

Nursing students map their way to understanding HIV

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In the Faculty of Nursing, students are taught the importance of connecting with the community, and nursing professor Vera Caine has come up with a way for students to not only learn about working in the community, but also to actually be a part of it.

The idea came about after Caine visited a body mapping art display hosted by [HIV Edmonton](#). Caine, whose research interests include working with Aboriginal women with HIV, was immediately struck by the display. Her immediate reaction was that her [students](#) simply had to engage with the artists and body maps, after a conversation with HIV Edmonton community educator Lynn Sutankayo, the project was born.

"It gives the students an understanding of who they are in relation to those living with HIV," said Caine. "The whole course is around community-health nursing and living in the community, so this project helps that process, particularly in teaching about a highly stigmatized disease."

The partnership between the faculty and HIV Edmonton offers first-year [nursing students](#) a truly hands-on [learning experience](#) through body mapping, Caine says. Students participate in the half-day session as part of their clinical hours in Nursing 191.

HIV Edmonton uses body mapping, which is a creative approach to inquiring into [life experiences](#) through art. It is a treatment information and support tool, a process of self-discovery and a means of building

community. Sutankayo leads the sessions for the students in collaboration with HIV Edmonton community members.

The process begins with the students drawing an outline of the shadow that represents the support in their lives. Then the body mapping artist has their body traced by a peer, resulting in a body outline and a shadow. Students then write the names of the people in their support network within the shadow, which represents their family, friends, medical professionals who are important to them.

Sutankayo then asks the students to draw two symbols within the body map: one represents the journey they've taken to that point; the second, represents what identifies them and where they gain their power from.

Throughout the process community members living with HIV will also share their personal experience and will work with students to understand their personal journeys.

The finished product is a full-size body map that is a descriptive and personal work of art.

As teaching tool, Caine sees the value in having the students place themselves in the role where they disclose who they are. "The students are asked some very personal questions and are asked to represent themselves on paper," said Caine. "It's a role reversal—as health-care providers, we are typically the askers of the questions and in this situation the questions are being asked of us as well."

Caine says this is the first time this project has taken place at the University of Alberta and she hopes to share this teaching with others.

Feedback from both the students and the participating community members has been very positive. "It's been a healing experience to be

able to give back to the community," said Sutankayo. "Our members seem to feel hopeful when they hear about the future aspirations of the students and what the experience means to them."

For the students, it's truly eye opening, Caine says. "The whole experience really gives them an opportunity to think about health care from another perspective, and I hope this stays with them throughout their careers."

Provided by University of Alberta

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