Sacred Heart University

From the Selected Works of Christina B. Gunther

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Technology Highlights Healthcare Informatics Capstone Event

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Health-care technology was in the spotlight recently at Sacred Heart University when eight graduate students in the College of Health Professions presented their health-care informatics capstone poster projects.

The students, who are set to complete the 16-month healthcare informatics program and earn their master’s degrees in the field this month, presented summaries of their work as posters. These were assessed by Professor Christina Gunther, who leads the healthcare informatics capstone course; Stephen Burrows, chair of the Health Science & Leadership Program; and Patricia Walker, dean of the College of Health Professions.

“They worked all semester on their projects, turning in 25- to 40-page papers on their chosen topics, which they then summarized as posters,” said Gunther about the presenting students. The work demonstrated the students’ mastery of health-care informatics, which is essentially the application of technology in health care, including database management, electronic health records and clinical decision support.

Notably, seven of the eight presenting students are natives of India; the exception was Deb Picchione, BSN, RN, at Danbury Hospital. Her project was titled “Telehealth in Assisted Living Facilities.” She commented, “The objective of my project was to determine if installing a tele-health kiosk in an assisted living facility in western Connecticut is feasible. My findings indicate that the elderly have a high level of receptiveness toward using technology, though the implementation would require engaging residents, family members and staff.”

Picchione envisioned real-life application of the concept. “I’d really like to make this a reality at Danbury Hospital,” she said, also noting, “I got my job there as a result of going through Sacred Heart’s program.”

Among the other presenting students was Lakshmi Divya Chitneedi, whose project was titled “Zika Virus and Technologies Used in Combatting It.” She observed, “Neither an effective treatment nor a vaccine is available for the Zika virus. Consequently, the public health response mostly emphasizes preventing infection. The need for technology to stop the spread has become crucial.”
Chitneedi identified several preventive measures that are being created or implemented, including the use of cellphones to track an individual's movements and identify disease hot spots; genetically modified mosquitos to stop disease spread; a gene drive approach that inserts genes into an organism, enabling a negative genetic trait to spread through a population; and high-tech athletic wear using Permethrin, a synthetic insecticide.

Regarding her future aspirations, Chitneedi said, "I want to work in a health IT sector. Sacred Heart's program has prepared me well to work in hospitals, insurance companies and data management."

Surveying the room, Gunther said of her students, "I'm very proud of them. They worked so hard and their topics are fascinating. I learned a lot from them."