



With funding from nearly \$5 million in federal grants, Washburn nursing students are getting experience in rural and underserved clinics in Kansas. (From left to right) Students Abbigayle Folks and Jordan Cummings are instructed by registered nurses Lura Goff and Madison Matzke, bsn '17, at Holton Family Practice Associates. Photo by Peggy Clark, Washburn Public Relations

Renewed and Well

School of Nursing using \$5 million grants to help care in underserved areas

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Natalie Peterman shadowed a nurse in rural Kansas during a pre-nursing class before coming to Washburn University.

“I absolutely loved it,” she said. “I saw the hard work rural nurses do and the impact it makes for the community, and I thought it was something I would really like to do in the future.”

The health care needs of underserved areas in Kansas are unique, prevalent and growing. The Washburn University School of Nursing is addressing these issues with two federal grants worth nearly \$5 million. The grant projects offer students valuable experience in primary care health clinics. The clinics are compensated with grant funds as they mentor students with their nursing staff. Peterman, a junior, just completed her second semester at Washburn and is participating in one of these grant programs.

“Exposing our students to different possibilities and better addressing the needs of patients within the communities is really the goal,” said Jane Carpenter, bsn '80, who was recently promoted to dean of the School of Nursing.

Each grant award provides more than \$2.4 million in funding over a four-year period. The RENEW – Registered Nurse Education for a Nurse-Led Enhanced Workforce – grant project began in July 2018, and places bachelor-level students like Peterman in clinics in rural and underserved areas, where they observe registered nurses practice at the full scope of their license as part of a community-based primary care team. The BWELL – Behavioral Health Workforce Education for Longitudinal Learning – grant project began in July 2019 and rotates up to 15 doctor of nursing practice students a year in clinics in rural and underserved communities. Students are mentored by nurse practitioners to treat substance abuse disorder, behavioral health issues and health issues arising from the opioid crisis.

“RENEW and BWELL allow us to provide traineeships that pay a significant part of students’ tuition and fees. In return for that, the students help us with the projects,” said Mari Tucker, RENEW partnership liaison. “We’re really training the workforce for future needs.”

Michele Reisinger, bsn ’91, assistant professor, mentioned the growing need for well-trained nurses in rural America.

“We need not look farther than the news to know hospitals are closing and the rural workforce is aging out,” she said. “These grants help with the workforce piece of it and create a relationship between Washburn and the academic practice partners.”

Most nursing students do their clinical rotations in hospitals instead of primary and ambulatory clinics. RENEW and BWELL students are getting all these experiences.

“We have plans for the students to go to dialysis, heart failure clinics and wound centers,” said Katie Johnson, bsn ’11, RENEW project director. “They will also complete clinical rotations at the Valeo Behavioral Health Care clinic and the Pine Ridge primary care clinic in Topeka.”

Stacy Umscheid, dnp ’19, BWELL project director, said behavioral health care and telehealth are critical in underserved areas.

“We’re hoping to prepare family nurse practitioners to recognize behavioral health issues and identify appropriate community referral resources,” she said. “If a patient has a long wait period or can’t get into a specialist, our nurse practitioners will be prepared to get them on the right track.”

RENEW participant and junior Mariel Dryton wants to become a nurse practitioner.


“We get these extra opportunities other students aren’t getting,” she said. “I think that’s awesome, and I feel like RENEW just prepares us to be even better nurses. Our population has new challenges to face as we go forward. These clinics I’ve been to, for a lot of people, they’re the only health care provider they can access. It will be our duty to help our patients and provide the best care we can.”

The data the grants collect help the School of Nursing enhance curriculum for all students. The grants also

fund sending faculty and staff to conferences and updating technology equipment all students can use.

“We’re all thinking how we can best suit the needs of our communities and our students to make the grant be very beneficial in Northeast Kansas,” Reisinger said.

Carpenter and her staff know getting the most out of \$5 million in grants is a team effort, and the groundwork was laid years before she became dean in 2019.

“We put a lot of effort into these grant applications, and I was very happy when we were awarded,” said Debbie Isaacson, associate dean and assistant professor. “We are in the company of major, well-known universities around the nation. We did a lot in the past that set us up for this. I feel like our history helped us be successful.” 

RENEW and BWELL are funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Service Administration. The academic practice partners are a key element in both grant projects and include:

- Holton Family Practice Associates
- Holton, Kansas
- Community HealthCare System
- Onaga, Kansas
- Pine Ridge Family Health Center
- Topeka, Kansas
- Coffey Health System
- Burlington, Kansas
- Konza Prairie Community Health Center
- Junction City, Kansas
- Compass Behavioral Health
- Dodge City, Kansas

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