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University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Issue III | July 2008

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STORY

UNLV Researchers Develop Training Program for Nurses
Communication Cited as Top Issue Affecting Success of Foreign Nurses; Pilot Program Aims to Positively Impact Patient Safety and Quality of Care



June 24, 2008 - With the nationwide nursing shortage expected to continue well into the future, health-care facilities have increasingly come to rely on internationally educated nurses (IENs) to fill staffing needs — yet until now no research-based training program has existed to ensure these nurses successfully integrate into the U.S. workforce.

In response to this need, UNLV School of Nursing Professor Yu (Philip) Xu and a team of university researchers developed Speak for Success — the first research-based, comprehensive language- and communication-training program for currently employed IENs. The nine-month pilot program, funded through a \$296,521 grant from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, will begin this summer with 72 IENs at Spring Valley Hospital in Las Vegas.

Nevada has among the highest rates of IENs in the nation, making up more than 15 percent of the nursing workforce in Southern Nevada (with an estimated 10-15 percentage points of underreporting) and close to 40 percent at Spring Valley Hospital. Nationally, IENs make up approximately 3.5 percent of registered nurses. Since the majority of IENs come from Asian countries, with more than half from the Philippines, the program is designed for Asian IENs.

"While every IEN has to pass a standard English language exam, effective communication and linguistic competence have been cited by employers, credentialing agencies, and IENs themselves as the top deterrents to integration and ultimately success in the American work environment," said Xu. "Since nursing requires constant communication with doctors, co-workers, patients, and families, communication-focused transition programs for foreign nurses are critical for improving both patient safety and quality of care."

Speak for Success is based on Xu's past and current research on IENs and consists of two interrelated components: a 10-week linguistic course with a certified speech pathologist, followed by four monthly communications workshops. While the former addresses linguistic competence with a focus on pronunciation and accent reduction, the latter aims at socio-cultural competence of communication.

Workshops include learning appropriateness in communication, non-verbal communication, language use and its variations in the American health-care setting, and practical communication skills training. A unique and innovative feature of the project is the use of simulated patients to evaluate socio-cultural competence during simulated scenarios. If successful, Speak for Success can be replicated by other hospitals locally. The research team intends to develop a model program for national dissemination.

Partnering with Xu on the project are Jay Shen, associate professor at UNLV's School of Public Health; Roseann Colosimo of the Nevada State Board of Nursing; and Margaret Covelli, chief nursing executive for Spring Valley Hospital. In addition, experts from the University of Nevada School of Medicine Office of Medical Education will assist in the communications portion of the study pertaining to human-simulated

patients.

[Read more](#) about this story in the UNLV Magazine.

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