

FACULTY PROFILE: JEANNE MATTHEWS

By Lauren Burgoon and Tressa Kirby

When the swine flu hit the world stage this spring, **Jeanne Matthews**, assistant professor of nursing, knowingly entered the fray—her normal course of action in such situations.

Aside from teaching at Georgetown, Matthews shares the role of nurse manager of Arlington County, Va.'s Department of Human Services' Public Health Division. In that position, she and her colleagues work to keep the local community healthy—battling everything from seasonal



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flu and norovirus, to measles—through planning and prevention.

In the recent public health crisis, Matthews has been tackling the swine-origin influenza A (H1N1) virus—commonly known as swine flu—which continues to affect people around the globe. She said the Arlington team has been preparing for years to handle situations like this one.

“We started planning for a potential pandemic years ago, put systems in place, and developed plans to deal with it,” she said. “So if we had a big challenge, we’d be able to meet it. It’s not just true of Arlington, that’s true of the whole country.”

Matthews, who is immediate past chair of the Public Health Nursing Section of the American Public Health Association, noted that a lot of the county’s pandemic planning originally concerned avian flu.

“That was the stimulus,” she said. “But the reality is that whether it’s avian or swine flu, a pandemic is a pandemic. There might be some specifics about treatment that change or differences in severity, but the reality of all pandemics is the same. You want to be able to identify

who the cases are, control the spread, and mitigate the impact on the community. What we develop around pandemic planning is developed irrespective of the pandemic and is an extension of what public health does every day.”

A PASSION FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

As a Georgetown professor, Matthews regularly takes these real-world experiences back with her to the Hilltop to enrich classroom learning.

“There are often outbreaks of one sort or another,” Matthews said. “We recently examined a measles outbreak in the Washington area. On the last day of class in the spring semester, I spent about 40 minutes doing an overview of the measles scenario because it’s the application of everything we’ve covered in our public health nursing sessions.”

Through the undergraduate course, Matthews said students learn about outbreak investigation, epidemiology, communicable disease, emergency preparedness, and partnership with communities.

MATTHEWS TALKS TO THE MEDIA ABOUT SWINE FLU



NHS Professor Jeanne Matthews spoke with the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* about the swine flu.



Matthews also commented to *National Public Radio*.

To the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*: “We don’t want to make people overly anxious when they don’t need to be. On the other hand, we don’t want people to relax their disease-control practices, like hand-washing, because they don’t think it applies to them.” (June 27, 2009)

To *National Public Radio* about closing schools and cancelling events: Health officials are “so dependent on whether it appears that community containment might halt person to person contact. This is a new strain. I don’t think we know enough about this flu to have a sense of when that should be.” (April 26, 2009)

“I walked [the students] through from the start of when we first heard about it through the collaborative work done by public health communities with business, schools, and so on to where we are now,” she said. “They are great teaching cases for our students.”

Matthews’ own teaching career began about 30 years ago, and her love for public health nursing has grown steadily over that time.

She received her bachelor’s degree in nursing from Hunter Bellevue School of Nursing and spent her early career working in critical care, case management, and public health nursing in New York City and Rochester.

Matthews later earned her master’s degree in nursing from the University of Rochester and her doctorate in nursing at the University of Maryland at Baltimore.

“In 1993,” she said, “I moved to Georgetown, a change that I thought would fit philosophically with my lifelong interest in social justice. That has enriched my life greatly.”

At NHS, she now teaches students in three courses, including “population health” and a capstone—both

taught with **Michael Stoto**, professor of health systems administration—and “public health nursing,” which she teaches with **Diane Downing**, an instructor of nursing and the other half of the nurse manager team in Arlington county.

And for several years, Matthews acted as a mentor to nursing students who were completing their clinical rotation in the county’s public health division.

“I love my work in public health,” Matthews said. “Combining academic and practice roles gives me the opportunity to share my passion with the next generation of public health nursing leaders. By engaging students in the policy and practice activities of day-to-day public health in the national capital region, our students develop the needed skills to shape the nation’s health through prevention and population-focused practice.”

Bill Cessato contributed to this report.