

# NURSING NOW

STUDENT NURSES STEP UP  
TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF  
21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY HEALTHCARE.

BY CAROLE LEIGH ENGBLOM  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM ROSTER

## THERAPEUTIC COMMUNICATION

WUDNEH GAGA '06 HAS HAD A LIFELONG FASCINATION with the medical field. When it came time to decide whether to be a doctor or a nurse, he opted for a profession that typically has been more open to women than men. That's just fine with Gaga. "Nursing places its focus not just on a particular health problem, but on the whole patient and his or her response to treatment," he says.

The St. Olaf Nursing Program is providing Gaga with a solid foundation in theory and practice that "combines the art of caring with the science of healthcare. My professors have done an excellent job of preparing me for positions in both inpatient and community settings," he says.

Gaga was born in Ethiopia and immigrated to the United States when he was 10. English is his second language; Amharic, the dominant language in Ethiopia, is his native tongue. He especially appreciates the nursing program's inclusion of therapeutic communication, which is essential in developing a strong and open nurse-patient relationship.

Being skilled in therapeutic communication "enables us to empathize with our patients and be receptive to their concerns in a warm, respectful and nonjudgmental way," he explains.

Gaga spends every other weekend working as a nursing assistant in patient care at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. This summer he will work in an organ transplant unit at Mayo and intends to become a nurse anesthetist.

"As a nurse, I have the opportunity to save and improve lives, to teach people how to achieve better health and to advocate for patients to make sure they have the best healthcare, every day," says Gaga. "Historically, more women have chosen nursing as a profession. That remains true today, but the trend is changing. I believe St. Olaf is on the forefront of this trend." ■

### WUDNEH GAGA '06

"I WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE,  
AND I FEEL AS THOUGH NURSING  
GIVES ME THAT OPPORTUNITY."





**BREANNA PETERSON '06**  
"TO PROMOTE HEALTH AND HEALING,  
A NURSE MUST UNDERSTAND A  
PATIENT'S ENVIRONMENT."

## GIVING ACCESS TO ALL

"NURSING IS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL MEANS BY WHICH TO LOVE people and promote change," says Breanna Peterson '06 of Ames, Iowa.

For the past three years, Peterson has volunteered at HealthFinders Medical Clinic, a free clinic located in the basement of Little Prairie United Methodist Church about four miles south of Northfield. The clinic serves Rice County's uninsured individuals and families whose household income is 200 percent below federal poverty guidelines. "At HealthFinders, I see firsthand the devastating consequences of living without health insurance," she says.

During the time in which HealthFinders was being established, Peterson researched free-clinic models, served on the fundraising committee and conducted independent research to create the clinic's diabetic protocol. Now that the clinic's doors are open, she works as its diabetic program coordinator, organizes monthly educational programs and meets with patients to discuss their concerns. "Several patients are using their access to diabetes education and medication to take control of their health for the first time in years," she says. "People are most vulnerable when their health is at stake. To walk beside them as they cope with these issues is an amazing honor and responsibility."

Peterson is pursuing a second major, Public Health: Policy and Reform, through the Center for Integrative Studies at St. Olaf. This independent major gives her a better understanding of the policies that govern Minnesota's healthcare system. Current research she's conducting in collaboration with University of Minnesota researchers will result, she hopes, in promoting healthcare reform. "There are 45 million Americans who do not have access to healthcare," says Peterson.

This fall, Peterson will undertake graduate studies on a full academic scholarship at Emory University's Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing in Atlanta, Georgia. Awarded the Robert W. Woodruff Scholarship, Peterson will work toward her master of science degree as a family nurse practitioner and master of public health in health policy and management.

Her goal, she says, is to address the needs of the uninsured by establishing more free medical clinics while engaging in policy reform "in order to implement permanent change in our healthcare system." ■



### PHILIP ROSSING '07 & JOE RAUCH '06

"WE SPEND MOST OF OUR JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEARS TOGETHER, AND WE FACE MANY OF THE SAME CHALLENGES. THIS RESULTS IN WONDERFUL FRIENDSHIPS THAT WILL LAST A LIFETIME," SAYS ROSSING (LEFT).

## EMERGENCY!

WHEN PHILIP ROSSING '07 ARRIVED AT ST. OLAF FROM South Dakota and chose economics as his major, he foresaw a future in hospital administration. But after shadowing a nurse administrator at Sioux Valley Hospital back home in Sioux Falls, he altered his course.

"A nursing major at St. Olaf was a better fit for me because I could pursue my passion for working with people and it would also leave the door open for me to assume a leadership position one day," Rossing says. "Men are being recognized more and more as an asset to the nursing profession."

Rossing has worked in the Sioux Valley Hospital emergency room for the past two summers. Though he likes the unpredictability of an ER, Rossing continues to shadow healthcare administrators to better understand how a health system functions. He's also added a management studies concentration to his nursing major.

"Nurses who possess a St. Olaf liberal arts education are immediately recognized as leaders in the healthcare community," he says.

Joseph Rauch '06 spent part of last summer in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, as a "scrub tech" with Medical Ministry International. Working in a small, nonprofit hospital with three doctors (from California, Canada and the Philippines), Rauch assisted with physical examinations for local villagers and also received valuable surgical training.

His current internship is in the ER at St. Cloud Hospital in St. Cloud, Minnesota. "I love the ER because it really makes us think and we find out what we're made of," he says.

Rauch is vice president of the St. Olaf EMTs (emergency medical technicians), a group of student volunteers who are first responders to campus medical emergencies — the only program of its kind in the nation. That, combined with the St. Olaf Nursing Program, "is not only teaching me how to be a great nurse but how to be a great person," Rauch says.

Although he thought of becoming a doctor, Rauch was influenced by the work of his mother and sister as nurses. "All I want to do is care for people," he says. "Nursing is who I am." ■



# PATHFINDER

FOR SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, NATIVE ERIN FORSYTHE '06, A LONG-term interest in alternative medicine and encouragement from her nursing professors led her to combine a nursing major with an independent major in health psychology. As part of her senior capstone project, "Integrating Complementary Therapies with Western Medicine," Forsythe observed the practice of alternative medicine such as acupuncture, biofeedback, hypnotherapy and meditation at the Pathways Health Crisis Resource Center in Minneapolis.

**ERIN FORSYTHE '06**  
"INTEGRATING HOLISTIC NURSING AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE INTO CLASSICAL TREATMENT WILL BE THE DEFINING FEATURE OF MY PATIENT CARE."

It enabled her to explore the integration of alternative and complementary therapies with traditional medicine. "This has helped me develop a better understanding of the connections between the mind and the body, and the implications of these connections on health," says Forsythe.

Forsythe believes that a key attribute of the St. Olaf Nursing Program is the faculty commitment to helping students find their specific areas of interest while providing a rigorous, practical nursing education. A recent clinical experience in an oncology unit at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis has sparked a developing interest in cardiology, and this summer Forsythe will complete the Summer III program in which student nurses participate in direct and indirect patient care at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

"My specific interests in nursing are constantly evolving," she says. ■

# ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

HELPING PEOPLE IN NEED, WHETHER THEY ARE INFANTS in a Peruvian hospital or families in crisis, is "a privilege and a gift," says Aubrey Rice '06. She chose a career in nursing because she realized that it was "the perfect way to live a life of service."

"Coming to St. Olaf for my nursing education is one of the best decisions I ever made," says Rice who grew up in Madison, Wisconsin. "Opportunities for clinical work in pediatrics, oncology, cardiology, public health, maternity, mental health and leadership have taught me more in two years than I could ever have imagined. Our professors do a wonderful job of organizing our time, pushing us to push ourselves and to feel proud of our successes."

Last January, Rice put her nursing skills to work in the Peru Medical Experience Interim program. Working with Children's Surgery International (CSI) in Cuzco, Peru (Machu Picchu), Rice assisted CSI physicians in determining surgical sites and gained insight into global healthcare. "My experiences in Peru were unbelievably rewarding," she says. "I felt a connection to the people. I loved their attitude toward life and their warmth toward each other and to us. I felt inspired to continue to do more, both personally and as a nurse."

Rice is completing her medical health clinical experience at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center and will begin working in the pediatric unit at St. Mary's Hospital, part of the Mayo Clinic campus, in Rochester, Minnesota, this fall.

She's considering becoming a midwife or a nurse practitioner specializing in women's health. Since her trip to Peru, however, international healthcare is also an option. "Causes that have continually caught my interest include working toward AIDS eradication and education regarding reproductive rights and methods," she says. "I've also thought about working on Native American reservations or in inner-city clinics or other free health services with the aim of improving public health. The possibilities are endless." ■



**AUBREY RICE '06**  
"EVERYWHERE I'VE GONE — FOR CLINICAL WORK, INTERNSHIPS AND JOB INTERVIEWS — I'VE BEEN PRAISED FOR MY TECHNICAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS. ST. OLAF DOES A REMARKABLE JOB OF TEACHING US HOW TO THINK CRITICALLY WITHOUT LOSING OUR HUMANITY."