As the nation struggles to come to terms with the senseless, tragic killing of George Floyd, and those before him, the time has come to send a clear message that injustice and racism will no longer be tolerated. Together, academic nursing leaders and the larger healthcare community must rally against pervasive inequities in society and move forward with empathy, inclusiveness, and collective action.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said that to remain neutral in situations of injustice is to have taken the side of the oppressor. Voices condemning systemic racism are growing louder as protests expressing outrage are occurring across the country. Many expressions of protest have been peaceful and purposeful, but regrettably, some have resulted in violence and destruction. With the opportunity before us to break through the wall of intolerance and address the uneven treatment that has long imperiled communities of color, we must not be distracted by those who threaten to unravel the fabric of American society.

As the voice of academic nursing, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is guided by a mission that embraces diversity and promotes inclusive learning environments. Our member schools of nursing have endorsed the association’s position statement on Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in Academic Nursing, which serves as a blueprint for addressing healthcare disparities and serving the greater good. AACN stands ready to help nurses lead in advancing human rights and reducing health inequities by developing a nursing workforce that is compassionate and respectful of the inherent dignity, worth, and uniqueness of every individual.

As the calls for meaningful change grow louder, nurse educators will do our part to speak out, take action, and create a preferred future that everyone so justly deserves. Together we will catalyze support for our nation’s promise of liberty and justice for all.

Susan Bakewell-Sachs, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chair, Board of Directors

Deborah Trautman, PhD, RN, FAAN
President and Chief Executive Officer
AACN ANNOUNCES NEW SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL PROGRAM TO AID NURSING STUDENTS IMPACTED BY COVID-19

AACN is pleased to announce that new funding has been received from organizations and individual donors to expand the COVID-19 Nursing Student Support Fund. Administered by AACN’s Foundation for Academic Nursing, this fund was created to provide financial relief to students whose education and lives have been directly impacted by the coronavirus. In addition to the 24 donations from individuals and organizations, the Foundation is grateful to three organizations for their generous contributions to the student fund: the Morton K. and Jane Blaustein Foundation ($25,000); Jonas Nursing and Veterans Healthcare ($10,000); and the University of Memphis Foundation ($3,000).

“To effectively meet the nation’s need for health care in response to COVID-19, we must ensure that nursing students graduate on time and enter the workforce where their expertise is greatly needed,” said AACN President and CEO Deborah Trautman. “AACN applauds the leaders of the Blaustein Foundation, Jonas Philanthropies, and the University of Memphis Foundation for supporting academic nursing’s efforts to assist students in need and maintain a robust nursing workforce.”

“As the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded, we have all witnessed the critical roles nurses play in providing highly skilled and compassionate care to patients at their most vulnerable moments,” said Jane Blaustein, Vice President and Trustee of the Morton K. and Jane Blaustein Foundation. “We are proud to support this effort that helps to ensure that a new generation of nurses will be there to help fight the coronavirus and future threats to our public’s health.”

The COVID-19 Nursing Student Support Fund provides one-time grants to nursing students enrolled in AACN member schools who need financial support to complete their nursing programs and/or meet life expenses. Priority is given to entry-level students in baccalaureate and master’s programs in the final two semesters of their nursing programs. To date, 51 grants ($500 each) have been disbursed to nursing students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This program was developed by nurse leader and philanthropist Darlene Curley, who contributed $25,000 in funding to launch this critically important program.

“Nurses are the backbone of the American healthcare system who are essential to sustaining the nation’s health, especially in times of crisis,” said Donald Jonas, co-founder of the Jonas Philanthropies. “We believe that it is essential to support nurses and the vital role they play in our hospitals, schools, clinics, nursing homes, and on the battlefield.”

New Funding Available to Nursing Students

With $47,500 in funding available, 95 awards in the amount of $500 will be made directly to nursing students, with the goal of funding students in all 50 states. All applications will be reviewed, and recipients will be selected by AACN with funds distributed via its philanthropic arm. Students interested in applying for an award must complete an online application posted on the AACN website. Students applying must be enrolled full-time and confirm that they are enrolled in an AACN member school and provide contact information for their advisor who can confirm that the student is in good

A MESSAGE FROM DARLENE CURLEY REGARDING THE AACN FOUNDATION FOR ACADEMIC NURSING

With the pandemic expected to last through 2021 and beyond, philanthropic support for nurses confronting this public health crisis is more important than ever. We are counting on nurses today to help weather this challenge, and we need to take action now to ensure that nurses will be there for us tomorrow.

Like many Americans, I wanted to support our frontline healthcare workers during this time of need. I chose to focus on nursing students and therefore provided seed funding to launch the COVID-19 Nursing Student Support Fund at the AACN Foundation for Academic Nursing. The initial grant provided fifty $500 grants to students experiencing financial distress that could prevent them from completing their studies and graduating from school on time.

Within just three weeks of announcing this new fund, more than 2,800 nursing students from all 50 states applied for available grants. Students nationwide shared details about the variety of challenges they are facing, which include recovering from COVID-19, caring for family members who have the virus, struggling to meet expenses after losing a job and/or family support for education, and many other hardships.

Nursing students are worried about continuing their education, and we should be too.

For information about the Fund and how you can support this effort, see AACN’s Foundation for Academic Nursing donation page or contact Marta Okoniewski, AACN’s Director of Student Engagement, at mokoniewski@aacnnursing.org.

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What is the mission and core work of APNA?

The American Psychiatric Nurses Association's mission and purpose is to provide leadership to promote psychiatric-mental health nurses, improve mental health care for culturally diverse individuals, families, groups, and communities, and shape health policy for the delivery of mental health services. We are the largest professional membership organization committed to the practice of psychiatric-mental health (PMH) nursing and wellness promotion, prevention of mental health problems, and the care and treatment of persons with psychiatric disorders.

A 501(c)(3) organization, our focus is on science and education, and that vision is guided by a strategic direction, which is formulated by the APNA Board of Directors and informed by the membership. Our members’ needs are evaluated with each review and update of the Strategic Direction core ideology, values, and goals. We ask the membership:

What do you want from APNA that you can’t get from any other source? If APNA could do only one thing, what should it be? Consistently, members respond with the same top four priorities: education, networking/community, current information & resources, and public awareness. The APNA Board of Directors accordingly places great emphasis on these areas, ensuring that we deliver quality continuing nursing education, foster a community of dynamic collaboration, provide up-to-date and vetted resources and information for our members, and work to educate the public about who psychiatric-mental health nurses are and what they do. It is the leadership of our Board of Directors—in keeping with APNA’s mission and purpose, strategic direction, and goals—that enables our staff to work toward operationalizing this vision.

What goals have you set as you begin your tenure as Executive Director?

Having been with APNA for more than 12 years before taking on the Executive Director role, I have been able to be a part of much of the organization’s growth and success, watching our member numbers rise from 4,000 when I started in 2007, to now more than 14,000. Much of this success was driven by philosophies and values that have guided our actions and enabled our Board of Directors to set the strategic vision for the organization. A goal that will remain in focus for me as Executive Director is to reinforce these philosophies that have been a driving force in our association’s success. Philosophies like…

• Provide quality products and services: Without these, an association does not offer value. Without value, it is no longer relevant to its members or the profession.
• Provide frequent, honest, and clear communication: Include context about why it matters.
• Keep the members your focus: When evaluating a process or plan, think “Does this make my life easier or the members’?” If your answer isn’t “the members”, keep trying!

These are just a few, but they are foundational to what we do as association staff and leadership. A simple goal that every leader has when working with a successful organization is to continue that success. We will strive to remain agile, forward-thinking, and positive, and provide value for psychiatric-mental health nurses and nursing for many years to come!

Do you have any leadership role models?

There are many wonderful role models of leadership in general – ones about whom you can read books, and they can change how you think about what you do. But the role models who touch you the most are the people who you’ve had the opportunity to work with directly. These are the mentors who help to shape your ideals and best practices in leadership. I am fortunate to have a mentor who not only helped shape my philosophies in...
In what capacity are psychiatric-mental health nurses providing care?

Psychiatric-mental health nurses have proficiency across the science of interpersonal relationships, medical science, neurobiology, therapeutic interventions, and treatment methods. They provide comprehensive person-centered psychiatric-mental health and substance use disorder care in a variety of settings, including inpatient and outpatient hospitals, community mental health centers, primary care offices, and in their own private practices.

Psychiatric-mental health registered nurses work with individuals, families, groups, and communities, assessing and helping to meet their mental health needs. They develop a nursing diagnosis and plan of care, implement the nursing process, and evaluate it for effectiveness. Psychiatric-mental health advanced practice registered nurses (PMH-APRNs) assess, diagnose, and treat individuals and families with psychiatric and/or substance use disorders, or the potential for such disorders.

Many prescribe medication and provide psychotherapy. PMH-APRNs often own private practices and corporations as well as consult with groups, communities, legislators, and corporations.

What are the specific challenges for psychiatric nurses relating to COVID-19?

Experiences for psychiatric-mental health nurses have been very different across the country, but there are a few challenges that cut across the profession that I’ll highlight here.

The isolation that “stay home” orders impose is difficult for people who have well-established social connectedness, but can be devastating for someone without adequate interpersonal resources. Almost all people will experience psychological distress and people with severe mental disorders are especially vulnerable. In a time when everyone is experiencing increased stressors, psychiatric-mental health nurses are hard at work to meet the resulting increased need for care. Many are also providing mental health interventions to frontline staff who are overwhelmed and struggling with the extreme stress and trauma they are encountering daily.

Another challenge is that face-to-face therapeutic interactions are a cornerstone of psychiatric-mental health nursing care. With social distancing measures, much care is being delivered via telehealth – and PMH nurses have had to find new ways to create that therapeutic relationship with their clients. Psychiatric-mental health nurses have had to figure out how to connect with patients from behind a mask, how to provide therapy and counseling sessions via telehealth, and how to reach patients who may not have ready access to video technology.

Patients with serious mental illness have a high risk of health problems and may have difficulty understanding and following guidelines around masks, handwashing, and social distancing. This is where psychiatric-mental health nurses’ skillset in patient education is crucial. This skillset is also important when striving to combat misinformation that our patients may be exposed to.

Psychiatric-mental health nurses have been navigating many of the same challenges that nurses in other settings are as well: new and changing protocols, availability of testing, managing contacts with patients who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, and locating appropriate PPE.

There are plenty of other challenges, of course; I can’t begin to address them all. It has been inspiring to see how our members are innovating and sharing what they learn with their colleagues so that everyone can do their best to keep their patients safe during this time.
Q&A with Lisa Deffenbaugh Nguyen

Q&A continued from page 4

How has the COVID-19 lockdown affected day-to-day management of APNA?

While we are moving forward with the projects that APNA typically has during this time, everything is being viewed through a COVID-19 lens, because that is the world we are all living in. How will this effort benefit our members (and all nurses) right now, while they are dealing with the extra stresses and challenges of working and living during a pandemic? Does this offer something they need or want right now? If the answer is yes, and we have the capacity, it is worth doing. We have been listening to our members’ concerns and responding accordingly – providing professional development opportunities for all nurses which can fill a need for educating students or helping with self-care, sending updates in legislation and regulations that speak to PMH nursing practice, and offering resources which enable nurses to practice more effectively during this time. And sometimes what we really need is a way to recognize and acknowledge the amazing work of others, which we are happy to continue this year through our APNA Annual Awards program.

Our June conference this year will be completely virtual, which is a first for us! This conference provides targeted psychopharmacology content that our nurses need for their certification and licensure renewals. Considering this need, we have re-worked the program and management of the event, and even added in a session to address clinical practice during COVID-19. We’ve been forced to explore a virtual conference out of necessity, and through this experience we may discover a new opportunity to help bring quality education to those who may not be able to travel to an in-person conference. All we can do right now is have courage and adapt to the challenges we are faced with – and that’s one area where nurses have always excelled!

In terms of staff and operations management, thankfully, we already had transitioned most of our operations to cloud-based systems about 7 years ago and have been diligent in maintaining these capabilities for virtual staff and work-from-home opportunities. As opposed to physical office visits and staff meetings, we are connecting through emails, chat, video meetings, and personal phone call check-ins. We even have the option of an APNA Staff Lunch Social, where we can hop on to Zoom during the lunch hour, when we would normally gather to enjoy conversations in our conference room. With all staff at home, communicating with each other requires some additional effort, but it is incredible just how effective and committed everyone has remained throughout the past several months while we try to flex with our current situations.

My communications with staff often have focused more on understanding the difficulties of this time, making sure we are taking care of ourselves, and encouraging the use of mental health time if we need it (and we all need some right now!). In the hubbub of maintaining work, home life, and unexpected new “coworkers” (mine are 7 and 4), it is easy to get overwhelmed by the demands of our multiple roles and responsibilities. One of the most important things I can offer our staff and our Board right now is this understanding and support. I remind them: “We are living through a pandemic!” – which is to say, we’ll figure it out, and it will be okay! I’ve got your back! And I know you’ve got mine too. That reassurance is a beautiful thing.

What resources are available from APNA that would be beneficial to nursing students?

APNA provides a broad array of helpful resources and information for those considering careers as a psychiatric-mental health RN or psychiatric-mental health APRN. Full-time nursing students can join APNA as a student member for just $25 per year. APNA membership opens doors to mentoring, online discussions with nurses across the nation, local chapter networking opportunities, access to job postings, free continuing education, and more.

The APNA Board of Directors offers an annual scholarship for undergraduate and graduate students. The scholarship covers attendance at the APNA Annual Conference each year for 30 students. This opportunity provides amazing exposure to current developments in the field of psychiatric-mental health nursing in addition to the opportunity to make valuable connections with nurse leaders. Eighty-five percent of past scholars have told us that they developed connections with other PMH nurses through this scholarship, and 66% of them say that these connections helped them in their careers.

On the APNA website, nurses can find educational webinars and podcasts that are free to everyone, including nursing students. For example, APNA is offering a free webinar for everyone on Motivational Interviewing through the end of the year. Motivational Interviewing is a skill that any nurse can use when encouraging healthy new behaviors for patients. Because this webinar includes interactive elements, it may even help students meet requirements for clinical hours, which became a concern as schools responded to COVID-19. (Students should check with their nursing school programs on this point.)

For those interested in learning the knowledge and skills foundational to psychiatric-mental health nursing, the APNA Transitions in Practice (ATP) Certificate Program is a self-paced online curriculum with four modules that focus on the most up-to-date best practices and evidence-based nursing knowledge. Not only will completing this program set students up for success when they make the transition to psychiatric-mental health nursing practice, earning this certificate also looks good on a resume!

For nurses looking to understand more about psychiatric-mental health nursing as a career path, I would encourage them...
to check out this report on the pivotal role of psychiatric-mental health nursing in today’s health care landscape. And knowing that many nursing students struggle with stress, I would encourage all nursing students to check out this self-care tip sheet for nurses.

What can AACN member schools do to promote psychiatric-mental health nursing as a career option for their students?

One big thing they can do is to help combat the stigma that surrounds psychiatric-mental health nursing! We know that many nursing students are fearful and anxious about caring for psychiatric-mental health patients due to societal stigma around mental illness and substance use. We also know that students who are interested in psychiatric-mental health are often dissuaded from pursuing this type of nursing career due to a misunderstanding of what it is that psychiatric-mental health nurses do.

Stigma can best be countered with accurate information. APNA has created an undergraduate education faculty toolkit to help undergraduate nursing professors teach the psychiatric-mental health nursing component of their curriculum with comfort and in a way that is destigmatizing. APNA also has an infographic for nursing students about what psychiatric-mental health nurses do that schools may find useful to share. Psychiatric-mental health nursing can be an incredibly rewarding career: you get to spend real time with your patients, partnering with them to find hope, healing, and ultimately recovery.

Looking to the future, what are the greatest opportunities and challenges facing professional nursing?

Nurses are the most trusted profession and they are doing heroic things during this time. The public realizes now, perhaps more than ever, the importance of nurses and the profession. With the mental health and substance use crises that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, nurses across the healthcare system will provide care to more and more patients with mental health needs. They will need to be prepared to provide person-centered and trauma-informed care to this population. This is an opportunity to ensure that nurses have access to foundational mental health information and tools, such as SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral to Treatment) in helping to care for their patients.

On a positive note, many regulations and policies that previously limited nurses’ abilities to practice to the full extent of their education and training have been relaxed during this public health emergency. Looking to the future as we come out of this pandemic, this will present an opportunity to reexamine those regulations and policies. It will be important to educate stakeholders on how access to high quality and effective care increases when nurses are able to practice to their full scope.

We can also anticipate a greater adoption of telehealth that will revolutionize how care is delivered for many nurses. Nurses will be challenged to adopt this technology and nurse faculty will need to prepare students for varying methods of care delivery.

Recovery from this pandemic will be challenging, but as we move forward, nurses should come together for an honest assessment of what went right, what went wrong, and what viable solutions can be put in place to move forward into a better future. Crisis breeds innovation and nurses are natural innovators. I think that we can anticipate many amazing nurse-developed innovations coming to light that will have a real potential to push care forward in new and exciting directions.

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: AACN FACULTY SCHOLARS GRANT PROGRAM

The Foundation for Academic Nursing, the philanthropic arm of AACN, has created a new program designed to spark innovation and excellence in academic nursing. The AACN Faculty Scholars Grant Program will provide funding support to nurse educators whose scholarly activities reflect current issues in nursing education or practice and support AACN’s strategic priorities.

The AACN Board of Directors approved the Faculty Scholars Grant Program to spotlight the innovative work being led by nurse educators to redesign teaching and learning at AACN member schools. Funding for this program was provided by more than 150 nursing schools and organizations that contributed to AACN’s 50th Anniversary Celebration program.

Through this initiative, a total of $100,000 in funding will be distributed to support four $25,000 faculty scholarship projects through 2022. Two awards will be offered in the 2020-2021 academic year, and two will be offered in 2021-2022 academic year.

Given the current state of affairs and priorities outlined in AACN’s Vision for Academic Nursing, applications are currently being accepted for the first two grants, which must focus on Innovations in Competency-Based Nursing Education or Nursing Education Innovations Related to Disaster Response (COVID-19). All applications must be received by August 14, 2020. For complete details, including application and selection criteria, see the 2020 Call for Applications.
The Foundation for Academic Nursing is pleased to announce the creation of a new advisory committee to help guide the work of AACN’s new philanthropic arm. Advisory committee members will help set strategic goals for the foundation and identify funding priorities. Click here for more information on the foundation. The committee will include the following individuals:

Darlene Curley  
Healthcare Advisor

Lepaine Sharp-McHenry  
Simmons University

George Haddad  
Liaison International, Inc.

Susan Bakewell-Sachs  
Board Liaison, Oregon Health & Science University

Jane Kirschling  
University of Maryland

Deborah Trautman  
Staff Liaison, AACN

Richard I. Levin  
The Arnold P. Gold Foundation

The Foundation for Academic Nursing is seeking additional support from other corporate and individual donors for this fund to expand our ability to help more nursing students in need. Those wishing to contribute are encouraged to donate online via the AACN website. Those with questions about making a contribution are encouraged to contact Marta Okoniewski, AACN’s Director of Student Engagement, at mokoniewski@aacnnursing.org.

To support the information needs of nursing school deans, faculty, students, and other stakeholders, AACN has developed this resource center to highlight key information sources about the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) found on the web. This page will be updated regularly to include details about new informational events and webinars, the latest news from the CDC, educational events and webinars, and work underway at our nation’s nursing schools to raise awareness on prevention and preparedness efforts.
**VOICES OF ACADEMIC NURSING LEADERSHIP**

To recognize academic nursing’s contribution to addressing COVID-19, [AACN](https://www.aacnnursing.org) is showcasing brief videos that spotlight insights and inspirations from member deans whose faculty and students are leading efforts to confront the pandemic in their communities.

*Call for Video Submissions*

AACN invites all member deans to share their thoughts on nursing’s response to COVID-19 by submitting a video to our new online Gallery of Leadership. Videos are due for submission by Wednesday, July 15.

[View submission guidelines](https://www.aacnnursing.org)

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**UPCOMING AACN WEBINARS**

- **Course Development: Child Maltreatment in Health Care**
  June 9 | 2:00-3:00 PM

- **Virtual Meeting on the Advanced Level Essentials**
  June 17 | 11:00 AM-4:30 PM

- **Virtual Meeting on the Advanced Level Essentials**
  June 23 | 11:00 AM - 4:30 PM