

Helping People Help Themselves

Stenberg College offers students an
innovative route to psychiatric nursing

by Amy Juschka



During the most difficult time of her life, Jamie Greenslade chose to empower herself in the face of adversity; she chose to pursue a career in psychiatric nursing.

“My mom, who recently passed away, has been ill pretty much my entire adult life,” says Greenslade. “It came to a point that she was so ill, I was really at a loss for what to do.”

A lung transplant left Greenslade’s mother susceptible to a wide range of medical complications—and a shortened life span.

“Physicians, specialists and ICU doctors ... use terminology that you really need to understand [if you’re going] to ask the right questions,” says Greenslade. “Leaving that up to my father was too much for him and my mom.”

Overwhelmed by her mother’s deteriorating condition, Greenslade decided to take her mom’s health into her own hands.

“What I thought at that time was, ‘yeah, I could become an RN and that would be great,’” explains Greenslade. “But I was attracted to a more holistic approach to nursing.”

“In psychiatric nursing we look at a person’s mind, body and soul versus just fixing and tuning up their body. With my mom’s illness I couldn’t help but think how this was affecting her psychologically and I thought, ‘if I train to become a Registered Psychiatric Nurse I can help others, and I can learn to help my mom as well.’”

Though she eventually succumbed to her illness, Greenslade was able to make her mother’s last years as comfortable as possible.

“I was her only daughter and I’m proud that even though she’s gone, I was able to do everything in my power to ensure that I cared for her and advocated for her to the very end.”

Today, with nine years of psychiatric nursing experience ranging from acute to hospice care, Greenslade shares her industry expertise and genuine passion for healing with tomorrow’s registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs)—as a clinical instructor and coordinator with the Regional Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing (RDPN) program at Stenberg College.

A private health care and human services college based in Surrey, B.C., Stenberg equips its students with a strong combination of specialized knowledge and practical and critical thinking that employers want. By utilizing the most current industry techniques and placing its students in first-rate preceptorships, Stenberg’s superior, career-oriented programs ensure graduates are thoroughly prepared for the workforce.

A unique learning opportunity

When it comes to excellence in education combined with relevant learning that meets industry demands, Stenberg’s RDPN program hits the mark.

For the first time in British Columbia it is possible to pursue an education in psychiatric nursing without relocating to the Lower Mainland. Stenberg’s RDPN program offers students a unique opportunity. A combination of educational delivery methods combined with clinical placements in the student’s local health authority means prospective RPNs can undertake psychiatric nursing education from remote cities and communities across the province.

“I used to get phone calls all the time from people not wanting to have to move,” says Dr. Jacquolyne Keath, Stenberg’s new Dean of Psychiatric Nursing who, after an impressive career encompassing everything from front line nursing to administration to teaching, joined the Stenberg team in October 2009.

Those who are familiar with Keath’s work as a psychiatric nurse or, like Greenslade, who can count her as a former teacher and mentor, would be surprised to learn that Keath has a passion outside of nursing.

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For Keath, who has a bachelor’s degree in music, unwinding after a busy day means performing with Opera Appassionata, a Vancouver-based non-profit organization that stages operas and opera-related events in the community.

“My first love is the stage, and nursing itself is looked at as an art and a science so in that sense, nursing has always been a great fit.”

Having previously served as Executive Director with the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia (CRPNBC), as well as on several college committees, Keath understands first-hand the need for online nursing education in British Columbia.

“It’s different from other programs because in essence they’re schooling from home, which saves students having to be uprooted.”

Apart from a two-day orientation on the Stenberg campus, all theory courses offered during the 23-month diploma program are online, meaning that students can train from home and often complete their 1,400 hours of clinical practice (400 hours more than the stipulated requirement) in their own local areas.

With just two per cent of RPNs practicing in what are termed ‘rural and remote’ areas of B.C. (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2007), Stenberg’s RDPN program seeks to address the considerable nursing shortage in regions outside the Lower Mainland.

“There are a lot of nurses in northern communities, but not a lot of psychiatric nurses so you end up with a situation where it’s not always the best practitioner working with our clients,” says Keath.

“Because all the diploma programs were located in the [Lower] Mainland, students would come from rural B.C. to study, and then would stay and work here,” explains Tracey Purvis, Stenberg’s RDPN program manager and coordinator. “So they



weren't necessarily addressing the nursing shortage in rural B.C."

Registered Psychiatric Nurses represent the single largest group of health care providers in the mental health field. They often work on the front lines—as members of an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals that includes doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists and other registered nurses.

Registered psychiatric nurses can typically expect entry-level earnings to start at about \$29 per hour, capping off at just over \$38 per hour—which, according to BC Work Futures, falls above the provincial average. Some RPNs, such as forensic psychiatric nurses, earn even more.

A diploma in psychiatric nursing imparts graduates with specialized knowledge and the skills to provide care in a variety of mental health settings, including forensic psychiatry, addiction facilities, acute care, hospice care, medical clinics and home care agencies.

"Psychiatric nursing specializes only in mental health," explains Greenslade. "But with that said, [RDPN] students have to do a medical and surgical rotation in their training, both theory and clinical, because we are registered nurses so there is an expectation that we are capable of critical decision making utilizing a holistic approach to nursing, as opposed to just a medical or psychiatric approach."

Addressing the nursing shortage

Stenberg's RDPN program curriculum includes lab, online courses, tutorial and clinical experience, taught and supervised by qualified psychiatric nursing instructors who, like Greenslade, have extensive experience in the field.

"This program is really a blessing and a gift because with the nursing shortage, this is exactly the direction that we need to go," she says.

According to the Canadian Nurses Association (2007), the average registered nurse employed in the mental health field is over 46 years old. Canada can expect a shortage of 78,000 registered nurses by 2011 and up to 113,000 by 2016—a shortage that includes registered psychiatric nurses.

Here in B.C., where the number of retiring nurses is exceeding the number of graduates, Stenberg offers its students a shorter route to a career in psychiatric nursing. While other programs in Canada typically range from three to four years in length, Stenberg students complete their theory and clinical practice in less than two years.

Another unique feature of the RDPN program, offered only at Stenberg, is its special access for Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs). Experienced LPNs are encouraged to apply for advanced standing in the program through Stenberg's Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition process, which enables eligible LPNs to shed 240 hours off their clinical training.

"A program like this makes it so much easier for students to enter the field, which means we help fill that gap faster and put people in a profession that helps others," says Greenslade.

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"Leaders on their feet"

It was Stenberg's shorter route to psychiatric nursing that initially attracted Daisy Martinez to the program.

"I always wanted to work in health care facilities, but didn't have the money," explains Martinez, who immigrated to Surrey from the Philippines in 2002.

"A lot of my friends are in health care and they used to see me volunteer at the church—if ever there was someone who was depressed or needed help I would always be there for them," says Martinez. "My friends would always tell me that I should become a nurse, but I didn't have four years to become an RN.

"But then my friend told me she had heard about a program that could be completed online in two

years. She asked me if I had ever heard of psychiatric nursing and I had."

Today, Martinez has completed her theory and clinical hours and is about to sit her national registration exams.

"It's funny," she says, "what I liked most about the program is exactly what was so challenging about it. At Stenberg, because school is mostly online, you learn time management very quickly.

"It's what can be so hard, but also what prepares you for life after school."

"This program in a lot of ways is much more challenging than when I went to school," says Greenslade, who teaches her students remotely from Kamloops. "With online learning, these guys are really required to take initiative and to critically think on their feet from day one."

Having been both a distance education student and an online instructor, Keath understands the unique opportunities and challenges online learning presents.

"It's interesting having taught online because you tend to get a more enriching dialogue than you might in a classroom," says Keath. "And because you're online it forces you to manage your time better so leadership skills are sort of inherent in online learners.

"It's a different mode of learning, not everybody can learn that way, but those who can come out a stronger nurse because they're leaders on their feet already," she adds.

Purvis, who is currently completing her Master of Nursing degree, and who has also studied online, says that Stenberg's program can still take people by surprise.



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“Sometimes nurses can’t believe that there’s a program online; it even took me some time to wrap my head around it, but our numbers definitely don’t lie!”

With a 100 per cent pass rate in their psychiatric nursing registration exams, and with 96 per cent of Stenberg graduates securing employment in their field within four weeks of graduation, Stenberg’s innovative online program has certainly been a success.

A rewarding career

After moving to Kelowna from Prince George, Mike Gill wanted a new start, but wasn’t interested in a traditional classroom setting.

“I was looking for a new direction in life, a new path,” he explains. “I have a business degree from UNBC and I worked in that field for about five years, but I wanted to do something different.”

For Gill, online learning was a perfect fit.

“You have to be an independent kind of person, but that lends itself to the field of psychiatric nursing anyway because what I’m discovering now is that you have to be able to figure stuff out and use your deductive skills,” he says.

Within one month of graduating, Gill began work-

ing as a casual RPN at Kelowna General Hospital (KGH) and the Vernon Jubilee Hospital. He credits his preceptorships at both hospitals for paving the way to employment.

“I applied for a job at KGH and had an interview the same week I wrote my registration exam. That’s something I never imagined would happen; getting a job so quickly.”

Today, he is enjoying the fast-paced nature of psychiatric nursing in a hospital setting, but hopes to one day pursue community nursing.

“Listening is a real gift,” says Martinez. “It’s true in every job, but in nursing it’s especially important.”

“One of my instructors at Stenberg—one of my mentors really—painted the picture early on in our schooling that, yes there is a community aspect of psychiatric nursing, but in that setting you’re basically flying solo in the community, so I’ve been focusing on the acute side of things to develop my skills and learn a bit more,” says Gill.

“Eventually I would like to work in the community, but for the time being I’m pretty content just

learning and working with a team.”

As for the rewards of psychiatric nursing, both Gill and Martinez say the best thing about the job is helping their clients.

“Our clients are usually at a time in their lives where they’re hurting,” explains Gill. “You have to be genuinely caring and empathetic to their situation.”

“Listening is a real gift,” says Martinez. “It’s true in every job, but in nursing it’s especially important.”

“There are times that you don’t need to speak—sometimes just being there and being available to a client is therapeutic in itself.”

Greenslade, who dreams of one day winning the lottery and opening a hospice care facility, is proud of the genuine empathy and understanding Stenberg-educated RPNs demonstrate in the field.

“They just keep going in the right direction in terms of professionalism and reputation,” says Greenslade.

“Stenberg genuinely cares about the type of nurses we want working in the field.”

For more information on Stenberg College’s Regional Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing program visit www.StenbergCollege.com or call Toll-Free: 1-87-STENBERG.

Stenberg College appoints Dr. Jacquollyne Keath as new Dean of Psychiatric Nursing

Stenberg College is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Jacquollyne Keath, RPN, RN, BA, CPMHN(C), MA, PhD to the position of Dean of Psychiatric Nursing effective October 15, 2009.

Jacquollyne has previously served as Executive Director/Registrar for the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of British Columbia and has also served on the CRPNBC Board of Directors and on several College committees, including the Registration, Nursing Education & Practice and Inquiry Committees.

She will also be familiar to many in the nursing and mental health communities through her teaching roles in the psychiatric nursing programs at both Douglas College and more recently at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, where she played a significant role in developing the first baccalaureate degree programs in psychiatric nursing in British Columbia – two of only three such programs in Canada. She has also taught practical nursing at Canadian Health Care Academy in New Westminster, BC.

Jacquollyne's academic credentials include diplomas in both Psychiatric Nursing and Registered Nursing, a Bachelor's in Music, a Master of Hypnotherapy degree and a Doctoral



Degree in Counseling Psychology from Southwest University. She is currently working on advanced studies in Natural Medicine with Global College of Natural Medicine (GCNM). Jacquollyne also brings to the role of Dean a wealth of work experience in psychiatric nursing, including a background in independent practice and previous employment in positions encompassing all of the domains of the profession: clinical practice, administration, education and research.

Dr. Keath's significant appointments include: Program Coordinator positions at both Douglas College and Kwantlen Polytechnic University; community based urgent, emergent, and

mental health crisis intervention experience with the Surrey Central Mental Health Team and Car 67 (a joint initiative between Surrey Health Services and the RCMP); Staff Nurse and supervisory roles with the Ministry for Children and Families at The Maples and Youth/Youth Forensic Services in Burnaby, and with the Ministry of Attorney General at the Burnaby Youth Secure Custody Centre; in-patient psychiatric services at Surrey Memorial Hospital; and experience as a Clinical Nurse Specialist/Consultant for the Howe Sound Home Support Sea-to-Sky In-Home Detox Program, among other appointments.

In making the announcement, Stenberg College's Executive Director, Jeremy Sabell said that "we are extremely fortunate to have been successful in recruiting a candidate of Dr. Keath's caliber and experience to assume the expanding role of Dean of Nursing from a field of very well-qualified candidates. We look forward to working closely with Jacquollyne as Stenberg sets a new course to tackle the many dynamic and exciting challenges that lie ahead for the profession of psychiatric nursing in BC, in Canada and beyond."

Tracey Purvis appointed Program Coordinator

Stenberg College is pleased to announce the appointment of Tracey Purvis, RPN BHSn as Program Coordinator for their Regional Psychiatric Nursing program. Tracey graduated from Douglas College with a diploma in Psychiatric Nursing and has been registered with the CRPNBC since 1997. She began her nursing practice in the area of forensic psychiatry and correctional nursing, both in BC and in Alberta, while at the same time continuing her nursing education with courses for the Advanced Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing. In 2003 Tracey graduated with a Bachelor of Health Science (Nursing) from Charles Sturt University (CSU) in Australia.

Tracey began teaching practical nursing in 2005 and later joined the faculty of the Bachelor of Psychiatric Nursing program at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in 2007 where she taught in both the BPN and BSN programs and had the opportunity to develop and write course material as well as teach in clinical and classroom settings. During this time, Tracey worked with Dr. Keath and formed a positive and effective working relationship. Both Tracey and Dr. Keath are excited about the opportunity to work together again and to take Stenberg's Regional Psychiatric Nursing program to the next level.

Over the past decade, Tracey has enjoyed various leadership positions, including consultation for youth in foster care, and she has continued her journey of educational growth by joining the Master of Nursing program at CSU specializing in mental health. This degree will be completed in 2010.

Having been a student in numerous distance education/distributed learning courses, Tracey has specific experience to add to her classroom and clinical teaching knowledge that will be of great benefit to Stenberg's students and faculty. Stenberg College's Executive Director, Jeremy Sabell, adds that "we are very much looking forward to having her on the team and seeing her considerable energy, enthusiasm and talent brought to bear on the various challenges inherent in delivering exceptional education in an online format."

Stenberg College's Regional Psychiatric Nursing Diploma program

In 2006, the Regional Online Diploma in Psychiatric Nursing offered by Stenberg College received approval to run its first cohort of students and this is the first and only such program in Canada. The program runs for twenty three months, during which time students undertake 1400 hours of clinical practice (400 hours more than the stipulated requirement, *CRPNBC, 2007*) most often in their own local areas. Students also undertake 560 hours of psychiatric nursing theory courses (60 more than the stipulated requirement), 280 hours of general nursing theory courses (55 more than the stipulated requirement) and 180 hours of applied equivalents and/or related course hours (*Stenberg College, 2007*). What is unique about this program is that all the theory courses are delivered as online courses. Apart from a two day 'Orientation' at the beginning of the program, there is no 'traditional', face-to-face delivery of the theory courses.

In April 2008, the program produced its first graduating class of 28 successful diplomates. Each of these diplomates sat their registration exams (in various regions around the province) and achieved a **100% pass rate**. Furthermore, within 4 weeks of graduation, 96% became registered psychiatric nurses and secured employment as nurses.

For more information on the Regional Psychiatric Nursing Diploma Program at Stenberg College go to www.stenbergcollege.com or contact Stenberg College at 604-580-2772.