

HEALTH CARE

Unique Partnership Provides New Opportunities for Nurses to Develop Skills, Give Back

By JO ELLEN KRUMM

Nurses make a difference. For vocational nursing students at Career Care Institute (CCI), a partnership with the nonprofit Valley Village is helping them make even more of a difference. It has introduced them to a whole new population that needs their care and compassion – adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Valley Village, headquartered in Winnetka, is the place where adults with developmental challenges thrive. It provides family-style homes and specialized day programs throughout the San Fernando Valley. CCI, with its main campus in Lancaster, is a vocational medical training facility. Its nursing students learn the fundamentals of nursing care and prepare for their state exam.

The partnership, begun in March 2011, brings nursing students together with clients at the Valley Village day program in Sunland. The clients have various developmental disabilities, including Down syndrome and autism. They also have medical conditions, such as diabetes, seizure disorder and high blood pressure that need to be monitored. The day program offers medical oversight as well as physical, occupational and recreational therapy to help clients develop and maintain functional abilities.

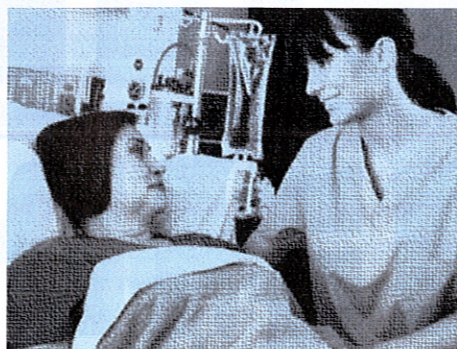
Corrine O. Stevens, RN, MSN, Director

of the Nursing Program at CCI, speaks highly of the program: "There are numerous types of experiences as our nursing students assist in the care of clients from such a diverse population," Stevens said. "The students have spoken often of the individual responses of the clients during various field trips and activities that are sponsored by the facility. My students are able to apply the knowledge they have learned in communications, patient care, G-tube care, and some medication administration. Most of all they are able to give compassionate care to others as they enter the nursing profession. As Director of the Nursing Program; I cannot express how grateful we are that our students are allowed to be such a great part of giving to this community. I look forward to a long and wonderful relationship with Valley Village."

Providing nursing care to adults with developmental disabilities requires special skills.

As CCI Nursing Instructor Chad Turner, LVN, pointed out at a recent orientation in Sunland: "This is where you will hone your communications skills. Many clients are nonverbal and cannot tell you how they feel or what is wrong, so you need to pay attention to gestures, facial expressions, body language and sounds. Get to know the clients. That's how you can know what's happening with them."

Said Cindy Moran-Pruitt, RN, also a



Nursing Instructor with the CCI program in Sunland: "Valley Village provides a rare opportunity to be able to work with this special population. Working with clients with such disabilities, who often can't communicate, can be daunting for a new nursing student. The Valley Village staff guides us in the specialized care and helps us understand each client's unique personality and how he or she wishes to be treated. Thus the students learn not to be afraid in certain situations but to jump right in and perform professionally. All the clients have their own distinct personalities and preferences. My students and I love them all."

"An extra advantage for beginning nursing students is that they can learn the basics, including providing physical care, monitoring, helping clients ambulate, and learning to give medications," added Moran-Pruitt. "They can fulfill many of their learning and skills requirements right here."

The nursing students, who are volunteers at Valley Village, have busy days with their hands-on training. Some of their activities are:

- Early in the morning, they greet and take participants from the buses into the building.
- They assist in hand-over-hand during activities when necessary. This might involve helping a client eat, write or do arts and crafts. The helper places her hand on top of the client's hand to guide and support the activity, such as lifting a spoon to the mouth.
- They learn how to safely lift and transfer clients, using two-person lifts, pivoting, wheelchairs, hoist lift, and sling.
- They accompany clients on field trips, riding along on the buses, pushing wheelchairs and helping with feeding if needed.

Noted Sherman Mitchell II, MPA & MAIOP, Director of the Valley Village Sunland program: "It's a win-win situation for the nursing students and for Valley Village. The nursing students are not only being introduced to a new population, but they are also gaining firsthand experiences in nursing practices for working with persons with developmental disabilities. This is a unique opportunity as most students in a training program would normally work in a hospital setting and with the elderly — among other common facilities — where they would typically not be aware of our developmentally disabled client population. The nursing students provide extra

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assistance with nursing care needs of certain participants, but are actively involved in the regular activities of all participants.

"Things have been working out extremely well with the nursing student volunteers and the onsite instructors the school provides to help cultivate the daily learning process," Mitchell continued. "The nursing students have contributed several thousand volunteer hours since starting in March 2011 and have gained a newfound interest in the wonderful and much needed work we do here." The program is such a success that the two organizations are working to expand the nursing student program to the Valley Village day programs in Winnetka.

"We appreciate the students' effort and dedication in learning how to work effectively with participants with developmental disabilities," Mitchell added. "We hope that the experience gained here would inspire them to continue to work with people with developmental disabilities."

That is happening. Valley Village has already hired one student from the CCI program to work with clients. Others have expressed interest in volunteering on their own to continue helping the clients. Valley Village's staff and clients welcome them with open arms.

For information on Valley Village, visit www.valleyvillage.org. To learn about Career Care Institute (CCI), visit www.CCIcolleges.edu.

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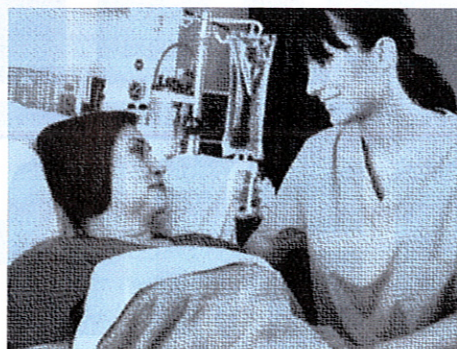
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