

Advanced Nursing Degrees for DCs

HOW WOULD IT IMPACT YOUR PRACTICE AND THE PROFESSION?

Editorial Staff

Years ago, it was rare to see a doctor of chiropractic with anything other than a DC degree. Eventually, doctors began taking diplomate programs that added additional expertise in areas such as neurology, radiology and pediatrics. More recently, the profession has seen a quiet move toward additional professional degrees on a small scale. In the chiropractic research community, it is no longer unusual to see a doctor with an MPH (Master of Public Health) or PhD in addition to their DC degree. Some doctors have chosen to earn their law degree (JD) in an effort to work in areas related to both law and health care. And a small number of doctors of chiropractic have even added a medical degree, although these are few and far between.

Chiropractors now have the unique opportunity to add the complementary profession of Family Nurse Practitioner, which has a scope of practice apart and different from chiropractic. This can be accomplished in three years or less through an educational program by which the chiropractor earns both a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree. This new program builds upon standard chiropractic education with classes that can be taken online or at times that are workable for most practicing DCs.



Sandefer Memorial Hall at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. The university is participating in the nurse practitioner degree program.

The program is being offered in partnership by Mid America Learning, Hardin-Simmons University and the Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing. Mid America consults with Hardin-Simmons to provide faculty development, assists with online course infrastructure, and manages the process of matching qualified students with qualified clinical environments (rotations).

Hardin-Simmons University is located on 96 acres in Abilene, Texas. Founded in 1891, Hardin-Simmons (www.hsutx.edu) is fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and offers six undergraduate degrees with more than 70 majors, as well as seven graduate degrees with 18 programs.

The Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing is also located in Abilene. The school offers a number of nursing and advanced nursing programs. The bachelor's and master's programs are both fully accredited by the Council on Collegiate Nursing Education and have full approval from the Texas Board of Nursing. Chiropractic students participate in what is referred to as an alternate-entry, rapid-mobility program. According to Jan Noles, dean of nursing at the school:

"In most of the country, family nurse practitioners have limited to full autonomy to practice. Our nursing curriculum for doctors of chiropractic is identical to that of the beginning nursing student. This program provides alternative entry, approved by the state of Texas, meant for individuals that already have one bachelor's degree. This allows for an abbreviation of the core curriculum."

Adding an advanced nursing degree to a chiropractic degree raises the issue of drug prescription. Some will undoubtedly question why a doctor of chiropractic would want to have a license to engage in this kind of health care practice. Scott Wofford, DC, MS, PT, president of Mid America Learning, explains:

"It is not surprising that DCs would be concerned about including drug prescription in the practice of chiropractic. This advanced nursing degree is not so doctors can become drug pushers. The family nurse practitioner certification will give a doctor the ability to be a full-service health care provider.

"Right now, if a doctor of chiropractic has a patient on too much medication, there is nothing they can do about it. Their best hope is to recommend nutritional and herbal supplements that either the patient or their medical doctor will recognize as a safe and effective alternative for the drugs. With an advanced nursing degree, the doctor can now address the need for those drugs and actually prescribe less harmful drugs legally and ethically. To do so otherwise could constitute a criminal action.

"This program is also very attractive for new DCs and those just coming out of chiropractic college. With an advanced nursing degree, a doctor can qualify for placement serving a medically underserved population. Depending on the location, doctors who serve in this program can potentially receive a six-figure annual salary and have a substantial part of their student loans forgiven for every year they serve. All in all, we believe that this is a program that opens new doors for both the chiropractic profession as well as individual doctors of chiropractic."

Needless to say, the addition of an advanced nursing degree to a chiropractic practice will be seen as

controversial to many in the profession. To express your opinion on this issue, please e-mail us at nursingdegree@dynamicchiropractic.com.

DECEMBER 2008

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