

National Leader

New laboratory in Wharton Hall gives College of Nursing an edge • by Christine Payton



Dr. Lisa Broussard, an assistant professor of nursing, is director of the new Maternal/Child Life Skills laboratory.

A NEW LAB IN WHARTON HALL THAT mirrors a hospital pediatric, newborn and labor/delivery unit is about as real as it can get.

The Maternal/Child Life Skills lab is equipped with some of the latest technology, including lifelike, computerized patient simulators.

There, senior nursing students test and implement nursing theories and interventions on four infant simulators and two pediatric simulators that are about the size of pre-K children. The lab also has two birth-

ing simulators; newborn simulators will be added later this year.

"UL Lafayette is the only university in Louisiana and in the country, to our knowledge, that has a simulated neonatal, pediatric and labor/delivery unit," said Dr. Melinda Oberleitner, head of the Nursing Department.

Interactive patient simulators provide immediate feedback for each nursing decision. Students begin with assessment, which includes checking temperatures and listening to and interpreting heart sounds. Later, they treat symptoms for bronchiolitis



Shown, from left, are: Emily Broussard; Dr. Lisa Broussard, assistant professor of nursing and lab director; Kimberly Bell; Cathy Boutte; and Miranda Blanchard.

(respiratory infection), hyperbilirubinemia (jaundice) and cellulitis (skin inflammation), and perform newborn stabilization.

With the birthing simulators, students can administer nursing care for preterm labor, preeclampsia (high blood pressure) and conduct general assessments related to labor and delivery.

"We try to make this experience for the students as realistic as possible," said Dr. Lisa Broussard, assistant professor of nursing and lab director. "Before we opened the lab, faculty members created different nursing scenarios for the simulators. Each semester, we're going to build on those scenarios and create new ones."

Instructors also can use hand-held devices for "on the fly" changes while students are administering care. "Faculty like the 'on the fly' method because it gives them the opportunity to challenge students based on immediate changes in a patient's status," Broussard said.

The simulators can mimic real-world hospital situations that students may not otherwise experience. "These scenarios can be played out in a safe environment where students can still make mistakes without putting anyone in danger," Broussard said.

The Maternal/Child Skills lab is the second nursing lab at UL Lafayette that uses sophisticated patient simulators. A lab that resembles a high-tech, hospital intensive care unit opened two years ago. It is equipped with adult-size simulators.

"Simulation is sweeping the country as a new pedagogy in nursing education. We have been ahead of the simulation integration curve at UL Lafayette and we think this gives our program a distinct advantage in several ways," Oberleitner said.

"It solidifies our positioning as a national leader in the integration of simulation technologies in nursing. It is a very

Damon Fontenot, a senior nursing major, has spent time in the lab this semester. "The simulators are like real children and babies," he said.

The future nurses have a chance to play different roles during each scenario. Some may be nurses, some may be doctors and others may be parents. Between 50 and 60 nursing students will work through the simulation lab each semester.

impressive area to highlight in recruiting prospective faculty and it has been a fantastic student recruitment tool for us."

The high-tech environment sends powerful messages, she continued.

"It tells the students that we put them and their learning first. This investment also tells prospective employers of our graduates that our students will graduate from this program having utilized and mastered the most advanced and sophisticated technologies that they are likely to encounter in hospitals and other health care settings across the U.S. today."

The benefits of students' training on patient simulators is apparent to Michelle Crain, interim chief nursing officer at Our

Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center. She's a 1990 and 1998 graduate of the College of Nursing and Allied Health Professions and is a certified nurse practitioner.

"I think what the Sim labs have allowed for students is a greater sense of critical thinking. They come out of college and still have a need to master some skills, but they can work quicker through this because of their experiences in the lab," Crain said.

"I believe the simulation lab gives students real-world experience. They are still in a lab with simulators, but the patient response is so realistic. The students don't need as much coaxing when they're starting out (in the workplace) because they have confidence in their skills. It's phenomenal."

In 2005, the National League for Nursing named UL Lafayette's College of Nursing and Allied Health Professions a Center of Excellence for Nursing Education. UL Lafayette is one of only 10 such centers in the country. ■



Instructors use computers to program patient simulators' behavior.



Kimberly Bell, a senior, is shown in the newest lab in Wharton Hall.