

Nurse/Teacher/Advocate Finds Time for Doctoral Studies

KYNNA WRIGHT IS BUSY — teaching, running a program, advocating for maternal and child health, and seeing patients as a certified pediatric nurse practitioner. Oh, and she also finds time to meet the rigorous demands of a UCLA School of Public Health doctoral student.

After earning a master's degree in nursing in 1997, Wright entered the school's M.P.H. program. Two years in the school's Child and Family Health Program — an interdisciplinary training program for health professionals in practice, research and policy analysis, directed by Dr. Neal Halfon — changed her clinical perspective.

"I'm able to help my patients much more," says Wright, who currently works at two community-based clinics. "Before the M.P.H., I had a patient with a cockroach in his ear. I was able to treat the infection, but didn't quite know what to do with the underlying problem at home. The patient's mother was looking for me to refer her to various social services, and I didn't know how." Now, Wright says, she not only treats patients' medical problems, but also examines factors such as housing, transportation and access to care. "That's made a world of difference," she says.

Through the Child and Family Health Program, Wright met Vivian Weinstein, the renowned child advocate who became Wright's mentor. Before she died, Weinstein saw one of her dreams come to fruition when The Vivian Weinstein Child Advocacy Fellowship program was established within the school's Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities. Wright is the manager of this program, which provides an opportunity for students to gain the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary for child advocacy while spending a year with a community-based program or policy-oriented group focused on improving children and family programs.

Wright's interest in policy has landed her on several advisory boards and has taken her to Sacramento, where she has lobbied on behalf of the March of Dimes and L.A. Care Health Plan. She worked for the California Children and Families Commission, helping to implement Proposition 10 (First 5), the cigarette-tax initiative that created new revenue for early-childhood programs.

Wright is in her fourth year as a doctoral student at the school, studying the special health needs and quality of care for disadvantaged children with HIV and AIDS. She is the first recipient of a new California Endowment initiative that supports students working in underserved communities. Once she earns the degree, Wright hopes to keep one foot in academia — but doesn't intend to stop seeing patients. "I'm first and foremost a nurse," she says. "I love that role, and as an African American woman, since there are not too many of us out there, I feel it's important not only personally but also to be a mentor to others."

So she teaches — at the UCLA School of Nursing and, last spring, at the first offering of Allied Health 35, an introductory public health course for high school and community college students, offered at Compton Community College through the UCLA School of Public Health. "That was an extremely rewarding experience," Wright says. "Seeing the light bulbs go off in these kids and having many of them decide they wanted to become public health practitioners was really exciting."

Wright laughs when the subject turns to her frenetic schedule. "Time management is key," she says. "There's just a lot to do, and the opportunities keep presenting themselves. While I have the energy, I want to take advantage."



"I can be an advocate, helping kids physically, mentally and socio-emotionally so that they have a good trajectory in life."

—Kynna Wright