

**Nomination of Dr. Catherine M Laing**  
**Rising Star in Family Nursing Award - International Family Nursing Association**

It is a delight and privilege to nominate my colleague **Dr. Catherine Laing**, an Assistant Professor at the University of Calgary, Faculty of Nursing, for an IFNA Rising Star award. By way of this letter, I offer a compelling argument why Catherine is most deserving of this award.

**Clinical Background**

Catherine graduated from the University of Calgary (U of C) in 1998 with a Bachelor of Nursing. She was offered a position in pediatric oncology at Alberta Children's Hospital (ACH) where she remained for 12 years, holding every position from Staff Nurse, Education Nurse, Research Nurse, Assistant Patient Care Manager, and eventually, Patient Care Manager. In all of her roles, Catherine worked with children and families intimately, even when in leadership and managerial positions. She claims that pediatric oncology chose her rather than her choosing it. In my own research and many interviews with family members who have been through treatment at ACH, they consistently ask if I know Catherine and then I am excitedly told about her as an exceptional nurse who effortlessly attended to the whole family and often "felt like part of the family."

**Student Academic Achievements**

Catherine returned to academia in 2004 to pursue her Master in Nursing in Family Systems Nursing. After returning to her role as Assistant Patient Care Manager, she was instrumental in funding 10 nurses to attend a one week externship offered in Family Systems Nursing by Drs. Janice Bell and Lorraine Wright. She also participated in a follow-up study to evaluate the impacts of this learning on the nurses' confidence and competence in working with families.

In 2010, Catherine left her Patient Care Manager position to return to the U of C to pursue doctoral study. Upon entry, she was granted the **largest external scholarship at the U of C**, and larger than any scholarship given internally. She was awarded a 4-year scholarship of \$37,500.00/year. Her award was granted through the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation and Research Institute. The scholarship was based on Dr. Laing's academic record, her research potential, and her long-term service to nursing practice. Her PhD study was focused on the meaning of children's cancer camps for children and families. Her sensitive treatment of the topic, including interviews with families who were still involved with camp even though their children had died, was quite profound, culminating with a **national award for her thesis**.

**Academic Accomplishments**

Upon completion of her PhD in 2013, Catherine was offered a tenure-track position as an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Nursing at the U of C. In just over 3 years of being in this position, her accomplishments in teaching and research are remarkable, so much that she has just received news that she was awarded the **College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) 2017 Excellence in Research Award**. I have confirmed with CARNA that she is the earliest-in-career recipient of this very prestigious award. While maintaining a full teaching load and receiving outstanding student evaluations, Catherine is purposefully and diligently building a program of research looking at the effects of childhood cancer on children and families. I offer a few highlights of her accomplishments relevant to family nursing.

**Significance to the practice of family nursing through research.** Dr. Laing's program of research is directly related to the ways in which we can understand the psychosocial impact of childhood cancer on children, families, and larger systems of health care and communities. All of her studies have direct implications for family nursing practice in the ways in which nurses can attend to the emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual needs of children and families. One example is her digital storytelling project. Her research shows the

massive healing effects on children and young people when they create a digital story which helps them shift stories of pain and suffering into stories of emotional strength and resilience. Her research also showed that when families and nurses view these stories, they are profoundly affected and changed by them. Another example is her study on children's cancer camp. The conduct of this study alone had impact on families, through the healing potential of interviews, and the findings have immense implications for family nursing in offering the ways that nurses can prepare children and families for camp, and work with them at camp. A third example is her ground-breaking work on the Social Return on Investment (SROI). This method of evaluating family health care is new and, although it has been used in business for years as Return on Investment (ROI) studies, it has not been used in health economics. She has completed three studies now using SROI methodology: evaluating children's cancer camps, evaluating digital story impact, and examining the impact on nurses of viewing digital stories. All of these remarkable findings are highly significant to the practice of family nursing.

**Significance to the practice of family nursing through teaching and mentorship.** Dr. Laing is a consummate teacher and mentor for undergraduate and graduate students, and also for staff nurses and other allied health professionals. Because she has a history and reputation at the ACH and is known provincially and nationally for her work in pediatric oncology, there are many nurses, social workers, oncologists, and psychologists of whom Catherine has involved in her research. They, in fact, seek her out to work with and learn from her. For example, a group at ACH regularly approach Catherine with ideas for research and count on her to develop proposals around the ideas, of which she successfully gets funded. She, in turn, involves them in her research as co-investigators. Many of them have no research experience and teaching and mentoring is at the core of this exchange. For every study she conducts, she hires research assistants at undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels who are involved in all aspects of the research, from literature reviews, to data collection (interviews), data analysis, preparation of manuscripts, authorship, and travel to and attendance at conferences for dissemination of research findings. This is teaching and mentorship at its highest level and the opportunities afforded to students are immeasurable. Always her focus on family and the development of strong family nursing practices are central.

**Rising star qualities.** Dr. Laing has received prestigious internal research funding and competitive provincial funding. Of interest, she has received funding for every grant she has written and she is currently applying for national and international funding. Catherine was active in research prior to her doctoral studies and had 2 refereed publications from a study on the impact of childhood cancer on grandparents. Within a year of completing her PhD, she published 6 papers in refereed journals from her doctoral thesis; her CV reflects her subsequent scholarship. She has presented findings from all her studies locally, nationally, and internationally at refereed conferences, including one in Italy on digital storytelling that led to publication in a refereed journal. Her knowledge of hermeneutics as a research method led to being invited to co-author a book entitled *Conducting Hermeneutic Research: From Philosophy to Practice*. Catherine's innovative work on SROI has garnered many invitations to speak on it in healthcare settings and the private sector, such as foundation boards. Most recently, she has been invited to Australia to work with a children's hospital in Brisbane in teaching them (nurses in particular) digital storytelling and SROI research methodology. Not only wanting to learn from her, they are looking for international collaboration in research and looking for Dr. Laing to lead them. The findings from Catherine's studies are far reaching and garner particular media attention. As a result of the media attention, her research has reached social networks where practitioners and families alike are being affected.

### **Conclusion**

Although Dr. Laing is relatively new to academia, she is one of the most prolific researchers in the Faculty of Nursing at the U of C. She is an outstanding teacher and promoter of family nursing. She is a Rising Star in its brightest light.