

ALUMNI connections

From Obstetrics to Indigenous Education

Heather Bensler, BN'96,
takes an unconventional
career path

SPRING 2018

Alumni President's Message	2
Nursing Alumni Give Back	3
The Unconventional Nurse	4
Caring for the Caregivers	6
5 Healthy Lifestyle Tips for Nurses	8

Message from your Alumni Committee President

Reflections on contributing to your alma mater

SATURDAY, MAY 5, 2018

Annual Faculty of Nursing Alumni Luncheon
Calgary Winter Club

For more information, contact Judy Hanson
nursingevents@ucalgary.ca
403.241.0394



CONNECT WITH KATE
@ INSTAGRAM @kklwong2

Kate Wong, President, Alumni Committee, Faculty of Nursing

My past five years with the Alumni Executive has given me many opportunities to contemplate the ways we give back to students, to the faculty and to our community. When I speak to our graduates about alumni and our focus on engagement, many are surprised that our main objective is not fundraising. Scholarships, bursaries and other financial contributions are certainly appreciated and provide meaningful opportunities for our students and faculty. However, the Alumni Executive's focus is on our

alum's relationship with each other, the Faculty of Nursing and with the University of Calgary. There are many ways in which our alumni contribute to the Faculty of Nursing community. Our alum participate as "patients" in our simulation lab. Graduates attend events and seminars hosted by the faculty/alumni. And NurseMentor and Alumni Weekend are two new ways to stay connected with current and future alumni. Every time you take on a nursing student as a final focus preceptor or during their regular clinical hours, you are contributing to a community of nurses from the University of Calgary. I want you, our graduates, to know how proud the Faculty of Nursing is of your accomplishments, your passion, your dedication and your willingness to teach the next generation of RNs in our province. It has been my pleasure to connect with some of you during my years as president, and I am continually inspired by the talent and commitment our graduates have for the community we serve. I have never been more proud to be a graduate!

Kate Wong, BN'12
President, Alumni Committee, Faculty of Nursing

TWEETS FROM ALUMNI

Justin Burkett BN'14
@BurkettYYC



"Great speaking with another tireless healthcare advocate tonight. With #cannabislegalization and the #fentanylcrisis at the top of the list @GPTaylorMRD is working hard to improve healthcare across the country."

Barb Shellian BN'79, MN'83
@barbshellian



"A big shout out to all the nurses in AHS Calgary Zone (urban and rural) who are managing flu season pressures — my friends and colleagues — making a difference in difficult situations @AHS_YYCZone @canadanurses #YESThisIsNursing"

EnableYourCommunity
@Enable_YYC



"Our co-founder **Sue Crawford, BN'13** won first place & \$10K in the @GSA Calgary Innovation Dev Award @UCalgary tonight!"



Nursing alumni give back

Male alumni and nursing students share perspectives on nursing career possibilities with high-school guys.

Panel shares why nursing is a viable career path for men

Every fall, an annual recruitment event brings together male nursing students and our male alumni in a panel discussion with prospective men interested in a career as a nurse. While the information session attracts a small audience, it makes a huge difference to how the attendees look at nursing.

"I had no idea about all the possibilities with this career," says Shaun Boyd, a grade 11 high

school student who attended the 2017 session in November with his father.

"Talking to these guys who have been there and know the program and can talk about the good and the bad was a cool opportunity. I am more excited than ever to make this happen for me."

Thanks to our six RNs and four students who took the time to share their knowledge!

Online mentoring program connects students with RNs

Who says you have to come to campus or even live in Calgary to give back? Case in point: our NurseMentor alumni volunteers! Currently, 18 mentors are enrolled in the pilot phase of this online mentorship network that pairs undergraduate students with RNs. While the majority of mentors live in the Calgary area, there are mentors from Vancouver as well as Toronto and points in-between.

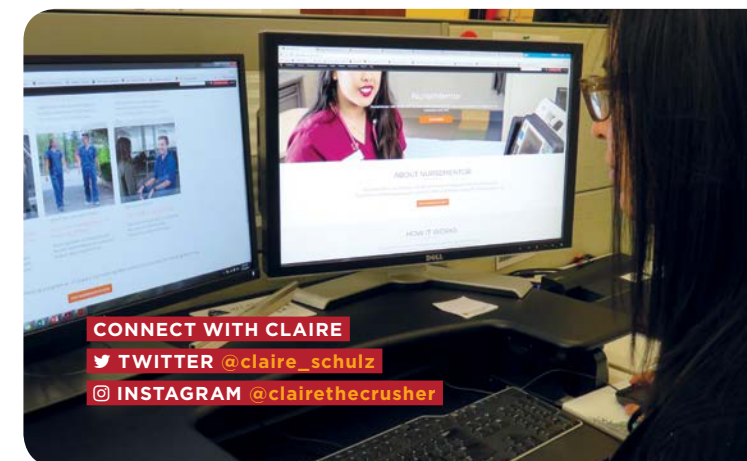
The program kicked off in September 2017 and while it hasn't been without technological glitches and a few 'missing in action' mentees, the feedback has been largely positive. NurseMentor coordinator **Claire Schulz, BN'17**, says the suggestions and solutions from both mentors and mentees helps to shape what the program can be moving forward.

"We are sending monthly evaluations, asking questions about what the matches are talking

about and potential areas where we need to make changes," explains Schulz. "The point of the pilot is to learn and to understand if the program is valuable to both alumni and students."

The pilot phase ends in April. Watch for the call to join NurseMentor (or re-enroll) this summer.

Learn more at
nursing.ucalgary.ca/nursementor



CONNECT WITH CLAIRE
TWITTER @claire_schulz
INSTAGRAM @clairethecrusher

Mentees and mentor feedback in the pilot program is helping to shape the future direction of the NurseMentor program.

The unconventional nurse

“
The unconventional routes that sometimes present themselves can lead you in a very satisfying direction in your career.”

—Heather Bensler, BN'96

Louise Baptiste (left) and Heather Bensler, directors of the Indigenous Initiatives at the Faculty of Nursing. Photo by Riley Brandt, University of Calgary.

Heather Bensler's career path has taken her from global health in South America to obstetrics and nursing education in Canada. Now, she's tackling Indigenous initiatives in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action for nursing schools

Heather Bensler, BN'96, readily admits she doesn't fit the stereotype of the 'classic nurse.'

"I always tell my students that you don't need to stick to a standard path," says Bensler, nursing instructor and co-director, Indigenous Initiatives at the Faculty of Nursing. "The unconventional routes that sometimes present themselves can lead you in a very satisfying direction in your career."

Bensler's career has been anything but conventional. Inspired by UCalgary instructor Ardene Vollman, in 1995, Bensler developed an early passion for community health. After seven years with Alberta Health Services as perinatal instructor, she capitalized on that community health knowledge and moved to Peru. There, she worked with the Indigenous People's Technology and Education Center (I-TEC), a faith-based organization that develops tools and training systems to help Indigenous communities in frontier areas to be self-sustaining.

"I was part of I-SEE, the optometry arm of I-TEC. I trained Indigenous leaders to diagnose simple eye disorders and to prescribe eyeglasses," says Bensler. The program continues to be used in South America, Africa and South-East Asia.

When Bensler returned to Canada, she discovered another passion — obstetrics — and completed her Master of Science in Nursing at Trinity Western University. "A colleague at the University of Alberta suggested that I may be a good post-secondary educator: that's when I was hired at Mount Royal University as an assistant professor."

That colleague nailed it, says Bensler, because education has become another area of excitement for her. "I am very interested in knowledge translation and how we, as nurses, can get people to shift their practice to align with the best evidence."

"There is a great opportunity with UCalgary to instill that into students," Bensler adds.

"The timing worked out for me. When my contract at MRU was up, I peeked north and this role with the faculty was posted."

The role is that of co-director for Indigenous Initiatives, a newly-created position in UCalgary's Faculty of Nursing in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) call-to-action for nursing schools.

"Our strength at the University of Calgary is that our curriculum is integrated," she says. "While the TRC asks for one course to speak to the impact of colonization and the concept of cultural safety, with our curriculum, we are able to thread it throughout."

Bensler's focus is on curriculum and faculty development. She is currently doing a needs assessment while also teaching one class. "What has already been implemented with vulnerable populations is impressive," she says. "My plans include developing Indigenous health-focused simulations, integrating Indigenous history into the curriculum through activities such as the blanket exercise and providing lunch and learns for faculty. We have already visited a few Canadian universities that are doing amazing work with their Indigenous students and will be incorporating some of our learnings from there."

In August, Bensler and her fellow director, Louise Baptiste, will present on their progress at the faculty's quarterly alumni breakfast, Food for Thought. As for her new role, Bensler is keen about the possibilities.

"It's a little overwhelming and a very big job," adds Bensler, "but a very important one."

CONNECT WITH HEATHER

TWITTER @HBensler

INSTAGRAM @tallgirlinperu



"A Shared Journey towards Reconciliation through an Indigenous Strategy within the Faculty of Nursing"

Breakfast Lecture Series

August 24, 2018 | Senate Room, Hotel Alma
nursing.ucalgary.ca/breakfast-series

From left, Star Mahara, Baptiste and Bensler at Thompson Rivers University.

Caring for the caregivers

Members of the faculty community put the spotlight on those people who dedicate time and energy to caregiving as professionals, family members and friends



For his web series, Mike Lang, MSc'15, works with caregivers to create a short digital story about their journey and the resulting stories are shared with family, friends and colleagues.

The concept and field of caregiving has expanded as the demands on the health-care system have increased. In today's world, caregiving is provided by a diverse range of individuals — professional and non-professional — who either through necessity or interest in the quality of life and health have taken on the responsibility as a family or friend caregiver. However, balancing other competing demands takes its toll on that caregiver. Here are how some in the Faculty of Nursing community are trying to make it better for today's caregiver.

DOME course helps caregivers of dementia patients practice mindfulness

Mindfulness is key when caregiving for dementia patients, says clinical nurse specialist **Loralee Fox, MN'09**, who currently works for Alberta Health Services in specialized geriatric services at the Foothills Medical Centre.

"It's about looking at ourselves and what we're bringing into the picture as a caregiver, whether that be as a care partner or formal caregiver," says

Fox. She completed her Masters in Nursing at the University of Calgary with a focus on gerontology, specifically dementia. Her work focuses on person-centered care of those cognitively impaired with expertise on the non-pharmacological management of behaviours.

"We contribute through our own body posture, tone, language, our own responses and understanding of what is going on in the person with dementia," she says. Last year, Fox, along with nurse practitioner and UCalgary nursing instructor Kimberly Shapkin, started co-teaching a new course aimed at caregivers and individuals working with dementia patients. DOME (Dementia Opportunities for Mindfulness Education) was first offered as a six-week course in fall 2017. Fox says participants in that first session ranged from formal caregivers, volunteer and paid caregivers to nursing homecare providers and family and friends of loved ones with dementia. Topics included everything from communication strategies and importance of self-care to mindfulness tactics.

"With small steps, we can shift from tragedy and suffering," she says, "to healthy families and caregivers and communities that can do more to support, regardless of where they are living, so they can live with the disease rather than suffer through it."

Web series allows caregivers to share stories, in their own words

January 2018 marked the launch of the website Stories for Caregivers, developed by TELUS Fund. One of the three series featured on the site — *Being There: Helping Caregivers See Their Place in the Story* — was hosted and directed by nursing doctoral student and health narrative specialist **Mike Lang, MSc'15**, and produced by local production company Roadwest Pictures. In each episode, Lang works with a different caregiver to create a short digital story about their journey caring for someone with a critical illness or injury. These stories are screened and discussed with their family, friends and colleagues, resulting in organic conversations that help the audience understand what it means to be a caregiver.

"In Canada, we have about eight million active caregivers, most of whom are unrecognized and unpaid, and this number is expected to double within 30 years," says Lang, whose PhD research focuses on digital storytelling in a health-care setting. "We need to do more to support these caregivers who are invaluable to our system."

"In health care, we are very good at providing people facts and knowledge about illness or injury, but what we are not so good at is helping

people learn how to live well despite what has happened to them," says Lang. "Stories allow us to draw wisdom from other people's lives and apply it to our own. They can teach us how to live well in the midst of challenging health-care experiences."

Lang's doctoral supervisor, **Catherine Laing, BN'98, MN'08, PhD'13**, whose program of research includes the therapeutic benefits of digital storytelling on paediatric and young adolescent patients affected by cancer, agrees that stories can be of huge benefit to everyone.

"This creative way to address any kind of health journey allows both a patient or former patient, their families and the health-care professional insight into how illness has affected them. Mike's exploration with digital storytelling for caregivers will help others as they walk the same path."

Watch the web series
"Being There"
storiesforcaregivers.com



Photo by Irish Holash



CONNECT WITH MIKE

TWITTER @mikelangstories

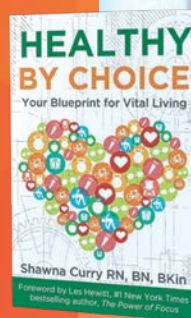
INSTAGRAM @mikelangstories

5 healthy lifestyle tips for nurses

Shawna Curry, BN'11, BKin'03, is a registered nurse, professional coach and international speaker who is passionate about making an impact on global health. After graduation from UCalgary, she worked in acute care at the Foothills Medical Centre and then in primary care as a chronic disease management nurse.

In 2014, she launched her company, Your Lifestyle Strategy, to offer clients total-health solutions and overall lifestyle strategies for everything from fitness and sleep to nutrition and self-help. Last year, she wrote and self-published a book called *Healthy by Choice: Your Blueprint for Vital Living* which became an Amazon bestseller less than 48 hours after its release.

Curry shares her advice here for nursing alumni on how to lead by example when it comes to health and wellness:



CONNECT WITH SHAWNA

TWITTER @takechargeyc

INSTAGRAM @yourlifestylestrategy

1. Prioritize your sleep

“Working shift work can dramatically affect your health. Poor quality or quantity of sleep can lead to mood changes, insulin resistance and weight gain. Create a sleep schedule to transition between your changing shifts and maximize your sleep quality. Take scheduled naps to supplement your sleep.”

2. Plan your meals

“By pre-planning your meals before a row of shifts, you’ll take the guess work out of meal time. Be in charge of what food goes in your body. Think of the temptations at the nursing desk on those long night shifts. You only have so much willpower in a day and by the time 3 a.m. rolls around, it’s likely all used up.”

3. Hit the gym

“Exercise helps to release endorphins which elevate your mood. High intensity workouts may not be the best combination with shift work, due to the increase in cortisol and adrenaline that they produce. Instead, do some form of resistance training at least three days per week and do something active on most other days.”

4. Learn to meditate

“Some nurses thrive on adrenaline-filled areas like Emergency or ICU, while others prefer more academic areas, management or research. Learn to meditate or use other relaxation techniques to help you cope with stress. Take slow deep breaths while you gather supplies or when giving your patient a bed bath. Your patients will pick up on your energy level; if you are calmer, they will be too.”

5. Have a strong support network

“We all have bad days. Sometimes, nursing bad days can be really bad. It’s incredibly important that you have someone that you can talk to — a friend or a trusted coworker who truly ‘gets it.’ Build your social circle to include people that bring you up.”

For more information,
please contact us

T +1.403.220.8336
E nconnect@ucalgary.ca

**Faculty of Nursing
University of Calgary**
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB T2N 1N4

nursing.ucalgary.ca

[Facebook](#) nursingucalgary
[Twitter](#) ucalgarynursing
[Instagram](#) ucalgarynursing
[LinkedIn](#) ucalgarynursing

Managing Editor
Karen Cook

Contributing Editor
Lynda Sea