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Office of University
Communications

June 10, 2016

Doctor of Nursing Practice Program Helps Colman Tom ('16) Strengthen Skills

Colman Tom ('16) of Roxboro, N.C., left a 15-year career in banking and finance on Wall Street to become a nurse. Instead of managing financial concerns, he aspired to care for people going through a physical crisis.

"I wanted to do something more meaningful with my life," Tom reflected. "I chose nursing because it allows me to positively impact people at their most vulnerable state and provide them with quality medical needs through humanistic interactions of comfort, understanding, and empathy."

Since making the decision over a decade ago, he has spent his career striving to provide quality patient care. His dedication led him to obtain his Doctor of Nursing Practice from Gardner-Webb University. "I chose nursing education, because I wanted to become a change agent in promoting positive patient outcomes through education and training program development," Tom offered. "After reviewing and comparing various Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs, I decided on Gardner-Webb's program because of its hybrid online structure, methodical course curriculum design, and student-centered focus. Gardner-Webb epitomizes the goal of higher education: To provide life-changing knowledge, skills, and ability, so you can be successful not only in your career but in life."

Tom believes the DNP curriculum provided him with the tools, skills, confidence, and resources to meet his career goals. "More importantly, Gardner-Webb's DNP program has taught me new ways to critically think, examine, analyze, and evaluate the best approaches," he assessed. "I've learned to design the most appropriate applications to resolve some of the issues, concerns, and problems in the perpetual changing landscape of our nursing industry on a more global level."

The course work was challenging, but he felt the online assignments were methodically structured and reasonably spaced. "The DNP program is well-organized, easy to navigate and user-friendly," he observed. "The shared experiences between my instructors and peers have provided me with more purposeful approaches, interventional strategies, and program designs making me a better, stronger, and more effective nurse."

All of the professors in the Hunt School of Nursing provided guidance and expertise throughout the program, but he is especially grateful to the three who helped him complete his Capstone project. Dr. Sharon Starr, the School of Nursing dean, assisted him in formulating his project according to practice-based evidence. Dr. Cindy Miller helped with implementation, and Dr. Gayle Casterline offered advice on the evaluation process.

Through his Capstone project, “Improving Patient Safety through Patient Safety Aide (Sitter) Competency Education,” Tom decided to find a solution to a problem he encountered when he was in charge of a patient contract sitter program. Sitters are employed to help with patients who are at-risk for falls or high risk for harming themselves or others. His facility hired sitters to improve patient safety, but patients still experienced incidents and there was constant strife between the sitters and the staff.

In his review of the literature, Tom found that most studies reported sitters were ineffective and cost prohibitive. Very few studies supported the effectiveness of sitters and even less attempted to find ways to help sitters improve. Tom decided to design a training program for patient safety aides (sitters) that included a section on how to manage disruptive behavior. After sitters attended the training, Tom noted significant improvements in high-risk patient safety care, including a reduction in patients wandering off, patients falling and a decrease in strife and role confusion between facility staff and contracted patient safety aides (sitters).

While Tom’s project improved outcomes at his facility and the DNP program enhanced his career skills, he was also influenced by Gardner-Webb’s Christian community. “My experience has truly opened my eyes to a new way of life that is more wholesome, humble, and sincere,” he affirmed. “Gardner-Webb’s Christian Community environment has taught me to be grateful for what I have accomplished, but more importantly, what I can accomplish for those less fortunate. I have learned to appreciate the struggles of others and the struggles I experience in my life as lessons to become a better person empowered through the strength of devotional faith.”