

HouseCalls Winter 2008

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The Cohort Model *New Nurses for Bartlett*

When they first met, their ambitions were as varied as their ages and backgrounds, but the seven Juneau residents came together as a team during their time in school—studying, working clinical rotations, and growing professionally together. They all graduated in mid-December from the University of Alaska's two-year nursing program.

"We really had a wonderful group dynamic. We really did bond," says Lynn Shepherd (59), Assistant Director at the Egan Library. "True to the term 'cohort model,' we shared every advance and every setback, and ultimately succeeded together. I was older than some of their mothers, but my fellow students were amazing, so welcoming of me." In addition to Shepherd, the graduates included O. Ken Hirsch, Heidi Koski, Lincoln Farabee, Deanna Browne, Ami Reifenstein, and Kim Peterson.

Ten candidates are selected every two years for the University of Alaska Southeast-sponsored program, which involves taking distance education courses taught by instructors at the University of Alaska Anchorage, while gaining work experience in various clinical settings. Several cohorts from other



The Cohort: (from left), Chris Urata, Kim Peterson, Lynn Shepherd, Deanna Browne, Heidi Koski, Ami Reifenstein, Lincoln Farabee, and O. Ken Hirsch. Photo by Sarah Harvey

Alaskan communities participating in the two-year program worked alongside the Juneau students during two three-week clinical sessions held in Anchorage hospitals.

The Juneau cohort started with ten students and, through attrition typical to the program, the group came down to seven. All say they enjoyed exceptional clinical experiences, due to their clinical instructor and UAS facilitator, Chris Urata.

Well before Urata became his instructor and program facilitator at the university, Ken Hirsch (24), a part-time lifeguard, had frequently observed her teaching synchronized swimming at Juneau's indoor pool. "She was always so meticulous—in there, involved and serious about getting the synchroniza-

tion down pat," he recalls. "In that same way, she was very intent that we in the nursing program learn the best way to carry out each specific procedure." Like other members of the cohort, he praises Urata most highly for securing for her students a wide range of clinical experiences in Juneau.

Urata has many connections within Juneau's medical community, both through her previous professional experience as a registered nurse, and through her husband, Bob, a long-time local physician. According to Lynn Shepherd, Urata did more than just take advantage of her connections within Juneau's medical establishment, though. "Chris is phenomenal," says Shepherd. "She provided us with a huge range of experiences not just at the hospital and local clinics, but



Facilitator/Mentor: Chris Urata organized clinical rotations for the nursing students.

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The time to prepare for the 2010 nursing cohort is now. Karen Schmitt, Dean for the Career Education Program at the University of Alaska Southeast, recommends a general college course track that includes math and English course credits. Applicants for the two-year Associate of Applied Science in Nursing degree program are also expected to have course credits in advanced biology and chemistry. Schmitt recommends that students interested in preparing for admission to the nursing program talk to a program advisor as early in their studies as possible to learn about program-specific requirements.

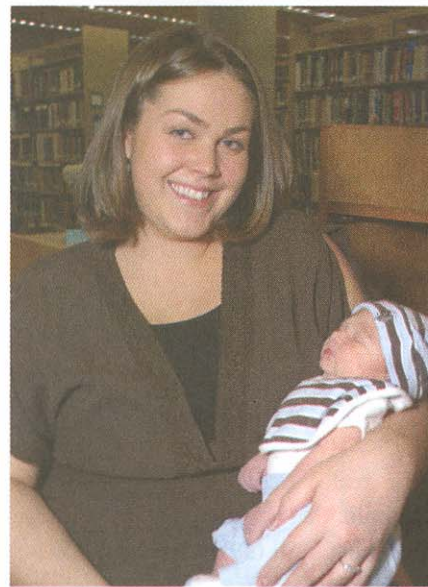
For most students, the Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in Nursing program, with a total of seventy credits, takes longer than two years of full-time study to complete. "Most of our AAS nursing students spread out their education over three or four years — many are at a stage in their life where they can't commit to a full-time program," Schmitt says.

UAS partners with its sister campus in Anchorage, which has a highly regarded nursing program. "It is much more cost effective for us to be in partnership with UAA," says Schmitt. Building a program from scratch in Juneau would take more than money — it would take years before such a program would be accredited. The nursing shortage in Alaska requires immediate attention.

According to Schmitt, a 2002 study concluded that Alaska needed to more than double the number of RN graduates per year to fill positions in the state. "Nurses are needed in very large numbers," she says. "This program has definitely made a dent. The University of Alaska partnered with the healthcare industry to set a goal of doubling nurse graduates within five years, and we've done better than that, going from slightly under 100 to more than 200 RN graduates per year statewide."

Karen Schmitt encourages those interested in the program to contact Sarah Harvey, Health Sciences Program Advisor at UAS: 796-6128

at adult care, in schools, and at the dialysis center. And she did this while at the same time providing all the mentoring. We really appreciated her efforts."



New Mom: Heidi Koski gave birth to her first child, Warren, on December 9th, one week prior to graduation.

Heidi Koski (25), who hopes to specialize in obstetrics, gave birth to her first child one week before graduating from the program. Koski, who hails from a long-time Juneau family, says her inspiration to become a nurse came early, when as a child she found herself in the hospital. "I spent a lot of time at Bartlett when I was six years old."

Koski says that the cohort received extensive opportunities at Bartlett. "We got to see a bit of everything at the hospital, and I can't thank them enough."

Her ambition to become an OB nurse parallels that of Ami Reifenstein (32), who is scheduled to start a preceptorship in early 2008 at Bartlett Beginnings, the hospital's new obstetrics unit. Reifenstein plans to eventually get her master's degree in nursing. She has gained ample prior experience in health care, having served as an EMT, a medical assistant, and, at the Juneau Birth Center, a midwife apprentice. Even though she came into the program with extensive experience, Reifenstein often

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found the clinical rotations arranged by Urata to be real eye-openers.

"I don't consider myself to be naïve, but some of what I saw..." she hesitates, not wanting to be explicit about the types of abuse she encountered during a few of the clinical rotations. "Let's just say that we all need to do more to promote the well being of kids and women, and support those organizations that work on their behalf. That is where my heart lies."

Married with two children, Reifenstein is the granddaughter of the late Dr. George Reifenstein, after whom the Reifenstein Dialysis Center is named.

Lincoln Farabee (32) had worked for several years with developmentally disabled people, prior to a short stint as a CNA (certified nursing aide) at Bartlett. "That work helped me," he says. "During the program, I was much more comfortable going up to the hospital, since I knew my way around."

Like others on his team, Farabee has high regard for Chris Urata's efforts to assure the cohort gained hands-on experience with patients in real-life settings. "She got us into all kinds of medical facilities: the emergency room, SEARHC, hospice and home care, dialysis. We got a lot of

experience not available to other cohorts throughout the state."

Farabee intends to pursue a four-year degree, followed by post-graduate studies in nursing, with hopes of eventually becoming a Nurse Practitioner.

Deanna Browne (34) returned to school two years after giving birth to her third child in 2000. "Nursing was something I always wanted to do, but I did the family thing first," she says. In 2002, Browne began taking college courses, working through the prerequisites in time to apply for the cohort, which began its course work in January of 2006.

She is now nursing at the Reifenstein Dialysis Center, in a one-on-one preceptorship common for all nurse graduates. A preceptor is an experienced nurse who mentors a new nurse until he or she is skilled enough to work without supervision. "The dialysis center is nice and homey with a small patient load. I like the set hours and just the feel of it," Browne says.

To her own surprise, Lynn Shepherd found that working in the Emergency Department most suited her interests. "I thought I might not be fast enough, or that I might get panicked,

but that hasn't been a problem. I appreciate the broad range of experience I am picking up from working with the many different types of patients who come to the emergency room."

Kim Peterson (51) has had a full Alaskan life of seasonal commercial fishing and winter activities outdoors. "I like people, I am task driven, and I want to see results," she says. She worked for a few years as a CNA at Wildflower Court, the adult long-term care facility, and was impressed with the teamwork. "I could see it wasn't boring, that it was a constant learning process." Peterson went back to school in 2003. Although some previous college credits transferred, she still needed to complete a number of nursing program prerequisites. "The program is competitive — there are only ten spots. There's a points system. You get some points based on your grade point average, and you get a point for having worked in healthcare, but half the score is taken from the nursing entrance test, which determines your math, reading, and general comprehension skills."

Peterson is already on the job at Bartlett as a nurse on the Medical/Surgical floor. "I like the hospital, and I'm happy to work there."

New Human Resources Director Kyla Allred

Prior to coming on as Human Resources Director for Bartlett Regional Hospital, Kyla Allred served for several years in a similar position with Wildflower Court, the adult care facility connected to the hospital by a walkway and a contractual relationship.

Allred, her husband Darrin, and their two children moved to Juneau in 2002 from Utah. She had previously worked as director of human resources and public relations for the 42-bed Uintah Basin Medical Center in Roosevelt, Utah.

For Allred, the ongoing human resources challenge that came with the job at Bartlett involves greatly reducing the hospital's reliance on "travelers," nurses, physical therapists, and other professionals who temporarily fill gaps in staffing.

Travelers usually stay for a minimum of three-months, sometimes longer. In addition to travel costs, the hospital has to provide housing and sufficient pay to provide travelers the incentive to work at Bartlett.

"Travelers are a great resource," she says, "but they don't have the buy-in, a vested interest in the community. Training costs, the learning curve, these are huge expenses."

Allred intends to look for future employees who are now in high school and, through job shadowing and volunteer programs, expose young people to the hospital environment.

Retention of long-term employees is at least equal in importance to recruitment. Toward this end,

Allred is hoping to institute programs that will improve working conditions and make it easier for people to work at Bartlett.

"We can provide flexibility with work days, hours and shifts," she says. A more imposing challenge involves finding the resources to enhance employment compensation. "When we recruit at the professional level, our cost of living here in Juneau is a barrier."

On the plus side, the hospital offers a strong benefits package that includes good medical-dental-vision insurance and participation in the PERS retirement system. More than a few people have taken jobs at the hospital to get vested in the State of Alaska's retirement system.