KANSAS CITY, Mo. (Feb. 8, 2013) – Senior nursing students at Saint Luke’s College of Health Sciences will participate in a poverty simulation, Friday, Feb. 15 from 9 a.m. to noon. This three-hour activity was developed by the Missouri Association for Community Action as a tool to educate participants about what it means to live in poverty.

The simulation is part of the Community Centered Nursing Across the Lifetime Clinical taught by a faculty team of 10 members. Professor Karen Schweiger Komoroski, Ph.D., R.N., C.N.E. is leading this particular course activity and has participated in a poverty simulation herself. The class of 75 students also works with children at Operation Breakthrough, the Salvation Army, and Della Lamb Community Services and the Don Bosco Community Center for seniors.

“Some nursing programs use this kind of simulation to help students understand the challenges of poverty and to sensitize them to the many barriers that someone in poverty must navigate,” said Komoroski.

The course is relatively unique to nursing programs and represents a paradigm shift away from studying a nursing area in isolation to combining the areas of maternal-child, mental health, and community health nursing. Learning experiences center around family case studies and help students understand the often complex task of nursing vulnerable populations from multiple perspectives.

The simulation session begins with a presentation about poverty in the Kansas City area. Then students are assigned a specific role and formed into families. They also receive a short description of their situation, for example, you are a mother with three children and make $500 each month. Or, you are a senior citizen with only social security for income. After being “pre-briefed” by the facilitator on local poverty statistics, families are then expected to live for a month in poverty. Over the next hour (broken into 15 minute “weeks”), families navigate challenges associated with managing their day to day lives and are randomly given “luck-of-the-draw-cards” such as: your car is repossessed, you are being evicted, and you’ve lost wages for being late to work after you lost your car.

Stationed at tables around the room are resource volunteers who role-play as a shop owner or agency representative. Many of the volunteers have experienced poverty themselves and are easily able to create a realistic experience someone would encounter at a grocery store, pawn shop, police department, jail, utility company, elementary school, or homeless shelter.

“Simulation participants must go from table to table standing in lines, filling out forms, and trying to negotiate solutions to their difficulties,” said Komoroski. “When I went through this simulation, I was surprised at what a visceral and emotional experience it was and how difficult it was to navigate a complex system to meet my families’ needs. Participants get a new perspective of what people in poverty face day after day. As our students go through this, I hope it will serve to broaden their world view and when they care for patients and their families living in poverty they will have gained a new empathy.”
Otis Morris, case manager with United Services Community Action Agency, is the simulation facilitator which will be held at Fire Fighter’s Union Reception Hall, 6320 Manchester Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

Additional information about poverty simulations can be found on YouTube or at the Missouri Association for Community Action homepage:

http://www.marketplace.org/topics/wealth-poverty/pretending-be-poor-can-change-your-perspective#.UG9ksOC-Qpg.email

http://www.communityaction.org/Poverty%20Simulation.aspx

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Saint Luke’s College of Health Sciences has graduated more than 3,800 nurses since it was founded in 1903. The college has a low student-faculty ratio and an average 97 percent pass rate for the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) which is well above state and national averages. Within six months of graduate 98% of graduates are employed or continuing their education. It is affiliated with Saint Luke’s Hospital of Kansas City. For more information, visit saintlukescollege.edu.