“Nursing is both an art and a science,” declares Pamela Kallmerten, program director of the online clinical nurse leader and evidence-based nursing programs at UNH.

The science of her nursing career is evidenced by Kallmerten’s extensive work experience, encompassing critical and emergency care, cardiac and surgical intensive care, occupational health and school nursing. The art of her work becomes apparent when Kallmerten discusses her role as an educator and mentor for students.
Heeding a long-held dream of teaching and nursing, her journey began by earning an RN license from Christ Hospital School of Nursing in Ohio followed by a B.S. in nursing science from Colby-Sawer College in New Hampshire and a master of science in critical care nursing from Northeastern University. She completed a doctor of nursing practice (DNP) from the University of New Hampshire as well as a Ph.D. of philosophy in nursing science from Duquesne University.

Having served with the Central NH Emergency Associates and LRG Healthcare of New Hampshire, Kallmerten has also worked in a wide range of acute and community medical settings in New England and Ohio. She is a registered nurse and certified clinical nurse leader, accepting her first full-time teaching position at Concord Community College in New Hampshire in 1999, and joining the UNH nursing department as a faculty member in 2012.

With a strong interest in healthcare technology, her DNP quality improvement project explored the use of an online portal to provide unit patients at Concord Hospital with direct access to their health records. As a Ph.D. student, Kallmerten brought this concept to the next level by targeting portal access for cardiovascular patients to use as a tool for health literacy while working toward better self-care. Surveying the results, she noted frustration among some users who struggled to overcome the initial login and authentication steps.

Says Kallmerten: “I divide the individual portal users into two groups – digital immigrants and digital natives – to differentiate users who have difficulty mastering the portal from those who are comfortable with this technology. Interestingly, many of the social determinants of health such as genetics, behavior, environment and demographics often align with this technological mastery definition.”

“When I see former students provide nursing care for me or my family, I am humbled by the real-life cycle of student-to-nurse and educator-to-patient. As educators, we prepare nurses to care for our community, for our families, for ourselves. Their success lights up my heart.”

Noting that American hospitals are blanketed with the beeping noises and flashing lights of modern healthcare equipment, Kallmerten points out that, although technology delivers on resource efficiency and automated medical alerts, it also leads to well-documented “alarm fatigue” among nurses and a loss of the quietude patients need for a healthy recovery.

Kallmerten is gravely concerned about the growing shortage of qualified nurses. She talks about “nurse burnout” resulting from increasingly long work shifts and lack of internal support. Diminishing job satisfaction has spurred professionals to accelerate retirement plans or pursue other careers. A resulting side effect is that hospital patients may receive fewer hours of care, which means many of them are discharged at a higher acuity rate, placing a heavier burden on family caregivers and home health services.
Responsible for the clinical nurse leader component of the new online DNP CNL program at UNH, Kallmerten is excited about the dual leadership degree. She explains that while the CNL portion of the program centers on process improvement at a microsystem level, the DNP training is geared for the macrosystem level. Creating this specialty DNP degree uniquely positions UNH graduates for a wide span of leadership opportunities in the nursing field. Offering an online DNP CNL option broadens the university’s student base and provides an alternate career path to the traditional nurse practitioner program.

Drawing lessons from her own online experience as a graduate student, Kallmerten was “thrilled to take a course from a well-known nursing expert in another state without leaving my home. For online students, geography becomes irrelevant.” Given the popularity of online learning among working professionals, she strives to foster an atmosphere of interactive communication and individualized student support.

Her happy memory of a UNH nursing graduate caring for Kallmerten’s daughter during childbirth elicits the heart-felt gratification of a teacher witnessing the achievements of her students along their professional journey.

“When I see former students provide nursing care for me or my family, I am humbled by the real-life cycle of student-to-nurse and educator-to-patient,” says Kallmerten with a bright smile. “As educators, we prepare nurses to care for our community, for our families, for ourselves. Their success lights up my heart.”

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