

# Expanding Access

*New funding and partnerships expand opportunities for psychiatric nurse practitioners.*

Donor support, grant funding and a tenacious academic community are expanding career opportunities for nurse practitioners who specialize in psychiatric and mental health care.

To meet the mounting demand for these professionals, TESU, along with its educational partners and donors, is working to eliminate academic and financial barriers for RNs entering the field. Support from Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine and grant assistance from the U.S. Department of Labor are helping to make this goal a reality.

"We are thankful for our partnership with Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine, whose generous donation of \$66,500 will directly benefit TESU nursing students enrolled in our newly launched Master of Science in Nursing's Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) program," stated Ruth Wittmann-Price, Ph.D., dean of the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions. "This contribution aligns with TESU's funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's Nursing Expansion Grant Program, further enhancing our commitment to preparing quality mental health practitioners."

The program has spawned key institutional partnerships in the Trenton community and beyond.

"We are fortunate to be among a select group of hospitals in New Jersey chosen to partner with TESU when the U.S. Department of Labor's Nursing Expansion Grant Program was launched

in 2023," said Michael Voll, chief nursing officer at Ancora Psychiatric Hospital in Hammonton, N.J. "This educational partnership will help our institution attract more nurses and enable our registered nurses to advance in their careers by enrolling in Thomas Edison's PMHNP program. Professional development is integral to Ancora's mission, and evidence consistently demonstrates that better-educated nurses lead to more favorable patient outcomes. Our field can be challenging, but it is immensely rewarding, and professionally, there is no other place I would rather be."

In addition to its collaboration with Ancora, TESU has teamed up with Trenton Psychiatric Hospital and Capital Health to tackle critical staff shortages in the field. These initiatives and the funding supporting them are converging at a pivotal moment.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the mental health field will face a shortage of 250,000 professionals this year. New Jersey, where the need is especially urgent, ranks 26th among U.S. states in terms of mental health provider availability, with one-third of its demand for professionals unmet. Additionally, Trenton, the capital city of New Jersey

and home to the University, has an inpatient mental health admissions rate that is double the state average. The grant support offers crucial scholarship funding





for students enrolled in the PMHNP program and will enhance TESU's efforts to expand and upskill the state's healthcare workforce to counteract these trends.

"At Johnson & Johnson, we are striving to close the gap between community and care so that better health is within reach of all people," noted Leighann Forbes, Ph.D., vice president, U.S. Medical Affairs, Neuroscience for Johnson & Johnson. "With deep roots in New Jersey, we are strengthening the health workforce to improve access to mental health care for our neighbors. Through this program, nurses will be better equipped to respond to the mental health needs of our community but also connected to opportunities to provide care through the collaborations

established with area hospitals."

The W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions at TESU has developed customized coursework to train 20 nurses enrolled in the program for careers in the field. Johnson & Johnson's support for this initiative has been crucial to the program's launch and effectiveness.

"The School is uniquely positioned to prepare advanced-level, compassionate nursing professionals who can address critical workforce shortages in psychiatric and mental health care across the patient lifespan," said Dr. Eboni Brown-Freeman, DNP, the PMHNP program's director.

"By offering an innovative and rigorous program model, the students will be poised to deliver specialized mental health care in varied settings while addressing staggering needs nationwide. Through strategic partnerships, collaborative outreach and donor support, we are expanding access to advanced nursing education while equipping our graduates with the expertise to provide holistic, patient-centered mental health care. Our PMHNP program is vital in strengthening the health care workforce and improving mental health outcomes in our communities."

According to the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, registered nurse practitioners in this field assess, diagnose and treat the mental health needs of patients.

Psychiatric and mental health nurse practitioners may also provide



Leighann Forbes, Ph.D., vice president, U.S. Medical Affairs, Neuroscience for Johnson & Johnson



Michael Voll, RN, chief nursing officer at Ancora Psychiatric Hospital in Hammonton, N.J.

therapy and prescribe medications for patients facing mental health disorders or substance abuse issues.

The University's PMHNP program is designed for bachelor's-prepared nurses. Key features include an online course structure, part- or full-time enrollment options, in-person clinical components and individualized one-on-one preceptorships. The program begins every 16 weeks in January, March, July and September.

To learn more about this and other academic programs at the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions, visit [tesu.edu/nursing](https://tesu.edu/nursing)

