

For Otto-Ryan, who received her accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from Rutgers in 2016 and worked as a



Angela Otto-Ryan, Nora Ryan, and Margaret Quinn.

school nurse and a pediatric surgical nurse before enrolling in the PNP program, the program's focus on what she calls "the bigger picture" was revelatory. In her previous positions, she says, "there was always such a large emphasis on fixing the problem in front of you." The PNP program, on the other hand, "was all about prevention and educating patients' families and promoting health."

"The focus of a primary care PNP," says Quinn, "is the outpatient setting: schools, community centers, doctors' offices, clinics." The new dual program, she notes, "will open up a whole variety of additional experiences, like inpatient, emergency room, urgent care, and surgical, and it's also a great crossover for those NPs who want to specialize in areas like cardiology or pulmonology."

All four programs will prepare students for a changing pediatrics landscape. Today, for instance, 26.6 percent of children suffer from chronic health conditions like asthma, obesity, and

ADHD—an increase of more than 100 percent from 12.8 in 1994. On the other hand, fewer children are being treated in hospitals, and the trend toward home care—which requires parent education and dedicated practitioner follow-up—calls for exactly the kind of skills PNPs are trained in.

When Otto-Ryan starts her next job, wherever it may be, she'll relish the opportunity, she says, to work closely with patients and their families in just this way—to head off the development of chronic conditions and, in her words, "to help children off to a healthy life."

It's what Quinn, a PNP herself, has dedicated her career to.

"If we have healthy children," she stresses, "we'll have a healthy future." ■

Improving Late-Life Care

SCHOOL OF NURSING FACULTY LEAD FUNDED RESEARCH ON AGING AND DEMENTIAS

If you're not yet over 65, you may well be caring for someone who is. Over the last decade, the number of Americans 65 and older jumped from 39.6 million to 54.1 million, and it's expected to reach 80.8 million by 2040. The predicted increase in Americans suffering from Alzheimer's disease is equally dramatic, projected to grow from 6 million to 15 million by 2060.

All these numbers add up to a critical need for research into aging, particularly as it points the way toward achieving a healthier old age and a more peaceful end-of-life experience.

Recently, three faculty researchers at Rutgers School of Nursing received grants—from the National Institutes of Health and the Alzheimer's Association—supporting research on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. All three aim to improve the health and well-being of older adults and their caregivers.

An Underutilized Insurance Benefit that Could Improve Late-Life Care Outcomes

Both restorative and palliative care—support for patients with serious, sometimes terminal, illnesses—delivered at home, can make a tremendous difference in quality of life, especially if that care is provided by skilled home health care professionals.

Unfortunately, home health care and home hospice are underutilized among racial and ethnic minority populations, despite coverage by Medicare and Medicaid.

With a four-year, \$2.6 million grant (RO1AG066139) from the National Institutes of Health's National Institute on Aging (NIH/NIA), a team led by Olga F. Jarrín Montaner (PhD, RN), assistant professor, has begun to investigate the ways in which skilled home health care can benefit those with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

When employed years before a patient's final decline in health, this kind of care, says Jarrín, "can help overcome structural and systemic racism, which contributes to lower utilization of palliative and hospice care among the rapidly growing population of Black, Hispanic, and Asian older adults living with advanced dementia."

Building the Research Infrastructure to Answer Questions About Healthy Aging

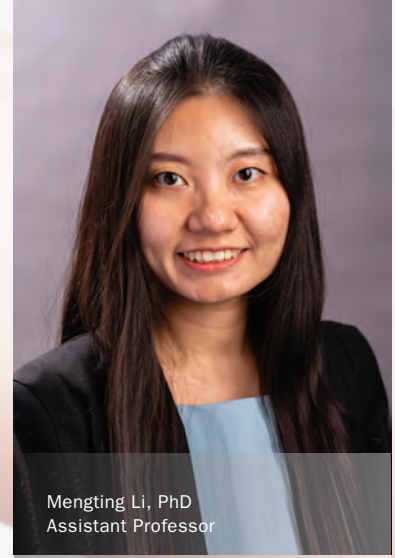
What factors contribute to healthy aging among people living with dementia? That's the big question that School of Nursing Professor Haiqun Lin (PhD, MD); Olga Jarrín; and their inter-



Olga Jarrín Montaner, PhD, RN
Assistant Professor



Haiqun Lin, PhD, MD
Professor



Mengting Li, PhD
Assistant Professor

professional research team hope to answer through the creation of a unique, comprehensive research repository and a suite of analytic methods to study the trajectories of health and illness experienced by Medicare beneficiaries during the last five years of life.

Thanks to a three-year, \$2.3 million, NIH/NIA grant (R33AG068931), Lin, a professor of biostatistics, and Jarrín, will incorporate data on individual factors affecting health, including chronic conditions like heart disease and acute illnesses such as COVID-19, as well as potential environmental, political, and socioeconomic determinants like the stresses of poverty and exposure to air pollution.

In addition to examining data, researchers will use predictive modeling and machine learning to determine which patients, based on a wide variety of risk factors, are more likely to enjoy a relatively independent living experience toward the last years of life, accompanied by a low expenditure on health care. “That approach,” says Lin, “is very new and should be very effective.”

How Family Affects Function

Supported by a \$147,195 grant from the Alzheimer’s Association,

Mengting Li (PhD), assistant professor, is looking into ways in which the family environment might affect cognitive function in older adults. Analyzing data collected from a large study of Chinese older adults in the Chicago area, Li and her colleagues have sorted some 3,000 individuals into four family types: tight knit (close, with minimal conflict), ambivalent (close, with high conflict), conflicted (not close, with high conflict), and detached (not close, with low conflict).

Since it was launched in mid-2020, the study has already yielded the surprising finding that cognitive function appears to be highest among older adults in ambivalent families, perhaps, says Li, “because a stressful relationship, buffered by close family ties, might cause older adults to think about how to solve their conflicts.” She expects that the final two years of the three-year study will yield a firm explanation, along with other important insights.

Her research could ultimately lead to family-based strategies that would delay or prevent Alzheimer’s and other dementias. “As life expectancy increases,” she says, “the time spent between parents and children will also increase, making intergenerational relationships especially important.” ■



Lynne Moronski, MPA, BA, BS, RN, CTR

Understanding and Reducing Vaccine Hesitancy Among Nurses

It was an unexpected conversation-stopper. Back in 2018, Lynne Moronski (MPA, BA, BS, RN, CTR) was chatting with a group of fellow nurses and mentioned how excited she was to be vaccinating patients at a local flu clinic. Their response—a long, uncomfortable silence.

Finally, one of the nurses explained that she and the others had, in fact, left their jobs at a hospital because administering vaccinations was mandatory there. “We don’t believe in it,” she told Moronski. Later, another nurse pulled Moronski aside and told her that vaccine hesitancy in their profession was, in fact, quite common. “I was surprised that people trained in evidence-based medicine and science would feel this way,” Moronski says.

In early 2020, when it became clear that COVID-19 would pose a significant threat in the U.S. and that a vaccine would be critical in combating it, Moronski began to explore the subject of nurses’ vaccine hesitancy and found that research confirmed the phenomenon. For instance, she notes, two separate studies conducted in 2020 put the percentage of nurses willing to take the COVID-19 vaccine at roughly 34 percent, compared with 80 percent of physicians and scientists.

As a PhD student at Rutgers School of Nursing—who joined the program in 2020—Moronski has decided to make nurses’ vaccine hesitancy the topic of her dissertation. She’s excited to develop her research expertise. “Instead of just implementing other people’s research, I want to do my own,” she says.

With a MPA in health policy and management and a BS in Nursing under her belt—from New York University and Rutgers School of Nursing, respectively—as well as administrative experience at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield, Moronski seeks to take an active role in helping shape health care policy.

Moronski points out that nurses are widely known as the most trusted of all health care professionals; and their heartfelt endorsement of the COVID vaccine, she feels, could go a long way toward convincing others to get vaccinated. But to uncover ways to counter their hesitancy, she’ll need to determine why so many nurses feel the way they do. “You have to examine the specific reasons for hesitancy and then tailor solutions to the data,” she says.

Moronski will begin her research this summer, surveying nurses to determine the root causes of their leanness both to vaccinate and to get vaccinated. She’s especially interested in differences among groups of nurses. For example, she cites a 2019 study showing that nurses with a DNP degree are the least vaccine hesitant, even compared to those holding PhD and BSN degrees.

Convincing nurses to embrace vaccination, she says, will be important long after the current pandemic is medical history. “After clean water,” she explains, “nothing works better at reducing death, disability, disease, and inequality than vaccination.” ■

SPOTLIGHT: SELECTED FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

NEW FELLOWS

Julie Blumenfeld (DNP, CNM, IBCLC), adjunct faculty member, was elected a fellow of the American College of Nurse-Midwives.

Jill Cox (PhD, RN, APN-c, CWOCN, FAAN), clinical associate professor, was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

Linda Flynn (PhD, RN, FAAN), dean and professor, was inducted into the New York Academy of Medicine.

AWARDS

Amita Avadhani (PhD, DNP, CNE, DCC, ACNP-BC, NP-C, CCRN, FAANP, FCCM), associate professor, specialty director for the DNP Executive Model program, and interim specialty director, Adult-Gerontology Acute Care, received the 2021 Advocate State Award for Excellence for New Jersey from the American Association of Nurse Practitioners.

Judy Barberio (PhD, RN, APN-c), clinical associate professor, received the 2020 ELNEC Award of Excellence from the End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium.

Irina Benenson (DNP, FNP-C, CEN), assistant professor, received the 2021 "Peer Reviewer of the Year" Award from *The Nurse Practitioner* journal.

Irina Benenson (DNP, FNP-C, CEN), assistant professor, and **Sallie Porter** (DNP, PhD, APN, RN-BC, CPNP), associate professor, are co-authors of an article listed in the *Nurse Practitioner Journal Best of 2020 Collection*. (Benenson, I., Porter, F. A., & Porter, S. (2020). Pediatric hypertension: A guideline update. *The Nurse Practitioner* 45(5):16-23.)

Yuri T. Jadotte (MD, PhD, MPH), associate professor and assistant director of the Northeast Institute for Evidence Synthesis and Translation, received the 2021 Early Career Award from the Association for Prevention Teaching and Research (APTR).

Tracy R. Vitale (DNP, RNC-OB, C-EFM, NE-BC), assistant professor and specialty director for DNP Project/DNP Project Courses, received the 2020 Nurse of the Year Award from the March of Dimes, New Jersey chapter, in the Educator-Academia category.

APPOINTMENTS

Caroline Dorsen (PhD, FNP-BC), clinical associate professor and associate dean for advanced practice and clinical partnerships, has been appointed to the Eastern Nursing Research Society's new Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) advisory group.

Yuri T. Jadotte (MD, PhD, MPH), associate professor and assistant director of the Northeast Institute for Evidence Synthesis and Translation, was elected to membership in the Society for Research Synthesis Methodology.

Jeffrey Kwong (DNP, MPH, AGPCNP-BC, FAANP, FAAN), professor, was appointed co-medical director of HIV & Aging, a joint educational venture between the American Academy of HIV Medicine and the American Geriatrics Society.

Constance Sobon Sensor (PhD, RN, CTN-A, NJ-CSN), assistant professor and director of the School Nurse Certificate program, was appointed U.N. Observer for the national League of Women Voters. She recently completed a four-year term at the United Nations as representative for Sigma, the national honor society for nursing.

EXTRAMURAL GRANTS

Olga F. Jarrín Montaner (PhD, RN), assistant professor, is principal investigator, and **Haiqun Lin** (MD, PhD), professor, is a co-investigator of *"RO1 Upstream Approaches to Improve Late Life Care for People Living with Dementia,"* a \$2,585,530 grant from the NIH National Institute on Aging (#1R01AG066139-01A1; additional co-investigators: P. Duberstein, X. Dong, and B. Wu).

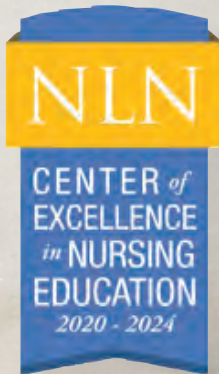
Olga F. Jarrín Montaner (PhD, RN), assistant professor, and **Haiqun Lin** (MD, PhD), professor, are principal investigators of *"Advanced Development and Utilization of Aging Trajectory Files from Multiple Datasets,"* a \$2,319,910 grant from the NIH National Institute on Aging. (Project # R33AG068931-01A1; co-investigators: S. Setoguchi-Iwata, J. Roy, L. Pizzi, F. Kobylarz, and X. Dong).

Margaret Quinn (DNP, RN, CPNP, CNE), clinical associate professor and specialty director of the Pediatric NP program, received two grants: *"Rutgers University Primary Care/Acute Care Dual Certification Pediatric Nurse Practitioner Program – Laboratory and Simulation Innovation,"* is a \$25,000 grant from the New Jersey Health Foundation; and the Wells Fargo/Edward W. & Stella C. Van Houten Memorial Fund awarded \$14,000 to support student scholarships.

Beth Savage (PhD, RN, CPNP, CPON), assistant professor, received a \$10,000 research grant from the Association of Pediatric Hematology/ Oncology Nurses (APHON) for her project, *"The Role of Poverty in the Risk of Acute Toxicities in Children with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia."*

Corina Lelutiu-Weinberger (PhD), associate professor and endowed chair of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center, is principal investigator of *"Preparing for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Implementation in Central-Eastern European Countries with Low Access to Biomedical Prevention,"* a \$422,919 grant from the National Institutes of Health, Fogarty International Center. (Grant #R21TW011752, co-investigator: J. Pachankis)

SPOTLIGHT: SCHOOL OF NURSING NEWS BRIEFS



NEW NLN CENTER OF EXCELLENCE DESIGNATION

Rutgers School of Nursing is one of only 17 nursing programs, teaching hospitals, and clinical sites from across the country that were named 2020-2024 NLN Centers of Excellence™ in Nursing Education by the National League for Nursing. Institutions earn this designation for demonstrating excellence in one of three categories: nursing education research; student learning and professional development; or, like in the case of Rutgers School of Nursing, excellence in faculty development.

SCHOOL OF NURSING CLIMBS IN NATIONAL RANKING OF NIH FUNDING



In just one year, Rutgers School of Nursing has risen significantly in the ranking of National Institutes of Health funding compiled annually by Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research (BRIMR). For 2020, School of Nursing was ranked 38th out of 78 schools—jumping from its 2019 rank of 53rd among 72 schools listed.



TOP 20 GRADUATE SCHOOL RANKINGS FROM U.S. NEWS

Continuing a track record of excellence in nursing education, Rutgers School of Nursing holds its place among the nation's top 20 nursing schools in rankings published in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2022 edition of *Best Graduate Schools*. The School of Nursing ranks 15th in the nation for its Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program and 19th for its Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program.



BEST SCHOOLS FOR MEN IN NURSING AWARD

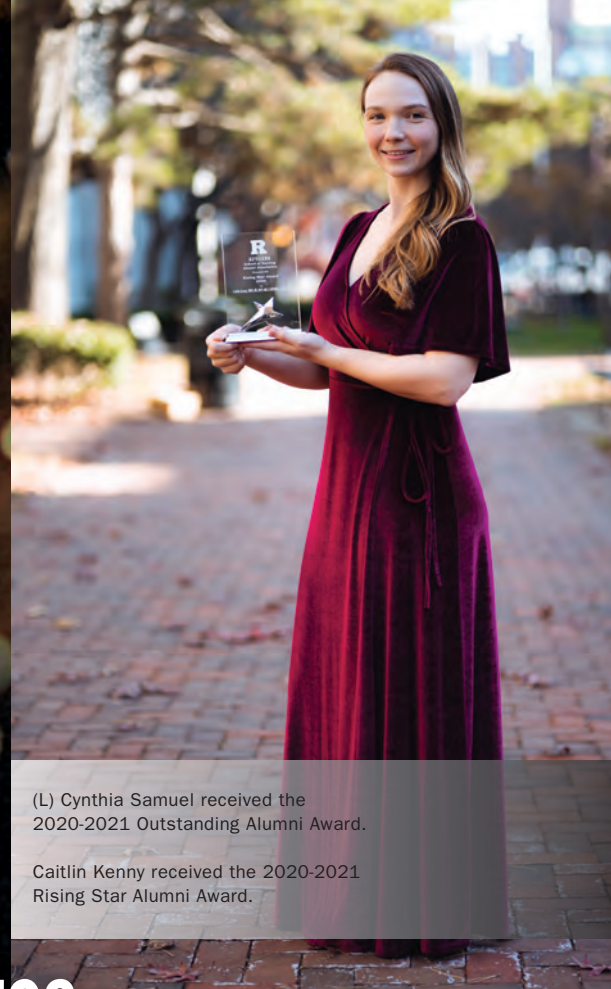
Rutgers School of Nursing received the Best Schools for Men in Nursing Award for the third year in a row (2018, 2019, and 2020). The American Association for Men in Nursing presents the award each year to recognize outstanding efforts in recruiting, retaining, and advancing public awareness of men in nursing.



AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE FOR RUTGERS NURSING MAGAZINE

Last year's inaugural issue of *Rutgers Nursing* magazine received the 2021 Award of Excellence in the annual Communicator Awards program of the Academy of Interactive and Visual Arts. *Rutgers Nursing* was recognized in the overall design, annual report, and brochure categories. The magazine also received a Bronze Award in the 2021 Circle of Excellence program of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.





(L) Cynthia Samuel received the 2020-2021 Outstanding Alumni Award.

Caitlin Kenny received the 2020-2021 Rising Star Alumni Award.

Alumni Gala Celebrates Nursing Excellence — Virtually

"I wish that I was standing in front of all of you raising a glass in toast to all of the great work that nurses have done in 2020, especially during this global pandemic," said Mary Anne Marra (DNP, RN, NEA-BC).

With the world on lockdown, Marra, president of the Rutgers School of Nursing Alumni Association, greeted supporters of the association's annual fundraising gala—this time, held virtually. The mixed-media, pre-recorded gala presentation was launched last December 10, following a champagne toast broadcast on Facebook Live.

"I've always been proud to be a nurse, and a Rutgers nurse, but never to the level of pride that I have felt during this past, extremely challenging year," Marra added. "Thank you to all those who are joining with us to recognize and support excellence in nursing and nursing education."

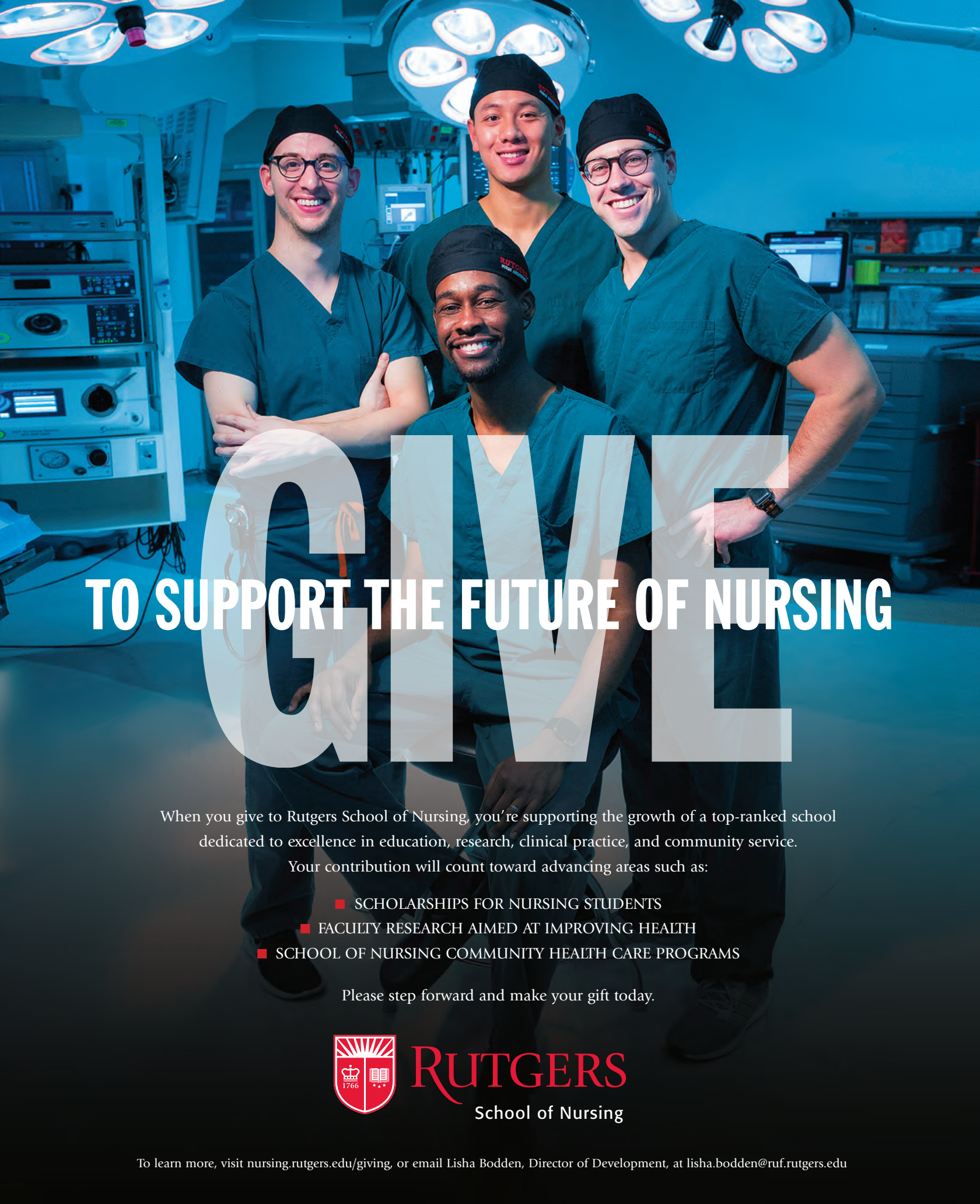
Continuing its annual tradition, the alumni association presented scholarships to 12 School of Nursing students and bestowed awards on two remarkable alumni.

Cynthia E. Samuel (PhD, RN, CSN), received the Outstanding Alumni Award. An alumna ('84) of the BS in Nursing program, Samuel was honored for her distinguished, 34-year career as a school nurse with the Irvington Public Schools; her dedication to improving health and well-being in urban communities; and her support of the alumni association, where she's served as both president and treasurer.

Caitlin Kenny (MSN, RNC-OB, C-EFM) received the 2020 Rising Star Alumni Award. A magna cum laude graduate of the BS in Nursing program ('13), Kenny serves as an RN in a New Jersey hospital's high-risk obstetrics unit. An advocate for nursing education, she helps train undergraduate nursing students completing clinical rotations and co-chairs a hospital mentorship committee that works to support and retain new graduate employees.

To view the 2020 Alumni Scholarship & Awards Virtual Gala and to learn about upcoming alumni events and opportunities to get involved, visit nursing.rutgers.edu/alumni. ■

Watch for updates! Alumni Scholarship & Awards Gala—coming fall/winter 2021.



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