At the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing at Florida Atlantic University (FAU), nursing is a discipline of knowledge and a field of professional practice grounded in caring. Students are trained to nurture the wholeness of persons and environment through caring.

Human patient simulation is used as a highly effective way to educate confident, competent, and caring future nurses. Simulated nursing situations are custom designed to allow about 150 FAU undergraduate nursing students (and a growing number of graduate students and nurse practitioners) to practice nursing skills, assessment techniques, communication and interdisciplinary collaboration grounded in caring.

Simulation adds high-tech reality to high-touch nurses’ training based on Caring Behaviors Inventory.

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Caring Behaviors Inventory is common thread through all programs
Using the Caring Behaviors Inventory (CBI) (Wolf et al, 1994) as a framework, FAU student nurses learn to express caring through 42 specific behaviors, such as “using touch to communicate caring,” “including the patient in planning his/her care,” and “showing concern for the patient.”

Scripted scenarios teach caring behaviors alongside skills and assessments designed to include the Joint Commission National Patient Safety Goals and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Essentials of Baccalaureate Nursing Education. As students progress from novice to advanced levels, simulation helps them integrate authentic presence and caring behaviors until they become a natural part of patient care.

Caring and clinical objectives blend in powerful simulation learning experiences
FAU’s College of Nursing conducted a research study to investigate the integration of high-fidelity patient simulators in the teaching of caring in nursing, and aimed to quantify the influence on the caring behaviors of practicing nurses. Data were collected both before and following a 15-week RN-BSN assessment course that utilized simulation technology. Overall results indicated simulation technology affected an average increase of 10.17% for all the caring behaviors examined.

During simulation, FAU nursing students practice talking to patients while washing their hands, or touching their hands to communicate caring while listening to heart sounds, and, as they gain skill proficiency, scenarios become more complex. Undergraduate BSN students practice caring for Mary Anderson (Resusci Anne®), a hospice patient diagnosed with stage IV metastatic ovarian cancer: Students perform a targeted nursing assessment; safely administer medications; maintain optimal oxygenation; provide for Mary’s comfort and safety; give clear, factual information about prognosis to Mary and her daughter; and offer support through four stages of the dying process. “Resusci Anne met our needs perfectly,” said Candice Hickman, MSN, RN, Casual Learning Area and Simulation Coordinator. “We just added a wireless mic, a scripted daughter and personal items such as family photos: students come to know the manikin as a person.”

Advanced students practice in a room with two SimMan manikins, family members and several medical staff during two distinct medical emergencies (one patient with a tracheotomy requiring suctioning due to a mucus plug; the other a code blue cardiac arrest).

Simulation helps nurses balance human interactions with medical needs for optimal healing results
“They’ll see these things in real-life practice, and need to interact with not only the patient, but also with family members. They’ll have to learn to balance it all,” said Hickman.

During debriefing, students discuss both successes and opportunities for improvement. “I always tell students ‘what happens in simulation, stays in simulation.’ Some students have a 3.9 GPA and have never failed at anything in their life, so when they do make a mistake, it is hard for them,” Hickman said. “I would rather they make mistakes here, with manikins, than with real patients.”

“Of all the things we have done with simulation, I am most proud of how we humanize the simulators. It’s important to balance the ‘need to get done’ nursing work with what matters most to patients and families,” said Hickman. “A patient might be very worried about his elderly wife at home alone, and would feel so much better if his nurse could help him make a quick phone call to her. Our students are seeing in simulation how it should be, and I think they will remember.”

The Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing at Florida Atlantic University
The Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing is dedicated to caring: advancing the science, practicing the art, studying its meaning and living it day-to-day. It is the first college of nursing devoted to preserving the scholarly works on caring through the Caring Archives. Its baccalaureate, master’s and doctor of nursing practice degree programs in nursing are fully accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. In 30 years, the College has grown from six to approximately 1,300 students; has expanded offerings to three campuses; and created five major centers/institutes for research, education and interdisciplinary collaboration. For more information, visit http://nursing.fau.edu

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