

## MORAL MEDICINE

By Joan-Maree Hargreaves

New health courses reflect evolving ethical, technological and legal needs.

There are a number of new medical science degrees being offered next year, from graduate programs for registered nurses to a master of forensic mental health.

Demand from community health organisations has led to the development of a graduate certificate in acute care nursing for registered nurses at the University of New England.

"This evolved out of a request from a couple of local area health services where there was a dire shortage of registered nurses in rural and regional areas in acute care," says Dr Penny Paliadelis, deputy head of the school of health at UNE.

The program covers training for nurses working in operating theatres, emergency units, coronary care units and intensive care units but is only available for working registered nurses and is undertaken by distance education. The certificate can be completed over one year full-time or two years part-time.

"This year was the first year it had been offered and it has been so popular that we introduced a mid-year intake," Paliadelis says. "We will offer it mid-year next year, too, if the demand continues."

The University of Sydney has new courses that straddle both the faculty of arts and the faculty of medicine. These are the graduate certificates and graduate diplomas in medical humanities and bioethics. This is a relatively new field covering areas as diverse as stem cell research and egg donation, to the links between music and medicine.

"Medical humanities looks at the way arts, music, philosophy and history all interact to influence and shape medicine," says Associate Professor Ian Kerridge, director of the Centre for Values, Ethics and Law in Medicine at the University of Sydney.

"Bioethics looks at ethics and social and legal issues in relation to new technologies associated with genetics and stem cells," Kerridge says, "and also touches on a whole range of topics like euthanasia, the relationship between the health provider and the patient, illnesses and how to respond to advances in sciences."

The development of new programs is being driven by a number of factors. "But generally it is a recognition that areas like medical health are not purely scientific - those days are well and truly over."

According to Kerridge, the way the bioethics program is taught is innovative. "One week we'll look at sex and drugs from a historical perspective - from the viewpoint of a female abortionist," he says. "And the next week we might look at it from a religious perspective - from the view of the Pope and the Vatican."

At the University of NSW there is a new master of forensic mental health - the first of its type in Australia. This program was developed to satisfy demand for highly skilled professionals working in justice health programs, and because of a broader concern about the quality of training of forensic mental health workers, according to Professor Philip Mitchell, head of psychiatry at UNSW.

"The focus is on a mix of skills development and theoretical training in the field," Mitchell says. "There are 10 courses within the program, dealing with violence, children and families, sexual deviation issues, as well as issues to do with the legal framework."

The majority of students will be medical and nursing graduates, Mitchell says, as well as lawyers and people from allied health backgrounds such as occupational therapy and pharmacy.

### Donna Blomgren expands her career prospects.

For Donna Blomgren, 44, studying a master of forensic mental health is as challenging as her day job as a full-time pharmacist at Long Bay Prison.

Blomgren, originally from Belfast, Northern Ireland, worked in her father's pharmacy for years before moving to Australia with her husband and two children five years ago. She has worked in hospitals across NSW, where her interest in mental health developed.

Blomgren began her masters at the University of New South Wales in February this year.

"I really enjoy learning about mental health and how psychological illnesses can lead to criminal behaviour," she says "but also learning about the stigmas attached to people with mental illnesses."

Blomgren says her degree involves a lot of clinical work in areas of law and mental health, but "I think this will also benefit me in becoming part of a multi-disciplinary workforce".

Maintaining a balance between work, study and family is a challenge. "But I have a very supportive husband, so I am very fortunate," she says.

Blomgren intends to pursue a career in forensic mental health management.

Photo: Angela Brkic

