

THE ACCELERATED MASTER'S FOR NON-NURSES

by Doug Gillett

It's never too late to become a nurse. Some UABSON students knew when they were very young that they wanted to be nurses, but others felt the call later in life—and many of them are giving up lucrative careers to heed that call.

For the latter group, the school now offers an accelerated curriculum that will allow students with bachelor's degrees in fields other than nursing to earn master's degrees in nursing in just two years—even if their undergraduate degrees are in fields totally unrelated to health care. “The educated nurse is your best bet,” says Dean Doreen Harper, PhD, RN, FAAN, “and these people are hungry for careers in professional nursing. That's why we can accelerate the content for them and distill it down to something they can move through quickly—because they come to us with a base of critical thinking and other skills.”

Currently under the direction of Sylvia Britt, DSN, RN, the first year of the program's curriculum is structured to prepare qualified students to be registered nurses. Students are then eligible to apply to sit for the RN-NCLEX exam, and once they pass that test they will practice in graduate residencies while completing the requirements for their master's degrees.

“Normally, it would take two years just to get a bachelor's degree,” Harper explains. “In the two-year accelerated master's program, the first year is focused on preparation for an RN license, with the second year focused on completion of a graduate-nurse residency and the requirements for the master's degree. And if you want to move on to advanced practice, you'll be able to move into an advanced-practice role or a PhD role—it just depends on what pathway you select at the graduate level.”

The program recently received big boosts

in the form of grants from both the Hill Crest Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, but Harper notes that UAB Health System has been a vital partner from the very beginning—not only did they donate \$1 million to help get the program up and running, but they've also offered a wide array of residency opportunities for these students. “This provides a potential pool of nurses who can work as RNs in the hospital while they continue their graduate work—much like we do with graduate medical education in terms of residencies—and also a pool of people who choose UAB as the place where they want to learn. They're looking at the next stage of their career development, and they have potential to stay in Birmingham and serve this area's health-care needs.

“Even when students go on to grad school, they often stay close to where they want to live and where they want to settle,” Harper says. “That's the kind of student we're recruiting here, because we really do want to see students live and work in Alabama and serve the needs of the state.”

The first class of accelerated master's students began in May, but even before the official start date, UABSON representatives were going to colleges and career fairs and compil-

ing lists of people interested in enrolling. “In some ways the nursing shortage has helped educate the public about the value of this profession,” Harper says. “And people are looking through a different lens in terms of careers and opportunities.”

That's evidenced by the diverse group of people who have expressed interest in the new curriculum. “Some are Peace Corps volunteers, and some are out doing social work; I've even talked to engineers in this program who have had enough health-care experiences to know that they really want to work with people,” Harper says. “So they're choosing to do this based on previous careers and life experiences, making nursing a very rich and rewarding choice. This will become a very attractive program as the need for nurses increases over the next three decades.”



Assistant professor Sylvia Britt, second from right, heads a program that will put new nurses through the academic “pipeline” more quickly than ever before.