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UNH Department of Social Work Chosen for National Curriculum Development Grant

By Sharon Keeler
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DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire's Department of Social Work has been selected as one of seven programs nationwide to undergo a curriculum review focused on improving and expanding teaching in the area of psychopharmacotherapy.

The review is being conducted by Rosemary Farmer, assistant professor of social work at Virginia Commonwealth University, who was awarded a grant by the Ittleson Foundation, a non-profit organization in New York that serves the needs of the underprivileged. One of the foundation's primary programs focuses on mental health, and the grant will be used to improve best practices for clinical social workers.

Psychopharmacotherapy is the use of medications to change brain function. These drugs are used to treat such mental illnesses as anxiety, bipolar disorder, and depression.

"More and more social workers are encountering clients who are taking psychotropic medications, therefore it's important for them to know about the medications, how they work in the body, what the positive and negative side effects are, and generally how to assist clients who are using these medications," says Farmer. "It is our belief that this content must be included in MSW curriculum no matter where social workers eventually work -- schools, mental health clinics, prisons, hospitals, homeless shelters, social service agencies, etc."

Angie Rice, assistant professor of social work at UNH,
wrote the proposal that secured UNH's involvement and is directing the review process. In-service training with social work faculty was conducted last semester and course modules are being reviewed for inclusion in established classes at the university.

"One of our objectives is to help fight the stigma associated with mental illness, and students have asked for more information on psychopharmacotherapy," Rice says. "Our goal is to develop a course that would help meet the needs of our social work students as well as students from other health and human service disciplines. With this knowledge, our graduates will be on the cutting edge of their fields."

According to Farmer, UNH's Department of Social Work was chosen to participate in the grant based on its current curriculum content in psychopharmacology and what it needed to enhance its teaching. Geographic diversity was also considered, and UNH's ability to reach rural populations matched one of the grant's objectives.

Other schools chosen to participate in the Ittleson Foundation grant include the Saint Louis University School of Social Service, Washington University George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Portland State University School of Social Work, Gallaudet University Department of Social Work, Yeshiva University School of Social Work, and Wichita State University School of Social Work.

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