

2015 IFNA Award Nomination: Excellence in Family Nursing Award

Nomination of Eva Benzein, R.N.T., Dipl.Nurse, Ph.D.

It has been 17 years since **Eva Benzein, RNT, Dipl.Nurse, PhD**, and three of her colleagues first visited the Family Nursing Unit, University of Calgary and witnessed “family nursing in action” and the power of the therapeutic conversation between nurses and families experiencing serious illness. Since then, Dr. Benzein, a professor at the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Department of Health and Caring Science at Linnaeus University (formerly Kalmar University) in Kalmar, Sweden, has provided sustained, visionary leadership in developing “Family-Focused Nursing” in Sweden and uniting the efforts of the 5 Nordic countries to advance the nursing of families with an emphasis on transforming practice with families. She received an Innovative Contribution to Family Nursing Award from the *Journal of Family Nursing* in 2005. Her belief in a systemic approach to health care and the value of healing conversations with families recently caught the attention of the founders of Ikea, the Kamprad family, who wished to develop a new model of offering palliative care that honored the importance of family. In 2012, Dr. Benzein was awarded a multi-million dollar award (2012-2017) from the Kamprad Family Foundation to establish a new palliative care center in the region of Småland, Sweden with an emphasis on developing interdisciplinary education and a program of research in family-focused care to support best practice in palliative care.

Pioneering Family-Focused Nursing in Sweden and the Nordic Countries

Dr. Benzein’s interest in family nursing began through the influence of Dr. Lorraine Wright and the work of the Family Nursing Unit, University of Calgary (for which Dr. Wright was awarded an honorary doctorate from Linnaeus University in 2012). The textbook by Wright and Leahey, *Nurses and Families: A Guide to Family Assessment and Intervention*, about generalist nursing practice with families using the Calgary Family Assessment and Intervention Models was translated into Swedish in 1998 and published by Studentlitteratur. Dr. Benzein and members of her faculty invited Dr. Wright to offer graduate level courses and lectures in Family Systems Nursing at Kalmar University and several neighboring universities in Sweden in 2000 and 2001. In 2002, Dr. Benzein and her colleague, Dr. Britt-Inger Saveman translated *Beliefs: The Heart of Healing in Families and Illness* (Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996) a textbook about advanced practice with families called the Illness Beliefs Model. These efforts supported major curriculum revisions that began in 2001 and were lead by Dr. Benzein and her colleagues to make family nursing more visible throughout all undergraduate and graduate level nursing courses. Doctoral students were recruited with an emphasis on developing new knowledge to transform practice with families.

In 2004, Drs. Benzein and Saveman established the *Family-Focused Nursing Unit (Omvardnadsmottagning foer familjer)* at Kalmar University where therapeutic conversations were offered to families using a research process. They named these family interventions “*Family Health Conversations*” influenced by the foundational ideas of Calgary Family Assessment and Intervention Models and the Illness Beliefs Model with attention to the unique cultural context of Sweden.

Dr. Benzein's early joint research in Family-Focused Nursing examined the attitudes of a large sample of Swedish registered nurses about the importance of involving families in nursing care. Through this work, her research team developed and revised an instrument called *Families' Importance in Nursing Care-Nurses' Attitudes* (FINC-NA) that is currently being used by family nursing researchers in several countries and translated into several languages. She has led a program of externally funded research focused on advancing understanding about the illness experience of families in various clinical populations including intensive care, forensic care, chronic illness, palliative care, cancer care, cardiac care. The program of research has also been extended to examining the value of systemic, family-level nursing interventions influenced by Family Health Conversations. In 2009, the *Center for Research on Family Health* was established at Linnaeus University. This program of research continues to examine the efficacy of family nursing interventions and translate this knowledge to practice settings.

In 2012, Drs. Benzein and Saveman along with their co-author Dr. Margaretha Hagberg published a co-edited book, "*Meeting With Families in Health and Community Care*", which describes the Family Health Conversations, their unique advanced practice approach to Family Systems Nursing. Dr. Benzein continues to mentor numerous team of family nursing researchers throughout the Nordic countries in the implementation of Family Health Conversations and continues to conduct lead research projects and educational innovations to advance knowledge about practice with families.

In 2002, Dr. Benzein and Dr. Saveman first brought together family nursing scholars from the five Nordic countries by organizing the First Nordic Conference on Family-Focused Nursing at Kalmar. In 2006, they hosted the Second Nordic Conference in Kalmar, followed by Third Nordic Conference in 2010. This tradition has continued with the Fourth Nordic Conference in 2014 in Denmark at which Dr. Benzein was invited to offer a keynote address titled, "How to support Family Systems Nursing in palliative care in Sweden".

New Directions: Director of the Center for Collaborative Palliative Care

In her new appointment as Director of the Center for Collaborative Palliative Care, Dr. Benzein brings her vision for systemic, family-focused palliative care to a larger level of influence through advancing knowledge about knowledge translation of practice with families in health care delivery. She is leading the development of university courses in family-focused palliative care at the bachelor and doctoral levels and the education of palliative care health professionals who are working in communities. She leads a program of research called, "To Live a Worthy Life: Possibilities and Challenges in Palliative Care" which is collecting interview data from patients, family members, families, and staff about what it means to live a "Worthy Life". This baseline information is being used to implement and evaluate relational, family-level interventions influenced by Family Health Conversations with the goal of supporting a "Worthy Life" in the context of palliative care.

Dr. Benzein's cumulative career achievements have changed the face of family nursing practice in Europe and beyond through her bold strategic and collaborative leadership, her tireless commitment to transform practice with families, and her unwavering vision for a systemic approach when defining and describing caring sciences.