

SWOSU Nursing Students Win Carter Grant for Anxiety Management Program

02.23.2009

Southwestern Oklahoma State University senior nursing students Collins Uzuegbu of Enugu, Nigeria, and Meagan Decher of Clinton recently received the Carter Academic Service Entrepreneur (CASE) grant, one of only three in the state of Oklahoma.

The grant will enable the students to develop an anxiety management program that focuses on the psychological and emotional needs of pediatric patients at the Weatherford Regional Hospital, the community partner in the project.

Uzuegbu and Decher have indicated three focal areas of their project: developing a custom-made statistical anxiety measurement tool; toy/game therapy; and briefing hospital staff on anxiety-reducing therapeutic communication techniques.

The award is sponsored by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and administered by the Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter Partnership Foundation. According to the CASE website, the grant competition is offered in countries across the world to students whose proposals represent the most innovative and promising ways to serve the community while applying what is learned in the classroom to these projects.

The SWOSU pair received a \$1,000 check on behalf of their community partner to fund their project. They also receive a certificate of merit signed by former president Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter. The project is underway and must be finished by the end of the 2009 spring semester.

A service learning project is a part of the leadership course requirement for senior nursing students at the SWOSU. Both students formulated the project and initiated the grant proposal under the guidance of their project advisor and leadership course co-coordinator Tamra Weimer. However, Uzuegbu and Decher drew inspiration to develop the project from the experience they had during their pediatrics clinical rotations. The students recalled seeing sick children in hospitals, already confused by the mystery of sickness, exhibiting obvious sense of fear, confusion, and anxiety while awaiting or receiving medical treatment. The pair also indicated that they were motivated by various scientific research publications they had read, which demonstrated that these kinds of anxieties in children can significantly prolong their hospital stay and make recovery complicated. The anxieties can potentially lay foundation for adult anxiety disorders, which have been shown to progress from these kinds of childhood anxieties.

"Having this kind of anxiety management program in place will shift the children's attention from their illness which hospital environment only tends to amplify; it will also give them the sense that people around them care a lot and would want them to feel comfortable being who they are - children," Uzuegbu said.

The students have remained in correspondence with LeaAnne Hume, the WRH representative, as well as with Dr. Ginger Welch of the SWOSU Psychology Department, who is assisting the students in developing the custom-made anxiety measurement tool. The tool will be used to measure anxiety in pediatric patients based on physical and physiological evidences of anxiety.

Uzuegbu and Decher will work closely with the WRH nursing staff to coordinate the implementation of the project throughout the spring semester. Age-appropriate games and a toy drive are underway, and anyone interested is encouraged to deliver toys to the toy box provided at the nursing office located in the basement of Stewart Hall.

"We want the program to be implemented at any place in the hospital where children are being treated" Decher said.

The students hope that implementation of this program will not only help to manage anxiety and better the hospital experience of the pediatrics patients in the short run, but they hope that in the long run, adult anxiety disorders that have been shown to stem from these childhood phobias will be ultimately prevented.