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FIU Nursing receives \$1.5 Million grant for university-based program to train sexual assault nurse examiners for rural and underserved Florida

Partnership with FIU Global Forensic and Justice Center will increase access to forensic nurse specialists at clinics in cities of Sweetwater, Belle Glade, and Hendry and Glades counties

MIAMI (Feb. 7, 2019) – Nearly 80 percent of rapes and sexual assaults go unreported, in part because of a severe shortage of licensed health care specialists known as sexual assault nurse examiners (SANEs), who help properly secure evidence from survivors of sexual assault, which can lead to higher prosecution rates.

In a first-of-its-kind partnership, the [Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing & Health Sciences](#) and the Global Forensic and Justice Center at FIU will collaborate with rural health clinics and hospitals on a university-based program to nearly double Florida’s number of SANE-certified nurses to aid sexual assault survivors in rural and underserved communities.

The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration awarded a \$1.5 million grant to Tami Thomas, associate dean of research for the college, to launch the Advanced Nursing Education-Regionally Underserved Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (RUSANE) program.

SANE-certified nurses conduct forensic medical examinations, as well as provide survivors with physical and mental health care to help deal with the trauma. Reflecting on her experience in collection of forensic evidence from child survivors of sexual abuse and assault, Thomas conveyed the significance of having properly trained nurses in this field.

“SANE nurses are on the frontline to treat survivors compassionately with the physical and emotional support they need, while assisting the legal system in their efforts to bring the criminal perpetrators to justice,” she said.

Over the next three years, the FIU RUSANE program will recruit, train and deploy upwards of 30 eligible licensed registered nurses and certified advanced practice registered nurses at clinics in Hendry and Glades counties, the city of Belle Glade in Palm Beach County, and the city of Sweetwater in Miami-Dade County.

“Florida currently has only 44 SANE-certified nurses for a state where it has been reported that more than a quarter of its 20 million population have experienced a rape or sexual assault,” Thomas said.

FIU Nursing will partner with local health care clinics in the four regions to provide culturally appropriate didactic and clinical training to prepare the nurses for SANE certification and serve at the clinics. Additionally, psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner faculty and counselors

will be available to support sexual assault survivors, as well as SANE-certified nurses as they cope with the challenges of the job.

The FIU Global Forensic and Justice Center will extend the impact of the program through continuing education courses that will keep SANE nurses informed on the latest forensic science and technological advancements to ensure efficacy of forensic exams, evidence collection, and to improve retention of SANE-certified nurses in the health care system.

“We look forward to partnering with FIU Nursing on this important program,” said Kevin Lothridge, executive director of the Global Forensic and Justice Center. “Survivors of sexual assault deserve the highest levels of quality investigation and care from their health providers, and our trainers will help them develop the specialized knowledge and skills they need to tackle the delicate and meticulous nature of this responsibility.”

Thomas also explained that the difficulty of reporting sexual assault crimes in rural areas is exacerbated by the excessive travel time and distance to the nearest hospital employing a SANE nurse, which can deter the survivor from coming forward at all. To combat this obstacle, the FIU RUSANE program will incorporate telehealth and tele-education components to design a replicable delivery model for other SANE training programs in regionally underserved areas around the country, including isolated rural communities.

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About the FIU Nicole Wertheim College Nursing & Health Sciences:

Established in 1982, the School of Nursing at Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, Florida was elevated to the [College of Nursing and Health Sciences](#) when it joined with the School of Health Sciences in October 2006. It was renamed as the Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing & Health Sciences in September 2013. The College offers undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees, as well as specialty certificates in programs across the departments of [Nursing education](#), [Athletic Training](#), [Communication Sciences & Disorders](#), [Health Services Administration](#), [Occupational Therapy](#) and [Physical Therapy](#). The College’s Master of Science in Nursing and Doctor of Nursing Practice programs are ranked No. 66 in the U.S. News and World Report 2019 Best Graduate Schools listing. For more information, visit cnhs.fiu.edu.

About FIU:

Florida International University, a public university located in Miami, has a passion for student success and community solutions. The university is classified by Carnegie as “R1.” FIU is among the top 100 public universities in U.S. News and World Report’s 2019 Best Colleges and 18 academic programs are individually ranked. FIU was recently ranked as the second-best performing university in Florida and graduates are among the highest-paid in the state. FIU has multiple state-of-the-art research facilities including the Wall of Wind Research and Testing Facility and FIU’s Medina Aquarius Program. FIU has awarded more than 330,000 degrees since 1972 and enrolls more than 57,000 students in two campuses and centers including FIU Downtown on Brickell, FIU@I-75, the Miami Beach Urban Studios, and sites in Qingdao and Tianjin, China. FIU also supports artistic and cultural engagement through its three museums: Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum, the Wolfsonian-FIU, and the Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU. FIU is a member of Conference USA with more than 400 student-athletes participating in 18 sports. For more information about FIU, visit www.fiu.edu.