



**Dr. Claudia Kregg-Byers:  
“Know Thy Patient”**



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In Dr Kregg-Byers role as primary community health nursing instructor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing, she has placed over 800 student nurses at over 100 community sites. For the eight years she has been in this position, she continually reiterates to her students the importance of holistic patient care. Dr. Kregg-Byers asserts that by utilizing a holistic approach to patient care, nurses can better assess and advocate for the needs of their patients.

Dr. Kregg-Byers spends many hours educating her students on how to build necessary trust and respect between themselves and their patients. She does this by emphasizing the importance of utilizing a cultural and social lens in their clinical experiences. Dr. Kregg-Byers indicates that using these lenses and taking a holistic approach to patient care leads to better patient outcomes. She gives an example of working through a social lens, “Imagine the insulin-dependent homeless patient that tears up the prescription they have just been handed because they fear they will be killed by someone who attempts to steal the insulin needles for street drugs; by listening to the patient and assessing the situation, the nurse is better able to advocate for the patient. The nurse can work with

the professional prescribing the medication to develop an alternate treatment plan that will not cause harm to the patient.”

Dr. Kregg-Byers suggests that working with diverse patient populations allows student nurses to acquire cultural sensitivity that can carry them over the lifetime of their profession. She acknowledges that the community health nursing practicum requires students to step outside of their comfort zone and indicates that she places students in settings that are unfamiliar to them. As difficult as this may be for some students, Dr. Kregg-Byers notes that stepping out of the students’ comfort zone prepares the student to become a better nurse upon graduation. Dr. Kregg-Byers says that community nurses do not always want to work one on one with patients and they do not have to. In preparation for careers outside of patient care, Dr. Kregg-Byers has placed her nursing students at practicums to perform statistical research on social determinants of health. Upon graduation, students may choose to become health educators or aid in research and development of health care tools, such as an electronic medical record which collects sexual orientation and gender identity data upfront. Tools such as these can be designed in an effort to respect a patient’s dignity by avoiding repetitive questioning of personal matters by multiple health care providers.

While students work in their clinicals to gain further practical experience, Professor Kregg-Byers supplements this training with classroom instruction. Dr. Kregg-Byers shares her own experiences and conveys information acquired from some of the professional organizations she belongs to; the Pittsburgh Black Nurses in Action, Asian American/Pacific Islander Nurses Association, Inc., National Association of Hispanic Nurses, and the Muslim Nurses Association. The students in the program also take part in health intervention activities designed to identify, mitigate, and ameliorate health disparities. These activities include windshield surveys and poverty simulations.

As the primary clinical instructor in Community health nursing, Dr. Kregg-Byers has devoted her career to educating nursing students on how to adapt their care to the needs of a diverse group of patients. In doing so, she has taught her students the importance of treating every patient holistically and with the respect and dignity they deserve. Thanks to Dr. Kregg-Byers hard work, the next generation of community health nurses will have a better understanding of how best to aid in decreasing health disparities and improve health outcomes for all individuals regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity.