

Denise Coppa, PhD, URI nursing professor, awarded \$1.6M grant to partner with health agencies

Key goals: graduate 109 new nurse practitioners, build faculty capacity

KINGSTON – University of Rhode Island Nursing Professor **DENISE COPPA, PhD, RNP**, has been awarded a \$1.6 million federal grant to establish academic and clinical partnerships with two Rhode Island community health centers.

URI was one of 21 schools chosen from the 300 that applied nationally.

The federal Health Resources and Services Administration grant will support collaboration between URI's College of Nursing and Providence Community Health Centers and Thundermist Health Centers to improve advanced nursing practice and primary care access for medically underserved individuals, many of whom live in poverty. The centers will use clinical faculty from the College of Nursing to partner with their own nurse practitioners to mentor students in their agencies and patient homes. This mentoring will improve students' readiness to practice upon graduation.

The project also calls for the URI College of Nursing's Nurse Practitioner Programs, in partnership with these agencies, to prepare 109 family nurse practitioner and adult/gerontological nurse practitioner students over three years at either the master's degree or doctoral levels. Twenty-five percent of those enrolled will be from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

At URI, nurse practitioner students are prepared at the master's degree or doctoral levels, and are eligible to become licensed primary care providers authorized to: order, perform and

interpret diagnostic tests such as lab work and X-rays; diagnose and treat acute and chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, infections, and injuries; prescribe medications and other treatments and manage patients' overall care.

"This is an endorsement of our program," Coppa said. "All URI nurse practitioner students will be prepared to a high level of safe, quality, culturally fluent health care within the complex practice-based environment of the nation's evolving health care system. This grant project is a direct result of the Affordable Care Act, which is calling for new models that address access to primary care by underrepresented groups. We should be proud that URI is a leader in educating advanced practice nurses to provide this critical, comprehensive care, in collaboration with two well respected community health centers."

Since URI must demonstrate the effectiveness of the project to the federal government, Coppa and her team will be researching patient satisfaction with care, preceptor satisfaction, the level of competency among nurse practitioner students, patient outcomes, workforce development and enhancement of nurse practitioner clinical education.

The need for primary care is great



Denise Coppa, PhD, RNP

right now, as 70,000 Rhode Islanders have been added to the state Health Exchange, and there are still individuals without health insurance. Both groups are potential patients at the centers participating in the project.

The grant allows URI to hire four new nurse practitioner faculty members, two of whom will be assigned to Thundermist. Through the Woonsocket branch, the faculty members will provide primary care in patients' homes and oversee nurse practitioner candidates who will gain clinical proficiency during those visits. The other two will provide primary care and oversee students at the Providence Community Health Centers.

"The home visits resemble the public health models of the 1940s when nurses visited families in their homes and assessed the entire environment—health of family members, sanitation and home conditions," Coppa said.

Other major goals of the program are:

- Increasing by 36 percent the number of clinical placements for URI nurse practitioner programs due to a larger pool of experienced preceptors, allowing the College of Nursing to accept more students.
- Increasing the ability of the agencies to recruit nurse practitioner candidates in their last semester of study to participate in pre-graduate fellowships. ❖