



Miami Nightingale Challenge participants meet with Dean Munro, far right, and Drs. Mary Hooshmand and Patricia Flatley Brennan, center.

Meet the Next Nightingales

Emerging nurse leaders from across the hemisphere join the SONHS Nightingale Challenge

By Yolanda Mancilla

At Nicklaus Children’s Hospital, Bianca Santamarina, staff nurse in the Cancer and Blood Disorders Center, blows soap bubbles for her patients to lighten their spirits when they come for chemotherapy. Santamarina enrolled in nursing school right after high school. “It was what I always wanted to do,” Santamarina said. “I never thought of anything else.”

A chronic asthmatic, she awoke one night at age 8 unable to breathe, and was rushed to Miami Children’s Hospital. Both of her lungs had collapsed. “That experience was so terrifying,” recalled Santamarina. “I can’t tell you their names, but I can tell you how the nurses made me feel, bringing me toys and coloring books.” The crisis was life-changing. “From that date, I said, ‘I want to be a light in this dark tunnel and help people in their most vulnerable moments.’”

Today, Santamarina is one of a dozen early career nurses nominated from Miami hospitals for the Nightingale Challenge Nurse Leadership Development Program at the School of Nursing and Health Studies. In addition to attending the Nursing Now USA South Florida Lecture Series, in person or virtually, participants engaged in discussions on nursing leadership roles.

SONHS created the program in response to Nursing Now’s 2020 Nightingale Challenge, a global call to provide leadership training opportunities to at least 20,000 early career nurses in 2020—the 200th anniversary of the birth of outspoken nurse and social reformer Florence Nightingale. Over 27,000 nurses worldwide have already benefited from the initiative, noted Barbara Stilwell, Nursing Now’s executive director, during her March lecture.

Underscoring the school’s hemispheric reach, three dozen

nurses from Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, and Uruguay also enrolled in the program. Magaly Miranda Ávila was among them. After a devastating earthquake hit Chile in 2010, Miranda Ávila began organizing nurses seeking to improve working conditions for the profession. The experience would change her career trajectory. A young mother with three children, she transitioned from clinical practice to a leadership role as a founder of the National Federation of Chilean Nursing Associations (FENASENF) and has served as its president since 2014.

The Nightingale Challenge offered “the possibility of bringing visibility to our work, of establishing communication with nurses globally, and of promoting the vocation of service in the next generation,” said Miranda Ávila. Using Zoom video conferencing technology, she and her fellow Latin American nurses gathered for lectures and post-lecture leadership dialogues facilitated by Johis Ortega, B.S.N. ’02, M.S.N. ’06, Ph.D. ’10, associate dean for Hemispheric and Global Initiatives.

“Being a nurse is a commitment forged by knowledge, passion, and vocation, but culturally established canons render us invisible in decision-making and allocation of resources,” shared Miranda Ávila. “As nurses, we’ve normalized long work days that are detrimental to our well-being, to the development of a healthy family life. We learn the capacity for sacrifice, but not for self-care. Our responsibility is to promote change from within ourselves.”

Juan Carlos Reyes Martínez, a supervising nurse at El Salvador’s National Hospital of Sensuntepeque, Cabañas, and a nursing instructor at Catholic University and the University of El Salvador, joined the challenge because it gave

Latin American nurses the chance to contribute to important issues facing the profession. “Nurse leaders are the nexus between the patient and the health care team,” he said. “They need decision-making opportunities and to see themselves as a fundamental and important part of care processes.”

Challenge participant Yasna Palmeiro Silva is a registered nurse with a master of public health degree. She works at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and is busy pursuing her Ph.D. in global health at University College London, where she investigates the effects of climate change on Chilean population health. “The Nightingale Challenge is a huge opportunity to receive high-quality training from one of the most prestigious universities in the world,” she said. “This challenge not only helps me to serve as a leader in my field and to strengthen nursing as a profession, but also to influence new generations of nurses who seek solutions to global health challenges.”

Santamarina, meanwhile, continues to build her leadership muscles here in Miami. She is enrolled in a master’s in nursing administration program and serves as chair of the Nicklaus Exemplary Professional Practice Council, tasked with ensuring the hospital maintains its prestigious magnet facility designation.

She sees the school’s Nightingale Challenge program as yet another avenue for growth. “I hope to develop my leadership skills and competencies in the program,” she shared. “Nursing is the face of health care. We are the leaders and the future of health care. We are making a huge impact, and it all ties into the Year of the Nurse—not just this year, but all years.” ■