



One University Avenue
Lowell, MA 01854
Telephone: 978.934.3224
Fax: 978.934.3033

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

NEWS RELEASE

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Contacts: Christine Gillette, 978-934-2209 or Christine.Gillette@uml.edu
Karen Angelo, 978-430-6303 or KarenAngelo@comcast.net

UMass Lowell Wins \$1.8M Grant to Improve Health, Safety in Home Care *Team to Research Ways to Make Conditions Safer for Worker, Patient*

LOWELL, Mass. – Because of Mrs. Smith’s limited mobility, she could no longer easily move around her small home, which seemed even smaller with the oxygen machine and medical supplies, as well as the clutter of mail, newspapers and kitchen waste. There wasn’t a single open workspace for the nurse to set up the intravenous line Mrs. Smith needed.

Yet the nurse knew that her patient depended on her and she managed to clear enough space and properly position Mrs. Smith so the procedure could be performed over the kitchen sink. There, the nurse inserted the needle, administered the medication and disposed of the needle.

This is just one example of the unexpected hazards that home health-care providers confront every day as they help clients like Mrs. Smith remain in their homes despite the need for medical assistance. As the population ages, the national demand for home health-care nurses and aides is expected to increase 50 percent by 2018. And as more people live longer with chronic illnesses, the type of care needed in the home is becoming increasingly complex.

But help is on the way. UMass Lowell is embarking on a new study to promote health and safety in the home-care industry. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recently awarded UMass Lowell a \$1.8 million, four-year grant to research issues facing Massachusetts home-care nurses and aides and develop education and training programs. UMass Lowell is partnering with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Occupational Health Surveillance Program, home-care agencies, labor unions and government agencies. The research

will include an industry-wide survey, focus groups, one-on-one interviews and the development of training materials.

“Home health-care nurses and aides are dedicated professionals and proud of the work they do. If they come into a home with little space to work and they know that this patient needs assistance, they will not leave until they find a way,” said Margaret Quinn, the study’s principal investigator and a professor in UMass Lowell’s Work Environment Department.

The study builds upon Project SHARRP (Safe Homecare and Risk Reduction for Providers), a previous UMass Lowell study funded by NIOSH that evaluated the risks to home health-care workers associated with needlestick injuries and other blood exposures. The results – published in the American Journal of Public Health, the most influential publication in the field – indicated that needlestick injuries pose a serious risk to home health-care nurses and aides. Quinn and her research team found that such workers encountered other serious risks. Typically working alone, these workers often make difficult decisions about patient care and their own safety.

“We were really surprised at the seriousness of the conditions that home care nurses and aides confront on a daily basis. We uncovered a world where these ‘invisible’ workers face issues such as needles and dressings left on counters, cluttered rooms with no place to work and physical strain of lifting patients without assistive devices,” said Quinn. “At times, they encounter much more serious issues, including evidence of elder neglect and violence in the home or in the neighborhood. Our work ultimately aims to identify safer practices and to work with home-care agencies, trade associations and unions to implement them. Safe and healthy home-care workers means better patient care.”

The National Association for Home Care & Hospice (NAHC) has declared November National Homecare and Hospice Month and to raise public awareness and to honor the millions of workers in the home-care and hospice industry.

UMass Lowell, with a national reputation in science, engineering and technology, is committed to educating students for lifelong success in a diverse world and conducting research and outreach activities that sustain the economic, environmental and social health of the region. The university offers its 13,000 students more than 120 degree choices, internships, five-year combined bachelor’s to master’s programs and doctoral studies in the colleges of Arts, Sciences, Engineering and Management, the School of Health and Environment, and the Graduate School of Education. www.uml.edu.