

Meet the Leonard A. Lauder Community Care NP Fellows

Erica Inez Iglesias

Aleksandr Kasyanchuk

Sandya Janardhan

Julie Nguyen

Lauren Odegaard

Rebecca Hosey

Carly Wasserbach

Gabbie Domingo

Azucena Villalobos



By Molly Petrilla

This fall, nine carefully chosen nurses from across the country will embark on their NP education at Penn—and thanks to a \$125 million gift from Leonard A. Lauder W’54, they will emerge from the experience debt-free and ready to care for those who need their expertise most.

Lauder’s record-setting gift established the Leonard A. Lauder Community Care Nurse Practitioner Program, which offers a free Penn education to budding NPs who are committed to working in underserved communities after graduation.

“This program is going to be transformative,” says Kim Strauch PhD ANP-BC GNU’11, who was named its Executive Director in July. “It’s going to be a game-changer for primary-care NP workforce development, and also have such a huge impact on the communities they go and work with.”

While she’s new to this role, Strauch is a familiar face at Penn Nursing. In fact, she was once an NP student here herself. After graduation, she worked in several clinical settings before landing at Project HOME—a Philadelphia nonprofit that provides medical care, housing, education, and other services to people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

“I found my niche working at Project HOME and discovered the things that really impact health and health outcomes [for vulnerable populations]—things that weren’t always taught in school,” Strauch says. “It’s been exciting to see Penn Nursing taking more of a holistic and inclusive view of what NP training and education should be.”

Leonard A. Lauder Fellows will follow the usual curricula for their respective programs,

but half of their rotations will be at designated clinical-practice sites which serve populations that align with the program’s mission. After graduation, they’re expected to continue working with under-resourced populations as newly minted NPs.

The program is designed to grow quickly over the next few years. In 2023, it will admit 20 Fellows, with 30 chosen the following year. By 2025, the program plans to welcome 40 new Fellows, which will remain its target enrollment in perpetuity. It will also develop an alumni network and begin hosting biennial conferences. The number of practice sites will grow, too, from two this year to ten by 2026.

The inaugural class of Fellows come from all over the country, including Philadelphia. For some, this work is highly personal and heavily influenced by their own childhood and family experiences. A few come from the same communities they hope to return to as future NPs. What they all share is a deep dedication to helping underserved populations.

“Generally, what we’re looking for are students who are mission-driven and have this intrinsic desire to work in under-resourced communities taking care of vulnerable populations,” Strauch says. “I don’t think that’s something you can necessarily teach. It’s a characteristic that some people just have.”

Here are nine of them.

Erica Inez Iglesias

BSN RN



WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM

Iglesias has been working as a nurse for nearly a decade and spent several years moving around the country as a psychiatric travel nurse. Before heading to Philly to start her NP fellowship, she had been working at a psychiatric emergency department in a Bay Area hospital.



NP TRACK AT PENN

Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner

Drawn to Pysch

For the first few years of her nursing career, Iglesias worked in general roles, including medical/surgical, women's health, and skilled nursing. But eventually, she found her way to psychiatric nursing—a specialty she'd always hoped to pursue.

"I am incredibly grateful to work with and advocate for the mental health population. I recognize that barriers for patients include the stigma surrounding mental health and accessibility," Iglesias says. "I cannot wait to expand my role as a mental health provider to better serve the mental health and underserved community."

Different Places, Similar Problems

While working as a travel nurse, Iglesias cared for patients inside psychiatric emergency centers in the Bay Area, Northern Florida, and Baltimore. "I was surprised to find that the problems I saw were pretty similar and consistent in every place I went," she says. "It's like psychiatric patients are sometimes forgotten—especially if they're from an underserved community. There needs to be so much more done to help the mental health population."

Finding Out

Iglesias likens getting selected as a Leonard A. Lauder Fellow to winning the lottery. "It was probably the happiest day of my life," she says. As soon as she opened the acceptance e-mail, she called her mom to share the news—and found herself crying tears of joy for the first time ever. "Even to this day, I still can't believe that it's real," she says. "It's like my whole life leading up to this—every job I've had, every struggle I've been through—makes sense now. It was all worth it."



Aleksandr Kasyanchuk

BSN RN

EARLY REALIZATIONS

Kasyanchuk's parents immigrated to the USA from Belarus in 2000. "Growing up as a first-generation immigrant with limited access to health care, having to make tough mental health care decisions for my siblings, and helping my older parents navigate our needlessly complex health care system really opened my eyes from an early age to the disparities that millions of people in our country face daily," he says.

As he grew up, visited, and volunteered throughout various parts of the US and other countries, Kasyanchuk kept clocking the disparities among both marginalized Americans as well as people living in countries without functional public health care systems.



WHERE HE'S COMING FROM

Before heading to Philadelphia, Kasyanchuk was working at the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance's pain clinic where he cared for oncology patients who were suffering from complex cancer-related pain. "I absolutely loved the holistic approach to care and the diversity of patients from all walks of life that we served," he says. "Seeing firsthand the tremendous improvement in quality-of-life when we were able to meet our patients where they were and figure out the right combination of treatments and supports was very rewarding."



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Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner

"Having these disparities stare me right in the face and witnessing their effects on some of the most wonderful, generous, and loving people I have ever met has been—and continues to be—a huge motivator for me," he says. "Underserved communities are precisely the ones where health care is needed the most, and I truly believe that is where we can make the greatest and most meaningful impact in people's lives."

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Reflecting on his past work in oncology and hospice care, Kasyanchuk says his proudest moments have all been rooted in making a difference for someone else—and building relationships with patients and families that span anywhere from days to years.

"The times patients have thanked me as they're being discharged having achieved remission, or families thanking me for taking care of and accompanying their loved one through the final days of their journey have consistently been the times I'm most proud to be a nurse," he says.



Sandya Janardhan

BSN RN



WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM

Originally from Northville, Michigan, Janardhan has been working in Ann Arbor and Detroit since 2019 as a critical care registered nurse in cardiovascular and medical-surgical ICUs.



NP TRACK AT PENN

Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner

A PASSION FOR UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

At the same time Janardhan was earning her BSN at Case Western Reserve University, she provided care for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. “While this experience was notably heart-breaking, it also fueled my inner passion for caring for this underserved population,” she says now.

In her more recent role as an RN in ICUs, Janardhan often cared for veterans—a population that she plans to continue supporting as a psychiatric NP.

For Janardhan, helping underserved groups feels both meaningful and personal. Her parents both grew up in a highly underserved community in India. “As Asian-Indian immigrants, they constantly instill messages about the significance of having fun and seeking to meet every personal goal.” At the same time, she says, they also passed down “the importance of being grateful in life.”

BUILDING HER CONFIDENCE

Janardhan says she wrestled with insecurity at the beginning of her nursing career, even to the point of “feeling incapable” when she was around “more proficient, wiser nurses.” She felt unqualified to become a leader and almost gave up on nursing entirely. But she pushed through the self-doubt. “As a result, in less than a year, I assumed leadership roles like charge nurse and rapid response nurse and even served as a preceptor for newly-hired nurses,” she says. “I believe overcoming this self-doubt is one of my most noteworthy accomplishments.”

STRIKING WORDS OF ADVICE

An RN ICU preceptor once told Janardhan that as nurses, “to advocate and care for others is our greatest strength but also a huge flaw.” She didn’t truly understand what that meant—until she spent the COVID-19 pandemic working in the ICU. “I often took on the emotional weight and burden of every patient,” she remembers.

Then came a period of “despair and overwhelming burnout.” Ultimately the words of that preceptor came back to her. “I consider her message as advice to all health care providers in recognizing our limits,” Janardhan says. “I will always strive to provide excellent nursing care, but now I keep my capabilities as a medical provider in mind.”

Gabbie Domingo

BSN RN Nu'21



WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM

Domingo has lived in Philly since starting her undergrad nursing career at Penn in 2017. For the past year, she’s been working at HUP on the neurology step-down floor.

“I’ve had a lot of patients who have recently gone through the worst moments of their lives,” she says. “Seeing how fast these patients can progress—from being unable to talk or move to eating, talking, and working with a PT—is very special, and I appreciate being a part of that.”



NP TRACK AT PENN

Adult Gerontology Primary Care Nurse Practitioner

Eye-Opening Research

Though she worked with underserved populations throughout high school and college, Domingo singles out one experience as having the biggest impact on her future goals. As a work-study student at Penn Nursing, she helped assistant professor of medicine Rebecca Brown MD MPH on a research project that focused on older adults who live in affordable housing communities around Philly.

Domingo called up individual participants weekly for three months straight, chatting about their health goals and encouraging them to tweak their diets, exercise routines, and other daily activities. “I really liked the ability to talk to these residents frequently and meet them where they are,” she says. “They were very much holding the reigns and could tell me what their community was like and what their goals were.”

Watching Dad's Dedication

Domingo says her dad sits atop her personal heroes list. He grew up in the Philippines as one of nine children, and lost his own father at an early age. Eventually he moved to Singapore, alone and knowing no one there, and managed to find a job. Later he arrived in America with Domingo’s mother (who was pregnant with her at the time) and older brother, again in much the same situation.

Even though her family of six shared a small house, Domingo says her dad continued to help other Filipino families who moved to the US with no place to live and very little money. “My dad would open our house and let these families stay with us for a few months until they could get on their feet,” she says. “He has never faltered in giving all he can to care for strangers and family.”

Lauren Odegaard

BSN RN



WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM

After serving as an officer in the Army Nurse Corps for the last five years, Odegaard recently returned to the US from South Korea, where she was stationed for a year as an Army public health nurse. She transitioned off of active-duty service at the end of July to begin her studies at Penn.



NP TRACK AT PENN

Family Nurse Practitioner

All in the Family

Odegaard says her grandmother greatly influenced her decision to pursue nursing. She graduated from a nursing program in 1945 and became a member of the Cadet Nurse Corps. “She was an incredibly strong and compassionate pediatric nurse,” Odegaard says.

Her own decision to join the Army also had family ties. Odegaard’s grandfathers, parents, and two siblings have all served or are currently serving in the military. “I was inspired by their service and wanted to simultaneously be a nurse and serve my country by caring for soldiers, veterans, and their family members,” she says.

First Assignment

In her first job, Odegaard worked on an inpatient medical-surgical ward that provided care to end-of-life and palliative care patients at Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Washington. She considers that role her proudest nursing accomplishment to date. “I gained skills that allowed me to promote dignity to patients during the dying process and provide comfort to them and their families,” she says.

Pivoting to Public Health

Odegaard decided to focus on public-health nursing in early 2021. By the summer of 2021, she was at Camp Humphreys in South Korea, helping with COVID-19 control—including contact-tracing for US military personnel stationed there. She went on to several other public health-facing roles, including working as a health consultant for child and youth services, providing education on STIs to local units, and coordinating education for pregnant and postpartum soldiers.

“As a public health nurse, my mindset changed from focus on the individual patient to the health and wellness of the community as a whole,” she says. “The Army has afforded me incredible opportunities to act beyond what I thought possible for myself, and I will always be grateful for my experiences and the leaders who supported and challenged me.”



Rebecca Hosey

MPH BSN
RN Nu’21

PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENT

One of Hosey’s proudest achievements was also one of her most recent. Working closely with her case management colleague at PPP, she helped support a patient in taking their anti-retroviral medication. “The labs were drawn, doctor visit completed—next step was just to take medication,” she recalls. “This person had difficulty with daily meds, but as a team, we were able to come up with a plan that led to adherence to the treatment regimen. Being a part of that team was an honor.”

LOVE IS THE ANSWER

By the time she moved to Philly, Hosey already knew she wanted to work in public health. She



WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM

Hosey spent the last three years working in various roles at Prevention Point Philadelphia—a harm-reduction center located in the city’s Kensington neighborhood. Among the various hats she wore, Hosey says her favorite was the six months she served as a public health nurse at PPP.

Like other harm reduction-based public health nonprofits, PPP provides comprehensive services including overdose education, naloxone distribution, case management, syringe exchange, and other social and medical assistance to communities affected by drug use and poverty. Over the last few years, they have served over 25,000 clients per year.

“I spent three years with this organization because I deeply believe in the work they do in the harm reduction world, and I really enjoyed working with all of my brilliant colleagues and loving patients and participants,” Hosey says.



NP TRACK AT PENN

Family Nurse Practitioner

began volunteering at Broad Street Ministry, Sunday Breakfast Rescue Mission, and the Eliza Shirley House with her older brother, who’s now a social worker in Philly. She says those experiences ultimately led her to PPP.

“I am passionate about harm reduction and radical nonjudgment and love in health care,” she says. “I believe that we can provide meaningful care as a teammate, not as patronizing clinicians or nurses.”

She traces that notion of showing patients love to William R. Short MD MPH FIDSA, an Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine at Penn. “He tells his students that we can share love with patients by making sure they know that we care about every part of their lives, not just their physical health,” Hosey says. “This is why family and community nursing are so appealing to me.”



Carly Wasserbach

BSN RN

JUMPING FOR JOY

When Wasserbach found out she'd been selected as a Fellow, "I started screaming and jumping up and down around my house," she remembers. "I was so excited and just felt extremely honored to have been chosen as part of the very first cohort."

"I can't wait to get started and help pave the way for future nurses who are also dedicated and committed to serving our country's most vulnerable and in need," she adds.

INSURANCE AND DELIVERY

Through her work in utilization management, Wasserbach has seen firsthand "just how much insurance manages and dictates the care within our health



WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM

In 2011, Wasserbach—who is originally from Baltimore—moved to northwestern Wyoming to work as a nurse in primary/urgent care and the operating room. A few years later, she became a utilization management RN at a small, rural hospital there. She stayed for the next eight years, witnessing the unique health care challenges facing rural America today—from glaring disparities in health outcomes, to lack of access, to a too-small pool of qualified providers.

"Wyoming has consistently reported the highest rates on suicide per capita in the US and compounding this is a severe shortage of mental health providers," she says. "By becoming a PMHNP, I hope to bridge this gap in my community."



NP TRACK AT PENN

Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner

system," she says. "It's hard to see people not receive medically necessary care simply because their insurance won't cover it."

She also notes that the cost of health care in America is the highest in the world—a delivery model that's "not sustainable, and quite frankly does not promote a healthy population."

Wasserbach believes that both of these barriers to access present particular challenges in the mental health field, "where there are already deep-rooted stigmas and obstacles that prevent people from seeking and receiving the care that they need," she says.

FAVORITE QUOTE

As a nurse working in a region that presents acute challenges, Wasserbach says she's been particularly inspired by the adage that "The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones."

Julie Nguyen

BSN RN



WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM

Born and raised in Denver, Colorado, Nguyen also went to college there (Regis University) and has been working as a medical/surgical nurse in Denver- and Aurora-based hospitals since graduating in 2020.



NP TRACK AT PENN

Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner

A School Project with Impact

As a BSN student, Nguyen collaborated with the Children's Hospital of Colorado to investigate the efficacy of medical marijuana in pediatric epilepsy. She presented her evidence-based project to a board of nursing and medical staff. Her main finding, she says, was that CBD was effective in the short term, but needed more research to determine its long-term efficacy.

"I found out our presentation is slowly being used to help the nursing and health care staff implement a safe medical marijuana policy for this population," Nguyen adds. "It's educating nurses on the pharmacology, medication administration, and adverse side effects of medical marijuana."

Focusing on People of Color

"I've noticed, while working as a nurse in downtown Denver and Aurora, that people of color and their medical problems are often disregarded or belittled in the hospital setting," Nguyen says. "This has a domino effect on not only their physical health, but their mental wellbeing, too."

That's why Nguyen plans to focus on populations of color as she becomes a PMHNP, including conducting research into culturally appropriate mental health resources. Eventually she hopes to open "a POC-dominant clinic" that helps provide mental health aid to underserved communities in urban Colorado cities.

Family Inspiration

Nguyen says her parents, who immigrated to the US from post-war Vietnam in the 1980s, are her longstanding role models. "They are the most hardworking individuals I have ever met, and put aside their mental health to provide a comfortable life for my family," she says. "I hope to return the favor to them after graduate school."

Azucena Villalobos

BSN RN Nu'19



WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM

Since completing the accelerated BSN program at Penn Nursing in December 2019, Villalobos has been working at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania for the last two years as an inpatient RN. She worked in a neuroscience medical/surgical floor before transitioning to the surgical ICU.



NP TRACK AT PENN

Family Nurse Practitioner

Disparities That Feel Personal

Villalobos grew up as the eldest daughter of two Mexican immigrants. "Despite the hardships life has thrown at them," she says of her parents, "their selflessness, perseverance, resilience, and kindness are just a few of the things I so greatly admire about them."

She knew her parents worked hard and made sacrifices on behalf of their family. But it wasn't until Villalobos became an undergrad at UCLA that she began to fully absorb the social, economic, and health care gaps that existed for people like her own parents living in underserved, low-income communities.

"I resonated with many of the issues these communities faced because they were similar to the experiences of my own family and myself," she says. "Recognizing the extent to which unmet social needs impact the health of individuals and families sparked my desire to become a nurse, with the goals of giving back to my community and providing comprehensive health care, particularly to those communities who lack access to care."

Villalobos also believes that being a bilingual and bicultural clinician will help her "better relate to my patients in unique ways and thus make a meaningful contribution to their care."

Focusing on Prevention

"Working in the ICU, I have seen the ultimate devastating effects of preventable chronic illnesses," Villalobos says. "I wholeheartedly believe in the role that health promotion and health maintenance play in the prevention of devastating illness, and that is why I know primary care is where I need to be."

A Voice for Hispanic Nurses

Villalobos says the National Association of Hispanic Nurses' Philadelphia Chapter has been key to her growth as both a nurse and a leader. A member since 2019, she currently serves as NAHN-Philly's president-elect. 🌟



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Leonard A. Lauder
Community Care
Nurse Practitioner Program



The Leonard A. Lauder Community Care Nurse Practitioner Program at Penn Nursing

The Leonard A. Lauder Community Care Nurse Practitioner Program at Penn Nursing was announced in February 2022 as a first-of-its-kind, tuition-free program dedicated to developing a nurse practitioner workforce committed to working in and with underserved communities, both rural and urban. The Leonard A. Lauder program was borne out of a \$125 million gift—the largest ever to an American nursing school—by Penn alumnus Leonard A. Lauder, chairman emeritus of the Estée Lauder Companies. Through this program, Penn Nursing's leadership in primary care will continue to grow, as will its partnerships with community-based health agencies.

We are now selecting Fellows from ALL primary care programs. To learn more about this tuition-free NP fellowship for full-time students, scan the QR code below or visit www.nursing.upenn.edu/lauder.

Primary Care Programs

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