



Monday, May 12, 2003

## OU honors exceptional nurses

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Oakland University's **School of Nursing** and its Board of Visitors honored eight of Michigan's most outstanding nurses and helped raise funds for nursing scholarships and other department needs at the 15th annual **Nightingale Awards for Nursing**. The ceremony was held May 8 at the Best Western Sterling Inn Conference Center in Sterling Heights.

"I'm thrilled to be at an event with 650 people celebrating nursing," said Linda Thompson, newly appointed dean of OU's School of Nursing. "I'm proud to be coming to an institution that for 15 years has celebrated extraordinary nurses doing extraordinary things. Recognizing this activity is something I want to commend. All of us benefit from the wonderful things nurses do every day."

All licensed registered nurses working in the state are eligible for Nightingale awards. A selection committee reviews all nominations and rates candidates based on behaviors, achievements, community service and professional organizations. Committee members independently score each of those criteria and the top scoring candidates comprise the winners and runners-up.

Award winners received a bronze statue of Florence Nightingale, a Nightingale pin and \$1,000. Runners-up received a plaque, pin and a special edition of Nightingale's book "Notes on Nursing."

Among the more emotional acceptance speeches of the evening was one by Patricia Preston of the Oakwood Healthcare System, who received the award for staff nurse practice. Preston recounted her experience with a 5-year-old patient named J.J., who suffered severe spinal cord injuries and became a quadriplegic after being hit by a vehicle while crossing a street.

"I became J.J.'s home care nurse, and I could see from the moment that I first met her that she was a special patient," Preston said. "Her spirit became an inspiration. It was inconceivable to her to sit on the sidelines of life."

"I watched in awe as she grew up and became involved in activity after activity. She moved her wheelchair in sync with the other girls in cheerleading. We went horseback riding, worked in soup kitchens, went to concerts – we even went up in a hot air balloon. J.J. inspired holistic and human needs. In 1999, the Program for Exceptional Families was created at Oakwood, and J.J. was the first through the door."

J.J. passed away unexpectedly before her 14th birthday, and Preston took a moment to acknowledge her parents, who were in the audience.

"Though J.J. is gone, her spirit lives on," Preston said. "Thanks for raising such an amazing young girl."

The 2003 Nightingale award winners include:

### **NURSING ADMINISTRATION**

#### **Linda Harden, RN, BSN**

Harden is an administrative manager at Henry Ford Medical Group at the Taylor and Wyandotte sites. Developing and implementing a nurse-managed, computerized anticoagulation program in conjunction with the Dupont Corporation and implementing the "Save a Life" program designed to empower medical assistants and nurses to order mammograms for patients at office visits are among her achievements. Harden also volunteers with a medical team that travels annually to undeveloped countries such as Honduras, Haiti and Romania.

### **NURSING EDUCATION / RESEARCH**

#### **Remedios Solarte, RN, MSN**

Solarte is a nursing faculty member at Oakland Community College. She is recognized for her interpersonal skills, dedication to student learning, and leadership abilities as an educator and practitioner. She secured funding to redesign a major nursing course into a Web-based format. She also was instrumental in the development of a peer-mentoring program that paired more experienced with less experienced students in the clinical setting. Students in this program reported enhanced interpersonal relationships and increased confidence as a result of this experience.

## **CASE MANAGEMENT / NURSE ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

### **Connie Parliament, RN, BSN, CNRN**

Parliament is the neuroscience service line coordinator at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Oakland. In this role, she manages stroke victims through all phases of their care. Her commitment to improving outcomes for those who suffer from neurological events has increased patient satisfaction while decreasing length of stay and earned her recognition as a consultant for the National Stroke Registry, Ethos, based in Denver, Colo. She also significantly improved treatment time of stroke victims through her efforts with the Oakland County EMS team, dropping the Oakland County treatment time to below the national average.

## **HOME CARE**

### **Sally Raxter, RN, BSN**

Raxter is a maternal child nurse at Henry Ford Home Health Care. She is known for being a strong patient advocate. Raxter recently assisted a pregnant diabetic patient, new to this country, who was in need of care. The woman feared leaving her children with someone else when she attended medical appointments. Raxter was relentless in finding childcare, transportation and an interpreter so the mother could receive the care she needed to control her diabetes and deliver a healthy baby. During a home visit with another patient, Raxter noted the patient was having seizure activity. Raxter is credited with saving the patient's life by ensuring emergency care was given in spite of the patient's reluctance to go to the hospital.

## **LONG-TERM CARE / REHABILITATION PRACTICE**

### **Judith Yrjanainen, RN, BSN**

Yrjanainen is the community relation coordinator for the Inpatient RehabCentre at Crittenton Hospital Medical. A large part of her responsibility is to market the RehabCentre to physicians, payers and case managers. The RehabCentre has grown each year since she began her marketing role. External admissions to the center have increased 180 percent in the past five years. She also works for the RehabCare Group, a national rehabilitation management company, and her more than 140 peers there look to her expertise in the field.

## **STAFF NURSE PRACTICE**

### **Patricia Preston, RN, BSN**

Preston is a clinical nurse coordinator for the Program for Exceptional Families at Oakwood Healthcare System, where she works with children who have special needs. She was vital in establishing problem-focused, school-based clinics to identify children who may benefit from the program. These clinics have been critical in sharing information and coordinating services between schools and the medical community. Her focus on the holistic needs of exceptional families ultimately optimizes care, relieves family stress and enhances their lifestyles.

## **ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSING**

### **Linda Vanni, RN, MSN, CS**

Vanni is a clinical nurse specialist at Karmanos Cancer Institute's Pain Service. She created an epidural pilot program in 1991 that was so successful, she was asked to initiate a pain management program for the entire Detroit Medical Center. Her initial epidural program continues to be highly successful and is considered clinically advanced in relation to comparable operating facilities in the area. Vanni changed and expanded the program so that it could benefit cancer pain patients in an ambulatory setting, increasing the quality of life for countless patients.

## **OAKLAND UNIVERSITY DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD**

### **Sandra Szekely, RN, BSN**

Szekely is a nursing development specialist for Oakwood Healthcare System. She utilized funding from the Thompson-McCully Foundation of Plymouth, Mich., to establish scholarships for 15 lower-income students in their pursuit of a nursing career. She developed the application, scoring process, selection criteria and reimbursement procedure, then created a mentoring and support program to assure success for these individuals – many of whom had never attended college.

The **Nightingale Awards for Nursing** coincide annually with National Nurses Week and Florence Nightingale's birthday (May 12, 1820). For more information on the awards and OU's nursing program, visit the **School of Nursing** Web site, call (248) 370-4253 or e-mail [nrsinfo@oakland.edu](mailto:nrsinfo@oakland.edu).

## **SUMMARY**

The School of Nursing honored eight of Michigan's most outstanding nurses and helped raise funds for scholarships and other department needs at the 15th annual Nightingale Awards for Nursing. All licensed registered nurses working in the state are eligible for Nightingale awards.

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