College of Nursing dean named to advisory council on nurse and physician shortages

College of Nursing Dean Kathleen Ann Long is among a select group of national health-care leaders named to the newly created Council on Physician and Nurse Supply, which will address the growing problem of nurse and physician shortages. Council members will monitor data and act as advocates for change, advising legislators and others on ways the supply of nurses and physicians can be altered to meet the public's needs.

Council co-chairs are Richard "Buz" Cooper, M.D., and UF nursing alumna Linda Aiken, Ph.D., R.N., both professors at the University of Pennsylvania. The council is based in the University of Pennsylvania's Consortium for Health Workforce Research and Policy, a joint program of the schools of Nursing and Medicine and the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics.

The council’s goals are to bring objectivity to the study of physician and nurse supply and to shape public policy. Council members will examine a range of domestic and international issues that must be addressed as the United States attempts to better align its health-care workforce with its future health-care needs. It is the only multidisciplinary organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to addressing issues of nurse and physician supply.

Council members represent universities across the country as well as major hospitals and health-care organizations. —Tracy Brown Wright

Researcher works to remove barriers to breast cancer screening for women with physical disabilities

Women with physical disabilities have the same or greater risk of developing breast cancer as other women, but behavioral and environmental barriers can contribute to lower rates of breast cancer screening for women with disabilities.

Ellen Lopez, M.P.H., Ph.D., an assistant professor in the UF College of Public Health and Health Professions’ department of behavioral science and community health, is working to understand these challenges by examining the facilitators and barriers to proper breast cancer screening for women with physical disabilities. Her work is funded by a new $230,000 Special Population Grant from the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

“Personal attitudes and beliefs, along with environmental obstacles such as inaccessible health-care facilities, put women with disabilities at risk for late breast cancer diagnosis and poor health outcomes,” Lopez said.

One major deterrent for breast cancer screening is a lack of referral. “Factors impacting health-care providers performing or recommending screening for their patients with disabilities are as complex as those factors impacting women," Lopez said. "For example, the disability itself can pose a barrier to those providers for whom the disability becomes the sole focus of their patient/provider interaction."

In partnership with the Center for Independent Living of North Central Florida, Lopez and her research team, which includes Elena Andresen, Jill Castina, Eva Egensteiner, Lisa Hannold, William Kennedy, Melissa Lanzone and Vijay Vasudevan, will conduct in-depth interviews with 30 women with disabilities and 30 health-care providers to learn their perspective on cancer screening facilitators and barriers.

Additionally, six women will be given digital cameras to take photographs during a health-care visit. This approach draws from an innovative research method, known as Photovoice, to give participants an opportunity to visually document and share their experiences with researchers.

“The women will be able to take photographs that literally ‘show and tell’ the things that make seeking and receiving breast cancer screening easy or difficult during an actual health-care visit,” Lopez said.

Study results will be shared at interactive forums with the women and health providers who participated in the research.

“This research is just the first step in identifying issues that are important to women with disabilities, and it will set the stage for women in the community to be involved in the research as partners, not just participants,” Lopez said.

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