

  
The Graduate School of Nursing

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This is a publication of the University of Massachusetts Medical School Office of Alumni and Parent Relations.

## Alumni Profile | Sean Collins, MS, ANP, PhD



**Program:** Acute Care, Nurse Practitioner, PhD

**Years of Graduation:** 1994, 1996, 2009

Field experience gained through three tours in Iraq wasn't the only reason Col. Sean Collins, MS, ANP, PhD, was called up for a six-month deployment in Afghanistan with the Air National Guard's 104th

Fighter Wing in 2011. His specific expertise in clinical research centering on the health issues of the deployed military was needed to evaluate protocols focused on treating the wounded.

During his most recent tour, Dr. Collins, commander of a Massachusetts Air National Guard medical group, evaluated patient care and ensured that research protocols for studies on the use of tourniquets and "walking blood banks" were current. With little refrigeration available in the field for blood storage, staff must administer donated blood to patients within 20 minutes of collection.

For Collins, an assistant professor in the GSN, the work in Afghanistan was an extension of his overall research interests. His clinical skills have focused on treating soldiers who are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder and other ailments, as well as helping their families.

A graduate of three GSN programs, Collins earned his master's in nursing in 1994 as a Clinical Nurse Specialist/Acute Care, his post-master's Certificate as an Adult Nurse Practitioner in 1996 and his PhD in 2009. While working toward his PhD in clinical research, Collins served three tours of duty. Research for his doctoral dissertation focused on analyzing data collected by the Department of Defense from surveys completed by military personnel returning from active duty. "The stimulating and challenge coursework at GSN leaves graduates well-prepared for success in any clinical setting," explained Collins, who lives in Southwick, Mass. ■

**Anyone with news to share is encouraged to send his or her class notes to [alumni@umassmed.edu](mailto:alumni@umassmed.edu). You may also submit notes by visiting the UMass Alumni Online Community at [www.NetworkUMass.com/Medical](http://www.NetworkUMass.com/Medical) and clicking on "Class Notes."**

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# The Vibe @

Winter 2012

## The Graduate School of Nursing

**Happy New Year!** We're so pleased to kick off 2012 with a new issue of The Vibe. In this edition, we examine a dynamic education elective that affords both GSN and their fellow School of Medicine students with opportunities to gain clinical exposure to geriatricians and other specialists who see older patients in an ambulatory setting and to help patients to more fully understand their health problems and treatments. We also take a look at the annual GEP pinning ceremony and introduce you to a fellow alumnus who was tapped by the National Guard to apply his clinical research expertise on health issues of deployed military, specifically relating to patient care in the field.

If you have news you'd like to share or have suggestions for future issues of The Vibe, please contact us at [alumni@umassmed.edu](mailto:alumni@umassmed.edu) or call the Office of Alumni Relations at 508-856-1593. We look forward to hearing from you!

Best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year,

**Jill Terrien, MS'97, PhD'07**  
Chair, Alumni Association

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## Geriatrics Education Elective Takes Off

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF NURSING (GSN) and School of Medicine (SOM) students are paving the way for more comprehensive geriatrics education and care through a unique elective. The Navigator Program in Geriatrics is designed to improve the health of older patients by pairing them with students for primary and subspecialty care appointments.

"We want to raise the bar for students' knowledge of geriatrics, no matter what specialty they will choose as future physicians and nurse practitioners," explained Sarah McGee, MD, MPH, assistant professor of medicine and a faculty advisor to the program.

The clinically based elective, which was initiated two years ago by a SOM student, pairs GSN and second-year SOM students with patients for at least three outpatient medical encounters. Combined with a series of small-group discussions facilitated by faculty, the elective provides foundational information and experiences that reflect the future of geriatrics education as an interdisciplinary, non-physician-centric model that will depend on a team approach.

"Most people say that their 'eureka moment' is less of a single epiphany and more of a gradual realization of how difficult it is for an older person to make



sense of multiple doctors, appointments and medications," said Gary Blanchard, MD, assistant professor of medicine and a faculty advisor for the program. Those lessons, however, can take many forms and are influenced by both the individual relationships students form with patients and family members, as well as a patient's medical progression and clinical interactions.

GSN student Alison Helmuth worked with the geriatric population in cardiac rehabilitation before she entered the GSN program. Through her participation in the Navigator Program, she developed a deeper understanding of patients' needs

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## ALUMNI PHONATHON

On four nights in October, more than 40 students from UMass Medical School's Graduate School of Nursing, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and School of Medicine manned a bank of phones in the School's Faculty Conference Room for the annual Alumni Phonathon.

Gifts from alumni are a crucial source of support for various initiatives and scholarships at all three schools. If you responded with a gift, thank you! If you would like to make a gift, you may do so online at <http://w3.umassmed.edu/OnlineDonation> or by mailing your contribution to UMass Medical School Development Office, 333 South Street, Shrewsbury, MA 01545.



▲ Keynote speaker Afaf Meleis, PhD, at the third annual Five-Campus PhD Nursing Student Forum.

## UMass PhD nursing students gather to learn and share

STUDENTS IN PURSUIT of the PhD in Nursing degree from all five UMass campuses convened centrally for the third annual Five-Campus PhD Nursing Student Forum, held in October at the University's South Street Campus in Shrewsbury, also home to much of the UMMS Graduate School of Nursing. The event provides students with an informal, open venue that encourages them to compare notes and share challenges and successes related to their educational experiences. Program planning for the annual event rotates among campuses.

Keynote speaker Afaf Meleis, PhD, discussed her own journey and discoveries in nursing scholarship in her talk "Transitions: A Journey Toward Integration of Knowledge." An internationally renowned nurse scientist, Dr. Meleis is the Margaret Bond Simon Dean of Nursing at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, where she is also professor of nursing and sociology and director of the school's World Health Organization Collaborating Center for Nursing and Midwifery Leadership.

Read more about the Forum online at [www.umassmed.edu/news/education/2011/five-campus\\_nursing\\_forum.aspx](http://www.umassmed.edu/news/education/2011/five-campus_nursing_forum.aspx).

## Geriatrics Education... Continued from page 1

and perspectives and appreciated the power of the interdisciplinary approach.

"I've been to lots of specialty appointments with my patients. Having me there as an advocate is helpful, as I guide them in asking the right questions and clarifying whatever goes on during the appointment," said Helmuth, who will graduate in June 2012. "Anything medical can be confusing even for the most well-rounded elderly individual. Learning how much time it takes to work with a geriatric patient has opened my eyes to the importance of listening and talking through issues during an appointment."

For Helmuth, the Navigator Program experience has paid off exponentially. "For such a short time commitment, what you get back is outstanding, not only in what you learn and how you can impact a life, but also in the connections you make with professionals," she said. "It's very interdisciplinary."

In the small-group sessions with faculty, students discuss how to effectively communicate with older adults as well as issues regarding prescribing medications, including the dangers of polypharmacy and not prescribing particular medications by virtue of age. End-of-life care, including

palliative care, as well as patient concerns related to specific specialty care visits are also covered.

The session pertaining to end-of-life care was implemented following the death of two patients during the program's first year. As the students who were paired with these patients were so profoundly impacted by these outcomes, they recommended the creation of this learning component, which is being developed by Dr. McGee, Dr. Blanchard and Jill Terrien, MS, PhD, assistant professor and director of NP Specialites.

The program's mix of medical and nursing students provides many opportunities for unique information exchanges. "Most of the medical students have limited clinical experience whereas many nurses have a great deal, which means they have a wealth of information to share," said McGee. "One nursing student, for example, has 20 years of cardiac nursing experience."

Since its inception, the program has

doubled to include 28 students. Faculty advisors are working to enhance the interdisciplinary approach by engaging GSN faculty. They are also developing education models where medical students would navigate patients whose primary care provider is a nurse practitioner (NP) and NP students would navigate patients under a physician's care.

"I don't know of another program that would pair students that way, but that's the future of geriatric education," said Blanchard. "We're teaching medical and nursing students during a formative time of their careers, and we're excited about that." ■

**GSN Alumni Snapshot**  
Information collected through an institution-wide alumni survey conducted in fall 2010.

- 18%** of respondents work within hospital-based specialty care (i.e., pathology)
- 8%** of respondents practice/serve in federally assisted underserved locations
- Respondents spend a majority of their time in patient care as opposed to research or education or administration

## Traditional Pinning Ceremony Opens Convocation Week

A PERSONAL TRAINER, a musician, a fashion designer, two teachers and a restaurateur, 12 recent college graduates and several health care professionals were the center of attention at the opening event of Convocation Week 2011. As members of the Graduate Entry Pathway (GEP) Class of 2013, these students marked a turning point in their nursing studies at the seventh annual GEP Pinning ceremony on Tuesday, Sept. 13.

"For our students, the academic work does not stop here," said GEP Director Eileen Terrill, PhD, assistant professor of nursing. A contemporary version of an event that, historically, marked the transition from training to practice, the GEP ceremony marks students' readiness to become registered nurses as they launch the next phase of their continuing preparation for advanced professional practice.

Launched by the GSN in 2003 to address the nursing workforce shortage in Central Massachusetts, the GEP is specifically designed for adult students who have a bachelor's degree in a field other than nursing. The Class of 2013



includes six men and 26 women whose diverse backgrounds reflect the goal of the GEP.

The GEP pin's design incorporates several symbols: a column with the entwined snake (wisdom); eagle's wings (protection); a star (nobility of purpose and for Massachusetts, as an original colony); and laurel leaves (peace and triumph). The words "education, research, service, practice" inscribed in the banners surrounding the shield refer to the mission of the Graduate School of Nursing.

Convocation Week, which symbolically launches the academic year, featured other major events. At the annual school-wide Convocation, Chancellor Michael F. Collins announced the recipients of the Chancellor's Medals for distinguished teaching, distinguished scholarship and distinguished service, and Siddhartha Mukherjee, MD, PhD, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, gave the keynote address. Three distinguished faculty members became named professors at the annual Investiture ceremony, a celebration of philanthropic partnerships that provide essential funding for research and education. And incoming School of Medicine students were welcomed into the medical community by campus leaders during the White Coat Ceremony.

To learn more about these events, please visit [www.umassmed.edu/convocation/2011](http://www.umassmed.edu/convocation/2011). ■

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 1, 2012  
Alumni Association  
Graduation Breakfast  
UMass Medical School

June 3, 2012  
39th Commencement  
Ceremony  
12 noon  
Campus Green  
UMass Medical School

Visit [www.NetworkUMass.com/Medical](http://www.NetworkUMass.com/Medical) regularly for additional events.