

UNIVERSITY INITIATIVES

Grant Helps Health Center Expand Care for Patients in Need

FAU's Westgate Community Health Center has received a \$600,000 grant from the Farris Foundation to increase access to nurse-led primary and mental care services for underserved populations.



BY GISELE GALOUSTIAN | 6/28/2016

Florida Atlantic University's Community Health Center operated by FAU's Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing has received a \$600,000 grant from The Celia Lipton Farris and Victor W. Farris Foundation, Inc. to increase access to integrated nurse-led primary and behavioral care. Strategically located in the heart of West Palm Beach, FAU's Westgate center serves a high

minority and low-income community, where only 18 percent of its low income residents have access to health centers.

With the grant, FAU's College of Nursing will increase its hours of operation and expand outreach to screen for mental illness. The project will integrate behavioral health assessment, screening processes and interventions into the center's existing nurse-led practice. Patients at the center currently receive examinations, diagnostic tests, prescriptions, and follow-up care.

"The Farris Foundation is very pleased to support the expansion of services at FAU's Community Health Center, which will help to create a comprehensive, seamless system of healthcare services for many residents in need in Palm Beach County," said Christine Koehn, Ph.D., executive director of The Celia Lipton Farris and Victor W. Farris Foundation, Inc.

The inter-professional team will include a nurse care manager, social worker, patient care coordinator as well as nurse practitioners and physicians to ensure shared decision-making care. In addition to primary, diabetes and mental health care services, the center will reach into the community to provide comprehensive screenings, and tele-behavioral and diabetes services at rural and urban health care partner sites. Team members will be trained to use mental health screening tools and telehealth services for remote and rural areas, and will address issues related to depression, anxiety, substance use, diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. Furthermore, spirituality and cultural beliefs, language preference, trauma symptoms, and personalized medicine such as pharmacogenomics will be utilized to ensure a comprehensive approach for the patient's health issues.

"The majority of individuals living with mental illness or substance use issues are seen in primary care settings where there are significant health problems such as diabetes and hypertension," said Eugenia Millender, Ph.D., director of the FAU Community Health Center. "However, not all primary care patients are screened for substance use or mental health disorders, and likewise, not all mental health patients are screened for chronic illness or substance use. This grant will enable the FAU Community Health Center to close these gaps in care."

The center also will establish an integrated behavioral inter-professional practice to teach health profession students the competencies, practice knowledge and cultural sensitivity skills that are necessary to serve in community health care settings.

"We are most thankful to The Celia Lipton Farris and Victor W. Farris Foundation for this generous grant to support Dr. Millender's important work in our Community Health Center in Westgate," said Marlaine Smith, Ph.D., dean of FAU's College of Nursing. "Early screening, treatment, and care management by our expanded team will build trust, better health outcomes, and authentic community partnerships. Moreover, the program will help to develop more culturally competent nurses, doctors, and social workers."

FAU's College of Nursing is internationally known for its commitment to nursing as a discipline focused on nurturing the wholeness of persons and the environment through Caring. The College advances Caring knowledge through education, practice, research and scholarship to transform care locally, nationally and globally. Currently, the College of Nursing offers bachelor's, master's, DNP and Ph.D. degree programs with approximately 1,600 nursing students enrolled in its programs. For more information, visit www.nursing.fau.edu.