

## A Look at Graduate Studies

There are over 265 graduate students advancing their nursing education with the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing. These students are studying in Saskatchewan, in Canada, and around the world. We would like to introduce you to four of these students studying in our various graduate programs.

### NICOLE EDMUNDSON

#### MASTER OF NURSING (THESIS)

Master of Nursing student Nicole Edmundson (BSN'18) never thought of nursing as a career path until she graduated with a degree in psychology and was looking for options for work that intersected with her interest in mental health.

After completing the USask College of Nursing Post-Degree Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, she launched her nursing career with positions in Lloydminster, Alberta. First, in general medical nursing and endoscopy before landing a permanent, full-time position in maternity nursing, where she is now celebrating five years.

Today, she has returned to the College of Nursing to complete her master's degree, while pursuing her interest in mental health in tandem with her expertise in maternal health.

"I have always thought of mental health as something we need to learn about in society, that we misunderstand. I don't have kids, but I always thought, 'if I was in that place, would I feel I would be able to reach out and get the help I need?'" said Edmundson.

Following coursework and careful development of a research proposal, Edmundson's thesis focuses on maternal mental health supports, surveying pregnant and post-partum women about the resources they would value, particularly virtual resources, in supporting their perinatal journey.

In Lloydminster, a city that straddles the Saskatchewan and Alberta border, most current online options are offered through Saskatoon and Regina, so there may be a need for resources closer to home.

"Through my time working on the maternity ward, I know a lot of



Nicole Edmundson. Submitted

mental health issues are becoming more prominent and also more talked about, but we haven't matched resources with that. I thought that would be great to research, to create those resources that don't exist," she said.

Alongside her research and nursing work, Edmundson also teaches at the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing distributed Lloydminster site, including instructing the therapeutic communications course and labs to undergraduate students. Edmundson's long-term plans include returning to her hometown of Edmonton, and possibly more teaching, which she loves, although she says she's not ready to give up bedside nursing just yet.

As she develops her research, Edmundson says she's had a great thesis experience so far.

"Doing this work, it's been amazing. My mentor is College of Nursing associate professor Dr. Hua Li (PhD), who has always been available to answer questions and help develop connections. She has my best interest in mind and I truly couldn't do this without her."

### CARMEN CHALUPIAK

#### MASTER OF NURSING (PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE)

Master of Nursing student Carmen Chalupiak (BSN'04) is confident in saying she has discovered her niche in nursing and that niche is teaching. After spending 20 years as a neonatal intensive care nurse, one could probably say she's familiar with most areas of the nursing profession. But it was during her years of practice that she found that educator spark.

"I was always interested in education and teaching and loved that aspect of being a nurse," said Chalupiak. "I was a clinical nurse educator for five years and wanted to further my own education to teach full time."

Naturally, Chalupiak returned to the place where it all started, the University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing. Much has changed since she first graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2004. She has two children, 12 and 14 years old, a ton of nursing experience under her belt, and thanks to advancements in technology, she was able to take her master's program online rather than in-person.

While online learning and being a student again were adjustments, not to mention the juggling act of balancing home life and school with her full-time job, Chalupiak said the result was worth it. "I loved the online program option, that was a priority for me," she says. "I really enjoyed the program, as it aligned directly to what I was doing to further my career."

Chalupiak said the advanced nursing knowledge she gained through her Master in Nursing degree has solidified her own teaching, not to mention added a credential highly valued at her workplace.

She currently teaches full time in the Saskatchewan Collaborative Bachelor of Science in Nursing program in Regina, where she mostly teaches undergraduates in third year, introducing them to skills in labour and birth. Chalupiak says the clinical training she guides her nursing students through makes her miss bedside nursing a bit, but she feels honoured to be in a position to share her own knowledge gained through years of experience and boosted by her new degree.

"I like teaching the next generation of nurses. I feel this is where I was meant to be."



Carmen Chalupiak. Submitted

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## ALEXANDRA POND

**MASTER OF NURSING PRIMARY HEALTH CARE  
NURSE PRACTITIONER**

Alexandra Pond (BSN'20) has always been attracted to the field of nursing for what she calls the "typical, but true" reason of wanting to help people. It wasn't until she started at USask College of Nursing that she began the exploration that would help her find her own niche within nursing and ultimately enrol in the Master of Nursing Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner program to focus even further on community-centered care.

Joining the College of Nursing from the rural community of Big River, Saskatchewan, Pond completed her Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2020, then went to practice in emergency departments in rural areas like Shellbrook and Meadow Lake. It was there, handling emergency cases, that Pond started wondering about the other side.

"I became interested in the prevention side of health because when you're on the opposite spectrum in emergency, you're wondering 'what happened to them before they came here, how did they get here and how could they have been taken care of better?'"

Pond was further intrigued with public health while working in an HIV and Hepatitis C case management program at a surrounding First Nation community. "I found an interest in public health that had never interested me in my bachelor's degree." She decided to become a nurse practitioner.

Completing the nurse practitioner program coursework online in her first year, she was able to stay in her home community. Pond is now working on two of three practicum placements required for her second year, in Meadow Lake and surrounding area, including Ministikwan and Makwa Sahgaiehcan First Nations. She works in a daily clinic, as well as rotations at the hospital. Once she graduates, Pond hopes to return to practice in her home community. She has special interests in reproductive health, infectious disease, and health teaching.

While the future may be open, Pond is confident she's chosen the right path and recommends it to others.

"There's something for everyone, and so many fields to work in—you can always switch it up if your life circumstances change," she said.



Alexandra Pond. Submitted

"For people who are considering going into nursing or if they're in the program now, it's not easy, but so worth it and so rewarding. It is an undertaking, but as a nurse you commit to lifelong learning to maintain your clinical competency to ensure the provision of safe and evidence-based care. It can be challenging at times, but if your drive to learn and passion for others is sound, then the world is your oyster."

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## UCHECHI OPARA

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN NURSING (PHD)**

College of Nursing Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing student Uchechi Opara is conducting research that will improve health-care in her home country of Nigeria.

Following completion of her master's degree from the University of Worcester, where she explored women's knowledge and satisfaction with maternal health, Opara is spending her PhD diving even deeper into the exploration of how cultural belief and practice influence women's access of the health-care system.

Her research findings suggest that the more health-care professionals understand women's perception of the system, the better public health services can be planned, tailoring services to meet women where they are. These findings are even more useful when you consider that Nigeria is the world's third-highest contributor to maternal death with a maternal mortality ratio of 1,047 per 100,000 live births.

Focusing on women in Nigeria's Igala subculture (the country has approximately 250 ethnic groups), Opara completed her field work over four months. She had already spent 20 years as a clinical nurse midwife immersed in this culture, so she says it was almost more challenging to find ways to maintain objectivity than it was to connect.

"I needed to make the familiar strange," she said.

Speaking with women in many health-care settings, she looked at maternal health from all angles. For example, the role of ancestors in family planning, wherein a belief that a woman has to have the number of children that God has planned or risk the deaths of males in their families, including their husbands. Another factor in maternal health is a patriarchal society in which women often have little say on decision-making around their own bodies, a fact that can lead to maternal death in some cases. Taking herbs is considered very important for pregnancy health, but the pregnancy itself is generally concealed until birth to prevent attacks. Finally, vaginal delivery is highly prized over Cesarean section, to the point where the latter is avoided as much as possible.

All Opara's research findings have potential to help inform health-care practitioners about women's attitudes towards maternal health, both in terms of creating public health education and having



Uchechi Opara. Submitted

a practical knowledge of women's understanding and beliefs behind health-care approaches.

Opara hopes to publish her research and share it through papers and seminars, as well as communicating with local health policy-makers within the community. She would like to continue her research with a pivot to focus on how health-care workers operate within this system, and also to help nursing schools become more aware of culturally appropriate models of care.

Opara said she has enjoyed doing her research at the College of Nursing, although settling in was a challenge in every respect, from acclimatizing to the culture, the weather, online learning, and even the academic writing style. She credits USask graduate learning specialist Jill MacMillan with helping with the latter, and the librarians who helped her source research and complete her literature review. "They taught us as international students how to go about writing academically and critically," she said.