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An advocate for innovative approaches to addressing the challenges faced by maternal-infant populations experiencing opioid use disorder (OUD), Karen Alexander serves as an assistant professor at Jefferson College of Nursing.

Dr. Alexander's research and clinical work focus heavily on improving care and outcomes for the growing number of pregnant women and their infants affected by opioid use. She has steadily established herself as a leader of patient-oriented research in the field.

Through her work as a neonatal intensive care nurse, Dr. Alexander has first-hand experience with the needs of women undergoing opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment as they strive to assure their infants of healthy lives. At Jefferson, she has worked alongside leaders in the field in the Departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Pediatrics who conducted clinical trials with both mothers and infants to treat opioid withdrawal symptoms with medication and develop innovations to create better systems of care.

One research effort in preparing her doctoral dissertation was a study of mothers in a neonatal intensive care unit whose infants were treated for opioid withdrawal symptoms. Focused on issues such as the mothers' feelings of guilt, breastfeeding practices, and a need for autonomy in care, this led to her writing a 2017 *Journal of Addictions Nursing* article in which she recommended that the American Nurses Association (ANA) Code of Ethics be a guide for nurses in caring for women with OUD. Dr. Alexander argued that recognizing the mothers' personal health situations, addressing personal biases, and creating strong personal relationships between health care providers and the mothers are important steps in providing nonjudgmental, compassionate care for mothers with opioid issues.

Also part of her dissertation research was an examination of how depression among mothers with OUD should be addressed within their addiction treatment. She recommended a multifaceted approach that addresses past trauma and, current social determinants while also incorporating behavioral interventions which benefit the woman and her child.

Most recently, Dr. Alexander – working with colleagues in Thomas Jefferson University's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Pediatrics – conducted a qualitative study to identify the barriers that women with OUD face in accessing health care. They found that such women often lack sufficient access to information about health care available for delivery and their newborns' possible hospitalizations. Women with OUD also seek support from nurses to form their identities as mothers, and nurses can facilitate by providing an environment that allows close physical contact between newborn and mother.

Prior to joining the Jefferson faculty in 2011, (initially as an instructor), Dr. Alexander served as nurse coordinator in the Diagnostic and Complex Care Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Before that, she was a staff nurse in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Thomas Jefferson Hospital.

Dr. Alexander earned her PhD in nursing from Duquesne University, her master's and bachelor's degrees in nursing at the Jefferson College of Nursing, and her bachelor of arts degree from Grove City College.