



Boston College

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NEW PROGRAM AT BOSTON COLLEGE WILL TRAIN NURSES IN FORENSICS Boston-area forensic leaders on board as advisors

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (10-16-08) – Boston College's William F. Connell School of Nursing will officially launch a master's specialty in forensic nursing starting in January to prepare nurses to address both the health and legal needs of victims of interpersonal violence, ranging from domestic violence, child abuse and elder abuse to sexual assault, occult violence and human trafficking.

A forensic nurse is specifically trained to address the patient's health needs while also using investigative and legal skills to make sure evidence and testimony are preserved and collected in a manner that will aid in possible future legal proceedings. Recognized by the American Nurses Association in 1995, forensic nursing is an emerging field in the US.

Supported by a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Connell School's master's specialty in forensic nursing will be one of only a handful of such programs offered across the country. The new program comes at an opportune time for the Connell School, which this fall has recorded its largest graduate student enrollment ever.



Angela Frederick Amar

"There is a societal need for this type of nursing. Violence is a big public health issue and nurses are in a good position to coordinate care for victims," said Connell School Assistant Professor Angela Frederick Amar, the driving force behind the new program.

The new specialty is designed to be completed in one year of full-time study. Students will complete 500 clinical hours in addition to classroom work and will be state certified as sexual assault nurse examiners upon graduation.

Amar's area of study is intimate partner violence. Her research indicates that even though awareness of domestic violence has increased dramatically, some of the stereotypes and barriers to seeking help are the same as they were 20 years ago. "It's my hope that by getting help to people sooner, we can change long-term outcomes for the better," she said. She added that forensic nurses can work in a variety of settings such as hospitals, prisons,

clinics or social service agencies. They can conduct death investigations for the military or coroner's office or investigate child abuse claims.

Boston College's program will benefit from the expertise of forensic nursing pioneer Ann Wolbert Burgess, a Connell School professor who has been studying forensic science and victimology since the 1970s and is currently conducting research on Internet sexual victimization of children and adolescents.

Burgess will contribute her trademark innovative teaching style to the new program, drawing on her connections with the FBI and relating experiences as an expert witness in high-profile proceedings such as the Duke Lacrosse case and the Menendez brothers' murder trial. Burgess is one to reach across disciplines, as she did this semester when she collaborated with the University's Biology Department to offer a hands-on lab where students use equipment and techniques from the field of forensics to process and evaluate evidence from mock crime scenes.

An advisory committee that reads like a "who's who of forensic leaders" in the Boston area has assisted in the design of the program's classroom and clinical components, providing students with the opportunity to work with a forensic photographer and in a police crime lab, for example.

Led by Lucia Zuniga, director of the Massachusetts Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program, the committee includes Suffolk County Sheriff Andrea Cabral; Norfolk County Asst. District Attorney Jeanmarie Carroll; Suffolk County Asst. District Attorney David Deakin; Donald R. Hayes, Director, Boston Police Dept.'s Crime Lab Unit; Dr. Michael Burns and Prof. Kevin Becker of Harvard Medical School; a Mass. state trooper; an emergency room nurse and representatives from the Mass. Department of Public Health, Executive Office of Public Safety & Security, Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance and other agencies.

"I'm very excited about the thought of building a community of people who are going to work together to advance the science of forensic nursing," said Amar.

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