Palacios recognized as a “hero of health”

Rebecca Palacios, assistant professor in the Department of Public Health Sciences, was honored in December as one of the Con Alma Health Foundation’s “heroes of health” for her work in improving drinking water in colonias, undeveloped or underdeveloped areas in Doña Ana and El Paso counties.

“Many people in these areas do not have access to treated municipal water,” she said. “There is a very high health risk for these people. Some of them dig their own wells, which tend to be shallow and produce contaminated water that isn’t sufficiently filtered.”

The “Point of Use Drinking Water Treatment in the Paso del Norte Region” project provides people with no-cost filtration systems to get rid of common contaminants in the water systems. Palacios is collaborating with researchers from the University of Texas-El Paso.

Con Alma also honored Palacios for her work in helping to improve the consumption of fruits and vegetables in Mexican-American households. To enhance nutrition, she is examining barriers to people buying fruits and vegetables by collaborating with grocery stores and the marketing departments of NMSU and Cornell University. These researchers are designing better store plans that encourage fruit and vegetable purchases, including putting recipes on grocery carts.

“There’s no reason for these health disparities to exist,” Palacios said. “I think it’s important that everyone should have access to good health.”

NMSU graduates the first DNP students in the state

History was made this past fall when Gina Fullbright and Shelly Noe became the state’s first two students to complete requirements for the Doctorate of Nursing Practitioner (DNP) degree.

Fullbright said time management was her biggest challenge. “It’s difficult for anyone to be a full-time student, a full-time employee and a full-time parent,” she said. “Each of these roles demands, expects, and deserves 100 percent of my attention. The DNP is a rigorous program and maintaining a healthy balance can be a challenge.” After graduation, Fullbright plans to continue working as a Women’s Health Certified Nurse Practitioner while teaching full-time at NMSU.

Noe said another challenge was fulfilling the role of pioneer. She said the cohort “blazed the trail for those who will come after us in the DNP program.” Noe has accepted a position as an assistant professor in the graduate program in the School of Nursing. She will continue working as a Nurse Practitioner and also plans to continue publishing research to improve practice for patients struggling with substance abuse.

Preparing nurse practitioners at a doctoral level provides the skills they need to translate research into practice more swiftly, thus improving quality of care.

In 2010, the Institute of Medicine’s Future of Nursing report highlighted the need for better-prepared and educated nurses. Before this report, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing voted that by 2015 all advanced practice nurses are required to be doctorally prepared.
In 2012, two NMSU researchers and their graduate student published an article in The Health Education Monograph Series called “Obesity Issues in the 51st State.” The researchers, Rebecca Palacios and Mark Kittleson, along with Master of Public Health graduate student Jessica Rodriguez-Herrera identified how this region of the country is at high risk for obesity related problems.

California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas as well as “sister states” in Mexico make up the 2,000 mile-long U.S.-Mexico border region. This area is often referred to as the 51st state because it has its own unique set of health challenges: a higher proportion of individuals living below poverty, low education levels and low-skill jobs that pay poorly, and lack of health insurance and access to health care, just to name a few.

Moreover, while the percentage of individuals classified as obese is about the same between the general U.S. population and the 51st state, the 51st state has a significantly higher number of overweight individuals when compared to the rest of the country.

According to the National Institutes of Health, obesity and being overweight are risk factors for various chronic diseases and problems. There also is evidence suggesting that obesity is strongly associated with an increased risk of developing cancers of the breast, cervix, prostate and pancreas.

So how is obesity being fought along the border? While there is no simple single solution to the problem, one of the critical answers is this: Americans need to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables.

Palacios, an assistant professor of public health, is working with marketing researchers Collin Payne and Mihai Niculescu on a grocery store health intervention. Their goal is to persuade Mexican-Americans in the Paso del Norte region to buy and eat more fruits and vegetables.

There still is a long way to go, but the work by these professors is one step toward reducing obesity in the “51st state.”

Holmes receives “Friend of Nursing” award

The New Mexico Center for Nursing Excellence honored longtime friend of nursing, and CHSS board member Denton Holmes, with the 2012 New Mexico Friend of Nursing award in October.

Rose Nava, who earned a dual Master of Social Work/Master of Public Health degree in May, was awarded an internship in Washington, D.C., last fall.

Our college will continue to educate our students, conduct research into topics that improve the quality of life, provide health services to our communities, and honor our donors and others who mean so much to us. We also look forward to even more honors and accolades this year.

So to 2013, we say, “Bring it on!”

Sincerely,

Tilahun Adera, Dean
College of Health and Social Services
The College of Health and Social Services was delighted to honor **Diana Fancher**, DNP, as the Distinguished Alumna of the Year in October 2012.

As a single mother, Fancher worked her way through school to earn an associate’s degree in Nursing from NMSU, graduating with honors. She then went on to earn her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, Master of Science in Nursing degree, Master of Business Administration degree and Doctorate of Nursing Practice degree. Her DNP degree is a specialty in executive leadership, which she earned at the Texas Tech University Health Science Center, Anita Thigpen Perry School of Nursing.

As the chief nursing officer of a major medical center, Fancher is responsible for an $85 million operational budget. She administers, directs and coordinates patient care services at University Medical Center El Paso and participates as a member of the hospital’s executive team in planning, policy formulation and strategic decisions. She also manages to make time for her responsibilities over six Women’s Health Centers and contributes to the design and development of the new El Paso Children’s Hospital and the new Women’s Tower at UMC El Paso.

Her efforts have included progressive clinical administrative roles and service as Associate Chief Nursing Officer at Las Palmas Medical Center. Outside of her profession, Fancher serves her community as a UMC Foundation board member, Children’s Miracle Network Advisory Board member and Cardiology Review Editorial Board member.

Alejandra Contreras, director of medical, surgical and perioperative services at UMC El Paso, said Fancher was certainly deserving of this honor.

“She has worked hard to be in the position she has as our CNO,” Contreras said. “She is a driver and a visionary. What I most enjoy about Diana is her humanity. She really cares for our nurses and making their environment a comfortable place to work in, their home away from home.”

Fancher embodies what the College of Health and Social Services hopes for all graduates: a life of commitment and service.

---

**Graduate receives mental health services internship**

NMSU’s dual master’s degree graduate **Rose Nava** began a 15-week internship Sept. 10 with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in Washington, D.C.

Nava earned a Master of Social Work and Master of Public Health in May from the College of Health and Social Services. She is currently an Albuquerque area program coordinator for the Southwest Institute for Family and Child Advocacy, which is housed in NMSU’s School of Social Work.

She will be working for SAMHSA’s policy office where she will focus on various projects that deal with tribal affairs, health care reform, legislation, behavior health, trauma and women and children’s issues.

“This is an excellent opportunity to see what happens on the national level,” said the Santa Fe native. “I want to gain knowledge that I can bring back to New Mexico communities.”

SAMHSA was established in 1992 by Congress to target effective substance abuse and mental health services to the people most in need and to translate research in these areas more effectively and more rapidly into the general health care system.

---

**Thank you for your support**

At this time of the year, it seems natural to reflect on the past year; to acknowledge progress made, to look forward to new possibilities and to express gratitude to those who have been friends of the college. I have spent this last year with many generous individuals, witnessing how they’ve affected change in a meaningful way with lasting effects.

As 2013 begins, I want to express my appreciation to the many of you who have given of your time—have been guest speakers in our classrooms, mentored students or attended important college events. Your commitment continues to make a difference. And to our donors: It is with your gifts that we advance in hiring faculty, award more scholarships to deserving students, provide much needed research funding, and make progress for many other worthy causes. For all of the areas your gifts impact positively, we thank you and wish you a very happy and prosperous 2013!

— **Jennifer Cervantes**  
Assistant Dean for Advancement
Congratulations to our scholarship recipients

On Sept. 27 we held our annual scholarship award ceremony where we celebrated our student recipients and our donors who make these scholarships possible. More than 40 scholarships were awarded totaling $98,330. We want to acknowledge our generous donors who recognize and support our amazing students, faculty and staff. Thank you!