

LEARNING DURING SHUTDOWN

'Hands-on' experience goes online for nursing students



Robert Inglis/The Daily Item

Kristi Heiss is a graduate level nursing student in Bloomsburg University's nurse anesthesia program.

Director started students on virtual path before outbreak

By Joe Sylvester
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Timothy Campbell said he already implemented tools to get nursing students more comfortable with computers and virtual simulation before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Campbell, director of the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program, said that when the shutdown occurred in mid-March,

the program easily transitioned to online classes and clinicals, which uses virtually simulated patient care scenarios.

Other nursing programs have transitioned to online classroom and clinical learning, the latter to help students finish their required clinical hours because hospitals are not accepting student nurses for clinical during the shutdown.

Kristi Heiss, of Blooms-

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Joe Sylvester/The Daily Item

Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble actor Danny Roth portrays a patient for a Bloomsburg University graduate nursing student Kristi Heiss.

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burg, and Tawney Engelberger, of Ashland, were two of the Bloomsburg University graduate nursing students who recently took part in an online "patient" interaction with actors from the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble.

Heiss and Engelberger, who worked as registered nurses at Geisinger Medical Center, are graduate students in Bloomsburg University's nurse anesthesia program, studying to become nurse anesthetists.

The two 29-year-olds, who both have two more years to go in the program, normally would have been doing their clinical work at Geisinger to get hands-on experience. The COVID-19 pandemic halted that when the state shut down schools, classes went online and hospitals stopped taking nursing students for clinicals.

Thanks to an endowment to the university's nursing department, nursing students who are finishing up their required clinical hours are doing so through four different software programs rather than in a hospital setting.

Computer comfort

Campbell said the online clinical programs actually offer an advantage because in clinical



Provided photo

Wendy Nagy, is one of the CSIU LPN Center instructors working with students on their online curriculum during the COVID-19 shutdown.

rotations there is no way for a faculty member to be there all of the time with every student. The virtual program reinforces the importance of doing all of the steps.

"Having the virtual program is helping prepare (students), knowledge-wise, a little bit better," Campbell said.

Campbell said that while there is no substitute for hands-on patient care, computer knowledge is important for nurses, who will use computers in the workplace.

"I had 40-year-old students who had never used a computer," he said.

Campbell noted a lot of non-traditional students haven't

had experience with electronic health records.

When he started at CSIU a little over two years ago, a lot of students were coming out of the program not feeling comfortable with computers.

"I'm student-focused and I'm going to prepare students for the 21st century," he said.

"By luck, when we were shut down, we could go directly online," Campbell said. "We had all the necessary software available to do it."

Acting like real patients

The online interaction the students participated in was a separate part of their online

training. Danny Roth and Cassandra Pisieczko, were among the BTE actors playing patients over Zoom, an online version of what they've done face-to-face with the students over the past 10 years.

"We were lucky to have most of our clinical experiences before COVID," Heiss said. "It's nice to compare. It's less stressful than in-person encounters. We can take our time and think how we can more effectively interact with the patient."

"It's definitely a lot different, especially because of how artificial that it is," said Engelberger.

Although both had worked as RNs at Geisinger, they did not have to work under the shadow of the pandemic. They took an educational leave of absence a few months ago to enroll in the Nurse Anesthesia program.

"We won't be going back (to work) until 2022," Heiss said "We're in our last two years."

She said she hopes they will be able to return to the hospital to do their clinical hours before then.

Kim Olszewski, Bloomsburg University associate professor of nursing and graduate nursing program coordinator, said one of four online clinical software programs the students are using, from Shadow Health, uses avatars, electronic images in human

form that can be manipulated on the computer. Each software program is for a different nursing program.

According to Susan Fetterman, chairwoman of BU's Department of Nursing, the programs are a computerized illustration of a patient. The student and virtual patient can both ask and answer questions regarding symptoms and location of the symptom. The responses are evaluated as to what is the best response by the student and why.

The system allows faculty to evaluate the student's ability to take care of a patient and allows students to learn how to interact with patients as well as what symptoms to look for.

Olszewski suggested purchasing the software, with a \$1.9 million endowment from Ed and Julie Breiner.

Preparing for 21st century

The shutdown and lack of students has not affected patient care, said a spokeswoman for Evangelical Community Hospital, Lewisburg, which uses nursing students from Luzerne County Community College and Penn College of Technology.

"Evangelical Community Hospital supports up-and-coming nurses in a variety of ways, including scholarships, internships, externships and on-the-job

clinical experience," said hospital spokeswoman Deanna Holtenbach. "Those programs are all currently suspended during the COVID-19 response and will resume again once the hospital is back to normal operations. The hospital is currently properly staffed and suspending student programs has not impacted the ability to care for patients or to meet the medical needs of the community."

Kimberly Delbo, director of nursing service and innovation at Emmanuel Home, Northumberland, is working on her Doctor in Nursing (DNP) and her son is seeking his bachelor of science in nursing (BSN), both online through Liberty University in Virginia. She said 30 percent of her direct care staff members are also nursing students in the CSIU LPN program or at Harrisburg Area Community College, and they also are doing online simulation clinical.

"It's nice to do simulation, but there is nothing like being able to have hands-on experience," said Delbo, who also does consulting. "I see some pros to doing more online learning — time efficiency and also being able to incorporate more technology to streamline the education process. Our new normal is going to include more technology."