







Nursing leaders: From left, Lily Orticio, Keith Buehner, and Stephanie Becherer represent School of Nursing and Health Studies alumni who are shaping the future of the nursing profession.

*For more than half a century, nursing education at the University of Miami has blended clinical practice and theoretical principles, modern technologies and ageless techniques, compassion that transcends borders and insights that advance frontiers—all with impressive gumption and rare grace. Here, a look back at a remarkable history as the school prepares for a bold new chapter in a magnificent new building.*

# VOICES VISIONS

**C**URIOS ABOUT THE FACE of nursing education today at the University of Miami? Take a look at Stephanie Becherer, B.S.N. '05—who considered various health care fields before realizing that the close patient interaction of nursing was “a better fit for my personality and goals.” Drawn to research for its potential to improve care, she wrote a thesis analyzing nurse-physician collaborative relationships and graduated summa cum laude. Now a nurse in the Cardiac ICU at Miami Children’s Hospital, she plans to begin work on a master’s degree. ~ Or Keith Buehner, B.S.N. '90, a nurse educator in hematology/oncology and the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit at Jackson Memorial Hospital and former president of the school’s alumni association. He began his career in law enforcement but was encouraged by family and friends to pursue nursing because of the challenges and rewards the profession offered. Says Buehner, “My B.S.N. opened so many doors and enabled me to see the big picture of nursing and health care.” ~ Or Lily Orticio, M.S.N. '89, M.B.A. '95. A nurse in the Philippines before

coming to the United States, Orticio earned her master’s while working at the Miller School of Medicine’s Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. Six years later, she returned for an M.B.A. Today Orticio juggles bedside care and administrative responsibilities as a nurse manager at Bascom Palmer while pursuing her nursing doctorate at UM. “The school’s growing focus on building data to guide care decisions reflects exciting advances in the field,” she says. “Nursing today is so diverse—there’s never been a better time to be part of it.” ~ Nor has there been a better time to study at the School of Nursing and Health Studies. Vibrantly diverse for decades, the school is a longtime leader in the development of innovative curricula, a compassionate member of the community at large, and among the first nursing institutions in the nation to offer a doctoral program. Now, as the school prepares to move into the new M. Christine Schwartz Center for Nursing and Health Studies, it’s an opportune time to reflect on a rich history of singular milestones and outstanding achievements—through the recollections of individuals who experienced and helped to create them.

BY BARBARA PIERCE



## Nurturing Nurses

With their impulse to ease human suffering, nurses are born. But they're also made with support, mentoring, and the leadership of strong role models.

I remember nursing school as a very nurturing experience, says Viki Solomon, B.S.N. '83. We were so young, and to gain the maturity to care for people is a growing process. We got to see our teachers as practicing nurses, not just as professors. Their priority was always the patient and that made a big impression on me.

Kathryn Keller, B.S.N. '78, Ph.D. '97, who was pursuing her doctoral degree in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, had no idea how she would possibly manage everything on her plate. I had three young children, a house with no roof, a job, and a dissertation to write, she says.

It was wild. But [faculty member] Nancy Hogan took me under her wing and guided me. She was so brilliant and supportive you just couldn't put a dollar value on it.

The school taught me a different way of thinking, says Keith Buehner, B.S.N. '90, an oncology nurse educator at Jackson Memorial Medical Center, and it changed me forever.

Dean [Evelyn] Barrett made a huge impact on me with her philosophy of holding true to the core values of nursing. These days, with care so complex, keeping sight of those values is more important than ever.

You don't always realize at the time how important your nursing school experiences are, reflects Solomon, who runs her own consulting firm and whose son is a freshman at UM. It's wonderful to be able to look back and realize you were in exactly the right place.



Back then, it was a very new idea to get a degree in nursing rather than a diploma.

ANN MARIE MCCRYSTAL  
R.N., B.S.N. '59

BACK IN 1939, there weren't many people with bachelor's degrees in nursing. The wife of new University of Miami history professor H. Franklin H. Williams was one of them. Before accompanying her husband to the tropical frontier, Florence Williams had been dean of nursing at the University of Kansas. In 1948 Mrs. Williams founded the University of Miami's Department of Nursing, where she would both lecture and lead for the next four years.

The first university-based nursing program in South Florida and only the second in the state, the department provided registered nurses with the opportunity to earn bachelor's of science degrees with a major in nursing. Some, like Kay Talbot, B.S. '52, had served in the

Army Nurse Corps and were pursuing their education on the G.I. Bill. "The classes were fascinating—comparative zoology, botany, organic chemistry, public health," Talbot recalls. "I had never been exposed to that theoretical perspective before."

Four years after its founding, the nursing major became an academic department within the College of Arts and Sciences, and alumna Dora Mae Eldridge, B.S. '50, R.N., Ph.D. (later Dora Mae Blackmon), became its first

full-time faculty member and department chair. In addition to promoting the advantages offered by a college degree in nursing, Blackmon took concrete steps to make the choice more appealing to college-bound high school graduates. She set the program on a regular academic year and enhanced the curriculum with courses in the humanities and social sciences.

"Back then, it was a very new idea to get a degree in nursing rather than a diploma," recalls Ann Marie McCrystal, B.S.N. '59, chair of the Visiting Nurse Association and Hospice Foundation of Vero Beach, Florida, and a member of the department's fourth graduating class. "From the get-go it was an excellent department and wonderful experience." McCrystal went on to become part of the first open-heart surgery team at Jackson Memorial Medical Center. "It was tremendously exciting," she says, "and all the drama I needed."

Meanwhile, the protracted, often-tense transition from diploma training to baccalaureate education led to its own dramatic moments. "The controversy over whether nursing was an art or a science, and whether nurses should be educated or trained, became more intense during my years at the school," recalls Betty Alvarez, B.S.N. '65, a diabetes educator. "Yet, despite the debate, I had a very positive experience."

"We diploma grads thought that the bachelor's program students didn't know what they were doing," recalls Elizabeth "Bets" Anderson, Dr.P.H., M.S.N., R.N., B.S.N. '68, who wryly refers to herself as one of the R.N. 'retreads.' "After all, we had years of experience and could run any unit; they could barely take care of one or two people at first. But they had a broad theoretical education, while we just had training. And the R.N.'s who could see beyond our background knew that this was where nursing had to go."

## A SCHOOL OF ONE'S OWN

When Blackmon resigned in 1967, Barbara Buchanan, M.S.N., R.N., a professor of psychiatric nursing, was appointed acting chair of the nursing department. "I remember my mother telling my dad that the department was going to be closed," recalls her daughter, Kathryn Keller, B.S.N. '78, Ph.D. '97, now associate professor of nursing at Florida Atlantic University. "She was active in a campaign to keep it open, so she was asked to step in. She was bright and charismatic, but she didn't really want to be an administrator. You could call her the reluctant dean."

"Barbara pulled nursing through a tough time at the University," says Dolores Chambreau, B.S.N. '67, a former administrator at the Miami VA Medical Center. "A lot of people still wondered why we needed a nursing school when there was a diploma program at Jackson. It was precarious at times, but it never entered my mind that nursing education at the University of Miami wouldn't survive. Every time we thought it would go down, something good would happen."

In 1968 two very good things happened. The National League for Nursing accredited the B.S.N. program for the first time, and the Department of Nursing became a freestanding school. Still the struggle for support continued. "One year when I was president of the school's alumni association, I slipped President Henry King Stanford a handwritten invitation to one of our homecoming events in a receiving line," recalls Chambreau. "He came, and our fortunes perked up for awhile. In fact, his daughter later enrolled in the program."

What I really wanted to do was get out and improve the health of thousands of people.

ELIZABETH BETS  
ANDERSON, DR.P.H.,  
M.S.N., R.N., B.S.N. '68



## Community Caring

Since the school's earliest days, faculty, students, and alumni have tended to the health needs of the community at large. Among UM's first nursing graduates, Sima Gebel, B.S.N. '53, C.N.P. '76, oversaw the care of afflicted youngsters from around Florida and as far away as South America while working at Miami Children's Hospital (then known as Variety) at the height of the polio epidemic.

After Hurricane Andrew devastated Miami in 1992, school faculty led by Dean Diane Horner started a clinic in hard-hit South Dade. We were on our way to check on [fellow faculty member] Donna Pfeiffer's house, when priests came out of a nearby church and asked us if we were nurses, recalls Professor Emeritus Patricia Clunn.

We started the clinic right there.

At first, supplies were so scarce that the team was sometimes forced to try patients' home remedies.

Even after student volunteers and other faculty members began rotating through, Pfeiffer worked at the clinic for a year, putting off repairs to her badly damaged home. The clinic was later incorporated into the school's transcultural and community health coursework.

The impulse to broaden the scope of care is a natural one for many nurses. I could work with a few patients a day in the hospital, explains alumna Elizabeth Bets Anderson, B.S.N. '68, now a respected public health expert and professor at the University of Texas Medical Branch. But what I really wanted to do was get out and improve the health of thousands of people.

Anderson adds, Under the current dean, the school is defining the community in global terms. And that's very appropriate, because Miami is so international.

1948

Registered nurses admitted to the College of Arts and Sciences for Bachelor of Science degrees with a major in nursing.

1952

Ten freshmen admitted to new Department of Nursing in the College of Arts and Sciences.

1953

Sima Gebel, B.S.N. '53, C.N.P. '76, among the University's first nursing graduates.



1956

Department of Nursing graduates its first group of students.

Barbara Buchanan was appointed dean of the School of Nursing in 1968.

1968

National League for Nursing accredits the baccalaureate program.



BSN

1968

The nursing department is transferred to the medical campus and officially becomes the School of Nursing.

1972

First family nurse practitioner program begins.

1976

17 students enroll in the new Master of Science in Nursing program.

1978

The school adds new tracks in nurse-midwifery and psychiatric-mental health.





In the early 1980s, as the school's doctoral program was finding its legs, the already-diverse city of Miami was rocked by a major influx of foreign arrivals, including boatloads of *Marielitos*. [Nursing professor] Lydia DeSantis saw it all coming, recalls Viki Solomon, B.S.N. '83. She told us that so many more people from the Caribbean and Latin America would come to Miami, one day English would no longer be the main language. I was struck by that prediction at the time and wondered if it would come true. And, of course, it did.

Tent cities of Haitians and Cubans sprang up around Miami. The new arrivals had cultures, world views, and concepts of sickness and health so different from standard American views that some organizations used health brokers in an attempt to bridge the divide. The tumultuous events intensified the city's urgent need for nursing education that crossed cultural frontiers.

A few years later, doctoral program faculty received a federal grant to create a Transcultural Nursing Institute. DeSantis, a nurse anthropologist, was one of its leaders. Among the first in the nation, the institute sought to imbue a culturally sensitive perspective throughout the curriculum.

Transcultural nursing is designed to help nurses set aside their own cultural biases and not impose them on their patients, says Professor Emeritus Georgie Labadie, Ph.D., R.N. With the amazing blend of cultures we have in Miami, around the country, and across the generations, the transcultural nursing perspective is still very pertinent.



MASTERING THE ART OF NURSING

As advanced nursing education gathered steam nationwide, the school kept pace. In 1976 the school enrolled 17 students in its new M.S.N. program—the state's first. Over the next several years, the program added several concentrations. Each new program represented an exhaustive effort. "You had to do a feasibility study, get faculty members interested, and find the money," recalls Professor Emeritus Patricia Clunn, Ph.D., R.N.

The era also spawned lasting triumphs. Buchanan recruited Theresa Gesse, a leader in nurse-midwifery education, to develop a similar program at UM's nursing school. Writing proposals, wading through mountains of paperwork, and working tirelessly, Gesse initiated

The future of nursing is rooted in evidence-based practice and applying that knowledge to improve patient care and outcomes.

LUISA ANGEL, R.N., B.S.N. '02

the state's first university-based nurse-midwifery program in 1978. "Its funding was a big milestone," recalls Professor Emeritus Patricia Dempsey, Ph.D., R.N.

In 1980 Evelyn R. Barrett, R.N., Ph.D., L.H.D., dean of the University of Iowa's School of Nursing, was tapped to lead nursing at the University of Miami. Soon after she arrived, the school's faculty set to work to have the undergraduate program reaccredited by the National League for Nursing—and win accreditation for the master's program.

PURSuing A DOCTORAL PROGRAM

"Nursing education is tough work and expensive for an academic institution," reflects Dempsey. "My hat is off to the administrators and faculty who stick with it and make it possible for us to keep our doors open."

After all we'd achieved, some deans might decide we'd earned a sabbatical," Clunn says. "But Evelyn was always saying, 'Let's keep up the momentum.'" Soon after celebrating the accreditation of the master's program, Barrett organized a retreat—not for R & R, but to explore the feasibility of a doctoral program.

"We began writing grants to bring in doctorally prepared professors who could offer both academic leadership and fresh

points of view," recalls Clunn. "During those five years, the school went from almost being closed to receiving a doctoral program grant," Clunn says admiringly. In 1985 the nursing school became the second in Florida and one of only a few dozen in the nation to offer a doctorate.

FORGING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Today's school continues to keep pace with trends in education and contemporary health care, with no sign of slowing down. "Nursing is a microcosm of society," says Nilda P. Peragallo, Dr.P.H., R.N., F.A.A.N., who was appointed dean in July 2003. "Here in Miami, we face new health challenges on a daily basis—challenges that will impact the health of our nation in the years ahead. Through education and research, we have a unique opportunity to improve health care nationally and internationally."

The School of Nursing and Health Studies now has a broad role overseeing health science as well as nursing education, with an increasingly international focus and an emphasis on evidence-based research. "The future of nursing is rooted in evidence-based practice and applying that knowledge to improve patient care and outcomes," says Luisa Angel, B.S.N. '02, a cardiac intensive care nurse at Miami Children's Hospital and president of the school's alumni association. The school begins a new chapter this summer with the opening of the M. Christine Schwartz Center, "which will offer an amazing, high-tech learning environment," says senior Mike Sanchez, assistant managing editor of *Hispanic Health Care International*.

"Nursing is a dynamic profession," notes Peragallo. "Quality nursing programs, such as the one we have at UM, prepare students to become lifelong learners."

Adds Clunn, "Very few of our alumni do the same thing forever, and that's good. But whatever they do, they do well—and that's a real tribute to our school."

As are the school's heroic perseverance, stellar achievements, and limitless potential to now play an even greater role in the advancement of excellence in health care. "It's amazing to look back on all the accomplishments and look forward to what the new building will make possible," says Dempsey. "It's truly a great time."

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The Schwartz Center will be an amazing, high-tech learning environment.

SENIOR MIKE SANCHEZ



When construction began on the \$19.4 million M. Christine Schwartz Center for Nursing and Health Studies in October 2004, the event was a milestone in more ways than one. Since its founding more than half a century ago, the school has endured a series of frequent moves. Its wanderings reflect both fluctuating fortunes and tireless efforts to ensure nursing's place as an academic priority.

The University's first nursing classes were held in ROTC barracks known, without depreciation, as the shacks. A Quonset hut inhabited by a nursing mannequin known as Mrs. Chase served as the students' lab. The building was so termite-ridden that if I wore heels, they would go through the floor, recalls Sima Gebel. After the nursing department became a school in 1968, it was moved to the medical campus.

Between 1979 and 1994, the school moved back and forth several more times between the medical campus and various locations on the Coral Gables campus, including former student dorms and fraternity houses.

When it opens this summer, the state-of-the-art M. Christine Schwartz Center for Nursing and Health Studies will be a spectacular and permanent new home for the school at the heart of the Coral Gables campus.

This building is so meaningful, says Gebel, who has been working to raise money for the school since her graduation more than 50 years ago. And that it's happening in my lifetime well, it's beyond words.



1979

The nursing school moves to the Coral Gables campus.

1985

The school establishes a doctoral degree program, the second in Florida.

1999

M. Christine and Ted Schwartz provide a \$5 million lead gift to build a state-of-the-art facility for the School of Nursing.



2003

Internationally renowned researcher Nilda P. Peragallo appointed dean.

2004

School expands degree offerings, with the addition of a B.S. in Health Science. With the expansion comes a new name: School of Nursing and Health Studies.



2004

Construction begins on the new M. Christine Schwartz Center for Nursing and Health Studies.



2005

In response to a growing need for advanced practice nurses, school develops new nurse anesthesia and acute care programs.

2005

School receives challenge grant from the prestigious Kresge Foundation toward completion of the Schwartz Center.



2006

With construction nearly complete, the Schwartz Center is scheduled to open this summer.