

FEATURES

Legislation require universities to alert students of threat within 30 minutes

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MCT WIRE SERVICE

WASHINGTON

Just days before the one-year anniversary of the Virginia Tech University shootings, Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, D-N.Y., introduced a bill that would require universities to alert students of a threat no more than 30 minutes after it's been confirmed.

"Many believe if the students had been notified earlier, they might not have gone to class," McCarthy said Wednesday.

The law currently requires universities to notify students in a "timely manner." But McCarthy said that standard is too subjective and could cost lives, like at Virginia Tech — when the university waited nearly two hours last April 16 to e-mail students that a gunman had been on campus. Thirty-two people were killed.

McCarthy's proposal also requires that universities annually publish and test

emergency response procedures.

Colleges would have until 2009 to set up campus wide alert systems using whatever method they chose — such as automated cell phone calls or text messages — but the proposal doesn't yet include funds for institutions to do so.

Gun violence hits home for McCarthy, whose son was injured and husband was killed by a gunman while riding a Long Island Rail Road train in New York in 1993. The tragedy was the platform that propelled her to a seat in Congress.

On New York's Long Island, Stony Brook University used its own emergency system in late February — when a cafeteria worker falsely reported a man with a gun.

The university alerted students 26 minutes after getting the report, a reasonable amount of time to respond to such a threat —

but which might not be feasible at other times, said Robert Lenahan, university emergency management director.

"There may be some circumstances where you may need to take a little more time to verify the accuracy," Lenahan said.

That's why the American Council on Education opposes the "one-size-fits-all mandate," said Terry W. Hartle, the council's senior vice president for government and public affairs.

"Campus security officers want to convey information as timely, accurate and useful," Hartle said. "If you choose one of those three over the others, you may not be providing the best information people need."

But alerts within 30 minutes could save lives, said Joe Samaha, father of Virginia Tech victim Reema Samaha. "If we do not learn the lesson, we will have lost our students for nothing," he said.



Photo by Garrett Garms

Extra security measures have been taken due to recent emergencies on university campuses.

Education central to the black church

Jerrod Johnson
STAFF REPORTER

As the Rev. Dr. Brad R. Braxton stood in K.R. Williams Auditorium in front of a crowd of about 300 students, alumni and visitors, there was one thing on his mind.

"I want to celebrate the marvelous legacy of the black church," he said. "The media coverage has created a considerable degree of misunderstanding."

Rev. Braxton was referring to the 2008 presidential nomination campaign and the media targeting of black churches due to comments made by Senator Barack Obama's former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago.

An associate professor of Homiletics and New Testament at Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Braxton taught at Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem. He holds a bachelor's degree in religious studies from the University of Virginia, a master of philosophy degree in New Testament Studies from the University of Oxford where he was a Rhodes Scholar, and a Ph.D. in New Testament studies from Emory University.

After a short prayer, Braxton enumerated the contributions the black church has made in the United States, including the practices of social protest and preaching, as well as the musical gifts of spirituals and gospel music. It was in the black church, he said, that worship became a true example of exultation and ecstasy.

"The black church has always been a fervent source of hope," Braxton said.

"Education is central to the black church," he said.

As a community, the church must be inclusive to those who are different, and not exclusive, he said.

"We must break down the walls of separation in churches," Braxton said. "We must break down the walls of separation between people of different racial identities, different sexual identities, red and blue states and between the 'do-bop' and 'hip-hop' generations."

Later on, he discussed the viewpoint held by many skeptics that the black church, for being so "Heavenly-minded," does no good in life. Braxton then defended his own position using the scientific theory of quantum energy.

"For every dimension of evil, there is a greater dimension of divine wisdom. The church's task is to mediate that wisdom on higher levels," he said.

Above everything else, Braxton called upon the church to do more, by operating on a higher level of existence.

"Church is about more than the sweetest hoop, the largest budget or the biggest building," he extolled. "Church is about more than passing the plate, Saturday specials and Sunday socials. Church is about more than dripping water on a baby's forehead and submerging people in water for baptism. Church is about more than wafers and wine on Communion and satisfying the deacons. Church is about more than holding hands of the dying and feeding the hungry."

"When we do church right," Braxton said, "it is an example of God on a higher level."

North Carolina trains nurses to serve missing psychiatric needs

Jan P. Fisher
MCT WIRE SERVICE

RALEIGH

The School of Nursing at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill is increasing the scarce supply of mental health providers by retraining nurses to diagnose and treat psychiatric illness.

What's more, the program recruits at least half its students from North Carolina counties with the highest need, which often results in new providers returning to practice where they are most needed.

The school is one of a handful of universities nationally that trains registered nurses to be psychiatric nurse practitioners. Here, and across the country, such professionals are emerging as critical players in efforts to address a growing shortage of psychiatrists.

Seventeen of North Carolina's 100 counties have no psychiatrist, and 27 others have significant shortages, according to the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research at the Chapel Hill campus.

That means many patients with mental illness, particularly those in rural parts of the state, go undiagnosed or untreated. Some seek help from primary-care doctors who typically lack the specialized training to provide optimal care. In the worst situations, untreated patients wander the streets, land in hospital emergency rooms or end up in jail.

"You have terrible access across the state," said Dr. Marvin Swartz, chief of the division of social and community psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C. Duke is also trying to address the shortage, by training physician assistants in a one-year fellowship program that provides advanced training in psychiatric care. Upon completion, physician assistants will be able to function as primary mental health care providers. "It's a very challenging situation."

Swartz and others say mental health reforms adopted by the state in 2001 only exacerbated problems by closing down county-run psychiatric programs. In theory, private providers were to step in to care for patients. Most counties are still waiting for that to happen. Others have overpaid for services that benefit easy-to-treat people, leaving profoundly sick patients with little care.

UNC-CH's psychiatric nurse practitioner program helps by pro-

ducing highly skilled clinicians who can assess and diagnose psychiatric illness and treat it with both psychotherapy and medication. In North Carolina, psychiatric nurse practitioners are the only nonphysician mental health providers who can prescribe powerful anti-psychotic drugs. State law does require them to work in collaboration with a physician, though the doctor need not be on site.

Abree Ryans of Jacksonville graduated from UNC-CH's program in December to find employers clamoring for her expertise.

"For the first time in my nursing career, I have not had to look for a job — people are calling me," said Ryans. "I have turned down at least 10 job offers."

Ryans, a former psychiatric nurse, has accepted a part-time position at a private mental health services practice in Jacksonville, which is an underserved area. She will perform psychological assessments and manage patients' medications. She is considering a second position with a provider in Wilmington.

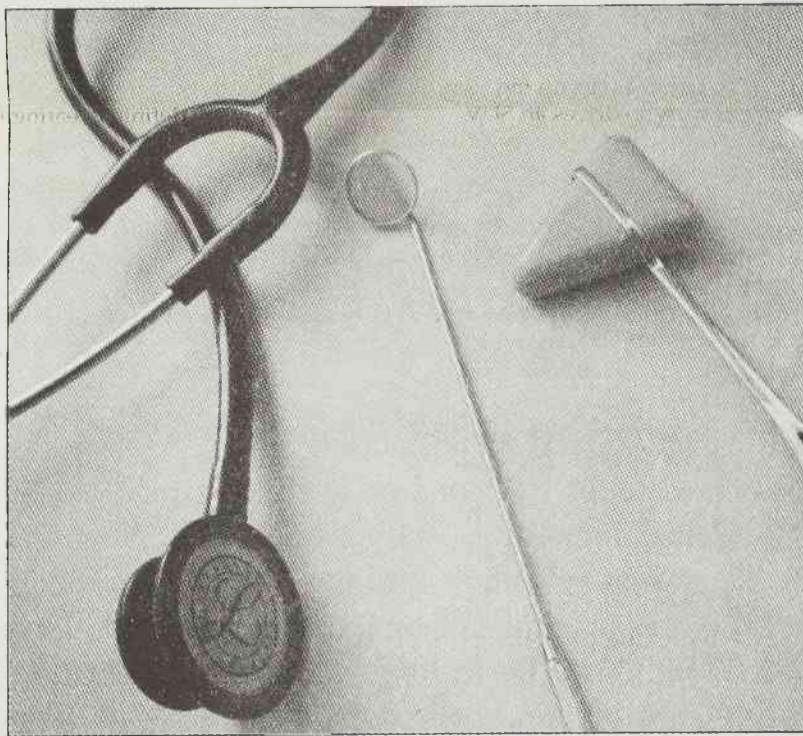
"I'm excited and raring to go," said Ryans, who loved her work as a nurse but felt too limited in what she could do for her patients. "Now I am going to be able to help people so much more."

UNC-CH has had a psychiatric nurse practitioner program since 2002. But enrollment didn't take off until the next year, when the School of Nursing received state and federal grants to target nurses already living and working in underserved areas across North Carolina. The program also seeks to enroll nurses who are racial minorities or who come from poor backgrounds.

Students entering the program may have a two-year or four-year nursing degree, or they may already have a master's degree in nursing. Depending on the level of training coming in, it takes one to three years to complete the psychiatric nurse practitioner degree.

Nurses recruited through the grant-funded program, called Nurses Enhancing Mental Health Options for the Underserved in North Carolina, receive resources such as a free laptop computer. Tuition assistance is also available in exchange for a commitment to work in an underserved area upon graduation.

To make attending school as easy as possible, the university modeled the psychiatric nurse practitioner



Photos courtesy of Media Relations

ABOVE: Nursing will no longer be limited to standard tasks but will expand to include psychiatric diagnoses of patients.

BELOW: WSSU nursing graduates will be more competitive when looking for jobs if they receive patient psychiatric training.

program after executive degree programs that require only weekly or monthly visits to campus. It also incorporated courses taught via teleconference. That has enabled nurses from remote parts of the state to work toward degrees while continuing to work in their home communities.

"I probably wouldn't be able to do this without distance learning," said Kim Bronson of Garland, N.C., a small town in Sampson County about a two-hour drive from Chapel Hill.

Bronson, a single mother, works full time as a substance-abuse nurse while also attending the school's psychiatric nurse practitioner program. She hopes to stay in Sampson County after she completes her training. Her dream is to open a substance abuse treatment center there or in nearby Robeson County. Both counties have a desperate need, she said.

"A lot of people don't know where to go or what to do to access services," Bronson said. "The emergency departments are inundated with psychiatric patients."

Since 2003, enrollment in the Chapel Hill campus program has grown from two students to more than 50. Fewer than six have completed their psychiatric nurse prac-



itioner degrees to date, but at least 14 more are expected to graduate this summer.

"We started slow, and we started small, so the numbers are not that impressive," said Linda Beeber, a professor of nursing at the school and founder of the psychiatric nurse practitioner program. "But give us a couple of years. It's certainly not the answer to the whole problem, but it's one proactive thing that nursing can offer."