Washington, DC (October 18, 2019)—The American Academy of Nursing (Academy) recognizes Valerie Gruss, PhD, APRN, GNP-BC, FAAN for her Dementia Guide Expert app as well as Judith Haber, PhD, APRN, FAAN and Erin Hartnett, DNP, PNPPC-BC, CPNP for their Oral Health in Nursing Education and Practice (OHNEP) program. The Academy’s Edge Runners are nurse innovators who have charted a new course and ushered in remarkable improvement to major healthcare challenges. Edge Runner models of care and interventions demonstrate significant outcomes, clinically and financially, through the leadership, ingenuity, and determination of nurses.

“The Academy is proud to designate these unique, nurse-designed programs as Edge Runners,” said Academy President Karen Cox, PhD, RN, FAAN. “Dr. Gruss’s Dementia Guide Expert app is an easy-to-use innovation that is drastically increasing access to care, which is especially important for diseases as personal as dementia.”

According to Alzheimer’s Disease International, over 46 million people worldwide have dementia and that number is expected to nearly triple by 2050. And while there is a push to create dementia-friendly communities through education and awareness, dementia information and support are fragmented.

The Dementia Guide Expert app is a unique centralized resource where patients with dementia and caregivers can find evidence-based expert information on the different types, contributing factors, risks, symptoms, stages, diagnoses, tests, treatments, management, communication techniques, and various resources and support services.

“Building age-friendly health systems and dementia-friendly communities is a top national healthcare priority,” said Dr. Gruss, creator of the app. “Utilizing mobile app health technology to educate and support persons with dementia and their caregivers expands our reach and enables the development of global dementia-friendly communities.”

Since the app’s launch in December 2017, it has been downloaded over 34,800 times across twelve countries. It has recently been translated into Spanish, “Guia Experta Sobre La Demencia,” and both the English and Spanish versions are available to download for free on iOS and Android devices.

“Drs. Haber and Hartnett are transforming the way we, as nurses, view oral health and its connection to the body through their OHNEP program,” said Dr. Cox.

Oral health often remains in the domain of dentistry, disconnecting the mouth from the rest of the body as a measure of overall health. The OHNEP program is changing the way oral health is thought about through faculty, preceptor, and clinician professional development, curriculum integration, and the establishment of best practices so that oral health will be thought of as an essential part of comprehensive care.
“Health equity for me means that all people across the lifespan have access to affordable and effective oral health care as a right, not a privilege,” said Dr. Haber, Executive Director of the program. “All health professionals, including nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives, physicians, physician assistants, pharmacists and others, can play an essential role in considering oral health as a key component of whole person care.”

The OHNEP program has made a significant impact in clinical education and practice. More than 50% of the 498 primary care nurse practitioner and 84% of midwifery programs nationwide are integrating oral health content in graduate program curricula. The program’s content is also featured on 23 nursing and interprofessional education and practice organization websites.

“We are committed to developing a nursing workforce with the interprofessional oral health competencies to recognize oral health promotion and disease prevention as an integral component of nursing practice,” said Dr. Hartnett, OHNEP Program Director.

Edge Runner profiles are available at aannet.org/initiatives/edge-runners/profiles.

About the American Academy of Nursing
The American Academy of Nursing (Academy) serves the public and the nursing profession by advancing health policy, practice, and science through organizational excellence and effective nursing leadership. The Academy’s more than 2,600 Fellows are nursing’s most accomplished leaders in education, management, practice, research, and policy. They have been recognized for their extraordinary contributions to nursing and healthcare.

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