Leah FitzGerald
Fletcher Jones Endowed Chair for Nursing Partnerships in the Community

Leah FitzGerald has worked in nearly every facet of care as an advanced practice nurse with clinical, teaching and research experience. Nothing has energized her more or better prepared her for her new role as Fletcher Jones Endowed Chair for Nursing Partnerships in the Community than her ongoing efforts to promote health in low-income neighborhoods.

FitzGerald’s field work recently took her to an underserved clinic in Venice to learn about patients’ oral health needs - knowledge she brought back to her nursing students. Poor oral hygiene, the students learned, is a risk factor for adverse pregnancy outcomes and may worsen diabetes in others, she says. The work, in partnership with UCLA School of Dentistry, is just one way FitzGerald has connected with students and professionals over more than three decades in health care.

“This position allows me the opportunity to bridge the gap and align higher education with real world needs,” she says. “A lot of nurses are in the community, at schools or health clinics, and can provide a vital and needed role to screen, risk stratify and identify appropriate resources.”

While FitzGerald’s research has focused on how stress affects overall health, she sees the potential for a bigger impact in her new position. “Community engagement is an important part of scholarship and an imperative approach to clinical care,” she says. “It requires engaged community partners who will give students opportunities to put theory into practice and help promote positive social change.”

This profile comes from the 2015 Mount Magazine feature on new University directors: “Bringing their ‘A’ Game.”