

Her innovative projects to improve health of veterans, wounded warriors

Editor's note: In this column, we continue our series highlighting the 2014 American Nurses Association (ANA) National Award recipients. For a list of winners and additional profiles, visit NursingWorld.org or TheAmericanNurse.org.

This June, ANA presented Cheryl A. Krause-Parello, PhD, RN, a New Jersey State Nurses Association member, with its national Jessie M. Scott Award, recognizing her for effectively demonstrating the interdependent relationships among nursing practice, education and research.

Krause-Parello is an associate professor at the University of Colorado (UC) College of Nursing, Denver. She also is the founder and director of C-P.A.W.W. (Canines Providing Assistance to Wounded Warriors), a health research initiative for military veterans at UC. Additionally, Krause-Parello is co-leading an innovative project, Working Dogs for Wounded Warriors: Effects of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD.

What led you to choose a career in nursing?

There were a couple of factors. My father and grandfather were pharmacists, my aunt and godmother, a nurse. Her profession seemed interesting to me, so I was of that mindset of wanting to be in health care. I also was interested in history and read about Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton, who really made a difference with their work in wartime. I started out in pediatrics, then did home health care, pharmaceutical work and school nursing before getting my master's and PhD.

Can you tell me about your current role, your interest in human-animal interaction, and your work with veterans and PTSD?

Since coming to the University of Colorado last fall, I've co-taught a graduate-level public policy course and a doctoral-level research course. The university is really giving me the time to build my research and direct C-P.A.W.W. I became interested in working with animals because of my beloved dachshund, Samantha. I knew our attachment was special and had a positive effect on my mood. So my initial research looked at the effects that pets had on older adults in terms of their loneliness, attachment, social support and well-being.



Cheryl Krause-Parello and Waffle.

Then as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continued — and because my husband is a Marine veteran — I wanted to do something to give back, especially to those who sacrificed so much for our freedom. I expanded my research to see if animal-assisted interventions can improve the health of military veterans. I'm really trying to build the science around the therapeutic use of animals, because once that happens, we can change public policy and make it an evidence-based, reimbursable treatment. At C-P.A.W.W., we study and implement animal-assisted interventions for veterans and wounded warriors needing palliative care, companionship and stress reduction. And I'm currently putting together an interdisciplinary team of researchers to investigate the effects of animal-assisted interventions on military returning from battlefield to community who have invisible wounds such as traumatic brain injury and PTSD, which may contribute to potential suicidal impulses. That work will dig deeper into measuring the physiological changes, such as steroids (e.g., cortisol and alpha-amylase) and cytokines (e.g., IL-6 and IL-8) in saliva that may occur with these interventions.

Can you explain the importance of mentorship?

When I was trying to figure out what I should do for my dissertation, my PhD mentor, Linda Flynn, PhD, RN, FAAN (formerly at Rutgers University and now at UC), told me to find something I feel passionate about, something that I could eat, sleep and breathe until my PhD was finished. When I decided that I wanted to work with animals and people — something that not a whole lot of nurses

were doing at the time — Linda supported my idea and my research. Now I try to be as thoughtful a mentor as she has been to me. And mentoring is the right thing to do, and I enjoy it. I mentor students at all levels, bring them to conferences, and get them involved in publishing research, writing policy and giving poster presentations. I try to look at which skills students are not yet comfortable with — even if it's calling someone on the phone instead of texting or emailing — and ask them to do it. I want to help them build the skills they'll need so they can successfully pursue their own passions.

How did you develop your leadership skills, and what can you say to other nurses to encourage them?

My master's degree is in case management and nursing administration. So I learned a lot about leadership through my coursework — plus my personality. I have a lot of ideas, and I like to share them. I'm really passionate about what I'm doing, so it drives how I lead.

If you don't have leadership skills or they haven't surfaced yet, I suggest partnering with someone who is moving something forward — even if it isn't in your primary area of interest. That way you can see how things get done, meet people and make connections. And be willing to do things "outside the box" so you can build your confidence and skills.

What can you tell me about the next generation of nurses, particularly in terms of their leadership skills and future?

What I've experienced with the students I work with here at UC is that they are so focused on what they're doing and driven to be the best they can be — in education, research or practice. It's so refreshing. I also think that leadership and mentorship are mixed. If students are mentored, especially early in their education, they will gain the skills they need to become leaders. ■

Do you know a nurse leader?

If you want to recommend an ANA member to be featured in this column, please write to TAN editor at 8515 Georgia Ave., Ste. 400, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3492 or via email at TANeditor@ana.org.