

# *Advancing HIV Nursing Practice: The Doctor of Nursing Practice HIV Specialty at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey*

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*The move to integrate HIV treatment and care into primary care is a major obstacle for the current U.S. health care workforce. Many HIV specialty providers will soon retire, while few primary care clinicians have been adequately trained in the diagnosis, care, and treatment of people living with HIV. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has supported the development of a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program with an HIV specialty at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, to assure successful transition to an HIV primary care workforce. The Rutgers School of Nursing has been at the forefront of the DNP education movement and is among the first to develop an HIV-focused DNP program. Thirty-seven students have enrolled in the 3-year program, and two have graduated from the first cohort. Here we discuss the planning, implementation, successes, and recommendations of the new program.*

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Since HIV was first described in the literature, it has posed unique opportunities to the nursing profession, and nurses have been able to adapt their practices in order to meet the needs of this disease. As research

related to prevention, care, and treatment has evolved over time, keeping clinicians' knowledge and skills current has been supported through the U.S. Government's Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) HIV/AIDS Bureau and through the AIDS Education and Training Centers (AETCs). The AETCs have supported clinicians who work on the front lines through a variety of education programming. An informed primary care workforce is important in the current context of HIV prevention, care, and treatment where patients are living longer and HIV is a chronic disease.

Nurses have been on the forefront of care for people living with HIV. Many nurses have been providing HIV care for most of their careers. The "graying" of the profession overall is acutely seen in the field of HIV, where many nurses are now looking to retire. This, coupled with the changing landscape of HIV care and treatment, has become a complex, multifactorial issue. To

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face these challenges, the HRSA has expanded the AETC grant program to provide programmatic support for universities to address this need through expanded nurse practitioner programs. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey (Rutgers), is one of four nursing institutions to be awarded the initial grant in 2013. The Rutgers program is framed in the context of a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) preparation.

The DNP has been recommended as an entry to practice for advance practice nurses (APNs) by the [American Association of Colleges of Nursing \(2004\)](#). The essentials of the DNP ([American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2006](#)) have provided a framework for education programs that will prepare nurses to be leaders in health care reform. Rutgers School of Nursing has been at the forefront of the DNP movement by challenging all advance practice programs to grant the DNP degree as an entry to practice. With support of this federal grant, Rutgers has instituted a DNP program that will help to insure a workforce of advance practice primary care HIV nurse practitioners (HAPNs) prepared to respond to the demand of more qualified clinicians to care for people at risk for and living with HIV.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the HRSA both consider HIV to be a primary care disease. HAPNs have been at the forefront of the care and treatment of individuals infected with and affected by HIV since it was first identified in 1981. [Wilson and colleagues \(2005\)](#) demonstrated that the quality of nurse practitioner HIV care was equal to that of their physician colleagues. However, many nurse practitioners are preparing to retire or are moving away from the demands of day-to-day clinical practice ([Nichols, Davis, & Richardson, 2010](#)). It is time that the next generation of HAPNs is prepared to step forward to fill the void that will occur. We will review the process that was used to train the first cohort of HAPN students in the Rutgers School of Nursing HIV Care Specialization Program.

## Background

Rutgers is the eighth oldest institution of higher learning in the United States. It is one of only nine colonial colleges established before the American Revolution and has a rich history. Currently, Rutgers

is comprised of four campuses across New Jersey, two of which are located in Newark (Rutgers Biomedical Health Sciences and Rutgers University–Newark). Rutgers is attended by a diverse student body, with more than 66,000 students from all 50 states and more than 115 countries, of whom more than 50% identify as non-White, each year (<http://www.rutgers.edu/about/facts-figures>).

As one of the nation's largest, most comprehensive academic nursing programs, Rutgers School of Nursing is dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in education, research, evidence-based health care delivery, and the promotion of community health. The school has more than 1,800 undergraduate and graduate students at four campus locations throughout the state of New Jersey.

The school's centers and institutes are focal points for research, technical assistance, capacity building, and evidence-based practice aimed at improving the health and well-being of diverse populations at state, national, and international levels. The school's nurse-managed health programs in New Jersey include interprofessional community health centers, an ambulatory center for HIV care, a mobile health care program, and a statewide program providing health care case management for children in foster care.

The School of Nursing is one of eight schools at Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences, which collectively comprise New Jersey's largest and most influential constellation of academic institutions devoted to nursing, medicine, dentistry, advanced health-related sciences, pharmacy, public health, and the full spectrum of allied health careers. Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences is one of four academic centers at Rutgers.

New Jersey, and specifically, the city of Newark, has been since the early 1980s, and continues to be, a high-HIV-prevalence area with a continued increase in new infections each year. Newark is an ideal site, with many clinical programs, to train a diverse population of next-generation APNs to provide state-of-the-science HIV primary care.

## Program

The DNP curriculum ([Figure 1](#)) is a comprehensive plan of study that not only supports learning

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