



## **Media Release**

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### **CRDAMC nurses pursue Doctorate of Nursing Practice**

FORT HOOD, Texas— Three Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center Army nurses are striving to take their careers to the next level—the highest level now available to nurses.

The Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md., transitioned its two-year master's degree program to a three-year Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) program early in 2014. Service-members that have been selected to the program spend the first two years at the University and then for the last year, Phase II, they are assigned to a military medical center for a hands-on learning experience in a clinical setting.

Capt. Holly Archer and Majors Kelley Togiola and Tommy Thompson began their DNP Phase II education in April at Darnall, one of five Phase II sites. All three will become Family Nurse Practitioners.

As part of the Phase II program, the students are assigned to a provider at a Patient Medical Home, who becomes the students' preceptor, and is responsible for training and mentoring them in all aspects of clinical practices and daily patient care.

“It is an intensive program preparing them to provide primary healthcare. Our students will complete more than 1,700 hours of clinical training in preparation to be responsible for a full panel of approximately 1,300 patients once they graduate,” said Lt. Col. John Meyer, Clinical Assistant Professor and Site Director at CRDAMC. “Their training is comprehensive as they spend blocks of their time rotating through the various specialty clinics and departments such as Podiatry, Women's Health, Physical Therapy, Occupational Health, Orthopedics and Radiology.”

A unique highlight for the nurses in the DNP program here, according to Meyer, is that they are able to do two-week rotations at the Department of Veteran's Affairs hospital in Temple, Texas.

"The typical patient population in the Darnall health system is younger. By developing this collaborative arrangement, our students have the opportunity to spend time managing patients who are older, thus giving them experience with illness and conditions that present in older adults. It is truly a valuable bit of experience for them.

"The VA nurse practitioners, physician assistants and physicians that precept our students have much to offer in the way of clinical experience. Sharing that knowledge resource between two Federal healthcare systems here in Central Texas makes a lot of sense these days."

In addition to the daily work in the clinics, students are also required to complete a Scholarly Inquiry Project and 16-20 credit hours of course work.

The year is tough for them, Meyer said, but the end result is worth the work.

"The complexity of science and technology in healthcare has advanced so much. The trend in healthcare overall is for professionals to be initially trained at the doctoral-level. The DNP program now allows nursing to be in line with other healthcare professions," he said.

Maj. Kelley Togiola, who is doing her training at Killeen Medical Home, said she is very happy to have been selected for the program.

"I really like it. It's a great combination of academics and experience. I'm learning such a broad scope of things," she said. "Rotating through the different specialties and the training at the VA hospital has been invaluable in giving me a well-rounded experience."

Working closely with her preceptor and those at the various clinics also adds to her education, she said, as she benefits from their personal tips and advice on taking care of patients.

"I enjoy patient care and this program allows me to see what a higher-level relationship with patients looks like," she said.