

# GEC Channel



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## Project Director's Message

Naushira Pandya, M.D., CMD



I am very excited and extremely privileged to head the **Florida Coastal Geriatric Resources, Education, and Training Center (GREAT GEC)** at Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine (NSU-COM). This center represents the culmination of much work and planning on the part of several key individuals in this institution. We received our award from the Health Resources and Services Administration in September 2007 and have already had a productive year.

The discipline leaders for this interdisciplinary education project hail from the following NSU colleges and centers:

- College of Allied Health and Nursing
- College of Dental Medicine
- College of Optometry
- College of Osteopathic Medicine
- College of Pharmacy
- Center for Psychological Studies
- Farquhar School of Social Sciences
- Lifelong Learning Institute

The expertise and interest in teaching geriatrics and treating seniors that already existed at NSU was one of the main reasons I joined the College of Osteopathic Medicine in 2003. The GREAT GEC has provided an additional impetus for all of us to galvanize our efforts, increase our collaboration in teaching health professions students, and provide more coordinated interdisciplinary care for our older patients at the main NSU campus.

I wish to recognize the guidance and mentorship of Dr. Leonard Levy, associate dean for education, planning, and research, and our executive director, Dr. Cecilia Rokusek, the experience and organizational skills of Dr. Jessica De Leon, our assistant

project manager, and the dedication and enthusiasm of Sona Hromulak, who is our newest member and administrative program manager.

Our first symposium, which was called Interdisciplinary Geriatrics: Closing the Gap in Elder Care and held June 6-7 on the NSU Health Professions Division campus, was a rewarding event that drew health professionals from Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach counties. The warmth and excitement, as well as the exchange of ideas and information, served to reaffirm the reasons all of us are engaged in the care of elders and in teaching and research in geriatrics and gerontology. We are grateful to our community partners for their collaboration and contributions to advance the mission of the center. The GREAT GEC represents a consortium comprising the **Aging and Disability Resource Center of Broward County**, the **Southwest Focal Point Senior Center**, and the **West Palm Beach Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center**.

One of the GREAT GEC's major goals is to provide health professions students and community members education in the areas of productive aging, public policy and access to health care, aging and social change, health care financing, and the care of persons with Alzheimer's and other chronic conditions. We are poised to play our part in improving the care of older adults in Southeast Florida who face the simultaneous challenges of age-related decline in function, chronic medical and psychosocial disorders, cognitive impairment, and limited resources. The priorities for elders in America are clearly stated in the recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report entitled *Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce*. The IOM's recommendations can be distilled into three main points:

- enhance geriatric competence of the entire workforce
- increase the recruitment and retention of geriatric specialists and caregivers
- improve the way care is delivered

Through supporting and nurturing individual and collaborative faculty research and educational efforts, we hope to make the GREAT GEC at Nova Southeastern University an institutional and community resource to prepare our students for rewarding and challenging careers. They will have competencies and skills that are and will continue to be demanded by the "Boomers."

# GREAT GEC Executive Director's Report

Cecilia Rokusek, Ed.D., R.D.



Dear colleagues and friends of the GREAT GEC:

What a pleasure for me to be part of Florida's newest Geriatric Education Center. The **Florida Coastal Geriatric Resources, Education, and Training Center (GREAT GEC)** is a long-awaited dream come true for Nova Southeastern University

College of Osteopathic Medicine (NSU-COM) and the entire Health Professions Division (HPD), which the college is part of. The interdisciplinary environment of the HPD is rich with so many of the core geriatric health professions, which include medicine, pharmacy, dental medicine, optometry, physical therapy, nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, and lifelong education. Our key challenge as an interdisciplinary team is to educate future health, education, and social services professionals to enter into the practice of geriatrics.

We are all aware of the growing demographic reality of an aging population worldwide, but most significantly here in the United States. We do not have enough adequately prepared professionals to serve a new majority group in society. We are going to need significantly more professionals in **EVERY** health, social service, and geriatric education profession. The solution is not an easy one and cannot be "fixed" in the near future. Those of us in higher education and those in practice serving mature adults must inspire others to go into geriatrics. This must occur early in the educational process. Students in elementary school and beyond need to be placed in environments where they can interact with elders.

In addition, parents need to instill in their children the values and rewards that can come from a career in working with mature adults. We must be genuinely positive about our work, and when students come to our facilities for clinical rotations, we need to be mentors and examples for them to follow. The personal and professional rewards of a career in geriatrics need to be highlighted. Certainly, low wages remain an issue, but let's focus on the recruitment of future geriatric professionals and the rewards of the career. If we do that, I believe the wages will come. There is power in numbers!

In this, our first quarterly GREAT GEC newsletter, which we are calling the *GEC Channel*, I, along with my colleagues, are proud to give you a snapshot of our first GEC symposium. It drew nearly 100 attendees from Florida and across the country. The program was

interdisciplinary and focused on contemporary issues in the geriatric discipline. Kudos to our wonderful faculty and staff that organized this. CD-ROM copies of the program can be attained by contacting Sona Hromulak, administrative program manager for the GEC, at [hromulak@nova.edu](mailto:hromulak@nova.edu).

The work of the GEC is now focused on Web-based interdisciplinary curriculum development. A very new and innovative curriculum will be coming out in the months and year ahead. As a nutritionist, I am lucky enough to be involved both as an administrator and as a discipline professional. The nutrition issues of the elderly are an ongoing challenge for us all. As a result of the work in the GEC, I look forward to looking at some of the major nutrition-related issues in the elderly and passing on practical and useful information to all of you so you can share it with those you are working with. If you should ever have any need for nutrition information or programs, please do not hesitate to call me or Ms. Hromulak to schedule a program.

Early this fall, we will be having the grand opening for our new GEC office suite. Everyone is busy moving into the new space this summer. We are truly making history at NSU-COM, and we are looking forward to a bright and far-reaching future as we have much yet to do to complete our dreams in geriatrics.



# Assistant Project Manager's Report

Jessica De Leon, Ph.D.



On June 6-7, the GREAT GEC hosted its inaugural **Interdisciplinary Geriatrics Symposium** called **Closing the Gap in Elder Care**.

As the symposium's title suggests, the geriatric patient presents complex and unique health issues that require an interdisciplinary approach to care. To address this complexity,

Closing the Gap in Elder Care brought together experts and professionals from different health professions, as well as governmental, commercial, and academic organizations, to educate and learn about geriatrics and discuss major health care issues among the elderly.

The 2008 symposium drew nearly 100 attendees from Florida and across the United States. The two-day event included an exciting combination of presentations by 23 speakers, who presented 15 oral and 11 poster presentations. Topics addressed were diverse and included dementia, depression, stroke, diabetes, weight management, falls, disaster preparedness, vision, hearing, oral health, pain management, hospice, Medicare/Medicaid, and environmental health.

Attendees also were able to interact with a number of exhibitors that lent their expertise, services, and products to this event. These included:

- Aging and Disability Resource Center/Broward County
- Elderly and Veterans Services
- Hospice Care of Southeast Florida
- Imagine Therapy
- League for the Hard of Hearing
- Novartis
- NSU-COM Center for Bioterrorism and All-Hazards Preparedness (CBAP)
- NSU College of Optometry
- NSU Lifelong Learning Institute
- Senior Volunteer Services
- SHINE (Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders)

An attendee evaluation found significant increases in the self-assessed level of knowledge on all topics. Over 97 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed the symposium provided them with

practical knowledge; over 93 percent felt they will be able to apply the knowledge gained; and 91 percent felt the symposium will help them do their job better. One hundred percent of the respondents rated the symposium overall as either "good" or "excellent."

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the event and made the GREAT GEC's inaugural symposium a success, including the dean of NSU's College of Osteopathic Medicine, Dr. Anthony J. Silvagni, NSU administration and facilities, and all who were involved in the symposium organization and supported our efforts. In particular, we would like to thank members of the GREAT GEC, including Dr. Naushira Pandya, Dr. Cecilia Rokusek, Sona Hromulak, and Dr. Diane Sanders-Cepeda.

The Florida Coastal Geriatric Resources, Education, and Training Center (GREAT GEC) located within Nova Southeastern University is one of a national network of 46 Geriatric Education Centers in the United States. The GREAT GEC offers health professions educators, students, and community practitioners with opportunities to learn more about providing culturally appropriate health care to older adults and their families and is dedicated to improving the health care of Florida elders.



Pictured (from left) at the symposium are: Edward Aqua, D.Eng., director, Lifelong Learning Institute; Margaret "Peggy" Davis, M.S.N., R.N., assistant professor, Nursing Department; Sona Hromulak, M.Sc., M.B.A., administrative program manager, GREAT GEC; Cecilia Rokusek, Ed.D., R.D., executive director, GREAT GEC; Naushira Pandya, M.D., CMD, project director, GREAT GEC; Michelle Gagnon-Blodgett, Psy.D., coordinator, geriatric clinical services/clinical assistant professor, Department of Geriatrics; Jessica De Leon, Ph.D., assistant project manager, GREAT GEC; Diane Ede-Nichols, D.D.S., associate professor, College of Dental Medicine; and Debra Stern, D.B.A., PT, associate professor, Department of Physical Therapy.

# GREAT GEC News of Note

**Naushira Pandya, M.D., CMD**, has authored and coauthored several recent journal articles, including "Eyes on Diabetes: A Multidisciplinary Patient Education Intervention" that was featured in the January 2008 issue of *Diabetes Educator* and "Diagnosis of Osteoporosis in Long-Term Care: Real-life Issues, which appeared in the November 2007 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*.

**Alina Perez, J.D.**, assistant professor of public health, in conjunction with NSU's Lifelong Learning Institute and the Fischler School of Education and Human Services, conducted an assessment of Broward County's readiness to engage baby boomers in civic activities. The results were included in the Community Foundation of Broward's report entitled *Re-Engage for Good: A Call to Action*.

Members of the **Broward Coalition for Optimal Behavioral Health and Aging** formed a working group for the initiative entitled Older Adult Behavioral Health and Wellness: Integration with Primary Care. The initiative's primary goal is to help educate and provide tools for area physicians and other health professions so they will be able to better detect and manage mental health problems in older patients. Workgroup members include: Stephen Ferrante, M.S.W. (Broward County

Elderly and Veteran Services Division); Kimberly Hornack, M.S.W. (Broward Health); Marcia Pinck, M.S.W. (Broward Mental Health Association); and NSU's Dr. Michelle Gagnon-Blodgett. To learn more about this initiative or about the Broward Coalition for Optimal Behavioral Health and Aging, please contact Dr. Gagnon-Blodgett at (954) 262-5611.

**Jacquelyn Dwoskin-Browne, Ph.D., LCSW**, program professor of gerontology initiatives at NSU's Fischler School of Education and Human Services, was appointed to the editorial board of the American Society on Aging's newsletter – *The Older Learner*.

**Jessica De Leon, Ph.D.**, GREAT GEC assistant project manager and research associate with the Center for Bioterrorism and All-Hazards Preparedness (CBAP), presented a workshop entitled "Hurricane Experiences Among Older Adults: Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Preparedness and Response" at the 22nd Annual Florida Governor's Hurricane Conference in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, last May with CBAP colleague Sally Bragg, R.N., M.S.N. In conjunction with faculty from the University of Florida, she will also be presenting a workshop entitled "Addressing the Needs of Older Adults Before, During, and After Disasters" at the Florida Conference on Aging in Orlando in August 2008.

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**Editor/Graphic Design**

Scott Colton, B.A., Director of Medical Communications

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