



It was fourteen years ago that Pam Byrd, RN, DON felt a real calling to be a nurse. Today, Pam works at Carter Healthcare, where she has been for the last ten years.

by Vickie Jenkins, Staff Writer

At Carter Healthcare, you will find caring nurses with a desire to care for others. One extraordinary nurse is Pam Byrd, RN/DON. Pam has been a nurse for fourteen years and says that being a nurse was a real calling for her. "I wanted to do something with my life that would be interesting, challenging and make a difference in someone's life. I also wanted the opportunity

for growth that nursing provides through the different nursing avenues that can be pursued," Pam explained.

"I grew up in Edmond, OK when it was a much smaller town. When I was little, I had a dream of being everything from a teacher, actress to a professional dancer.

See BYRD Page 2

## ONA Statement on COVID-19 Vaccination



Nurses have worked selflessly to care for others during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Now they have the opportunity to protect themselves and others by getting immunized against this new virus. Nurses and other healthcare workers have been selected to be among the first to be vaccinated because of their contact with patients and their potential for infection.

To be effective, the COVID-19 vaccine must be received by a large percentage of the adult population, and nurses who serve as frontline caregivers and make informed choices to be vaccinated serve as role models and trusted patient educators. Indeed, nurses' decisions to be vaccinated against COVID-19 can help to shorten the duration of the pandemic while protecting the public from community spread. Ultimately, widespread effective vaccination will reduce the burden of this disease on acute and critical care units. If a vaccine allows more nurses to stay healthy, then there will be more support for patient care and clinical colleagues.

As of December, 21, 2020, the Oklahoma Nurses Association joins in with the American Nurses Association (ANA) and other nursing organizations such as the American Association of Critical-Care Nurse (AACN) to strongly recommend that nurses be vaccinated against COVID-19.

This decision is ultimately up to each individual. We encourage nurses to use trusted knowledge, ethical frameworks, and current science-based resources as the foundation for their decision-making. ONA and ANA believe

See ONA Page 3



## BYRD

Continued from Page 1

It took some growing up for me to realize that I was being called to be a nurse. I attended Rose State College for my nursing," Pam said. "Even though my mom was a nurse, I never imagined being a nurse myself, following in her footsteps. That was the farthest thing from my mind. Yet, here I am," she said with a smile. "Now, I have a daughter who is an RT and another daughter in college for nursing."

"While I was in nursing school, I had various professors that were excellent mentors and I am still in contact with today. I think they played a big part in allowing me to realize some of the qualities that make a good nurse, such as compassion, empathy, patience and critical thinking skills," Pam said. "I also think that anyone that is interested in pursuing a nursing career should enjoy people and have a desire to help others."

A typical day for Pam includes many duties such as meetings, reading and responding to an enormous amount of emails,

answering phone calls and helping resolve problems and issues. Pam also can be found analyzing different reports to make sure Carter Healthcare is providing the best care to their patients.

"My first job in nursing was on a pediatric surgical and cardiac unit at Children's Hospital. It was a challenging position. Not only did I have to develop a relationship with the patients but also with their families," she added.

"Being a nurse is a very rewarding job, knowing that I am making a difference in a patient's life. As a nurse manager, it includes knowing that I have provided great support and education to my team members. On the other hand, being a nurse has some challenges too; making sure team members are adequately trained and have the knowledge they need to give good patient care in the home health setting. Rules and regulations change frequently and these changes need to be implemented into practice as soon as possible."

Pam considers herself somewhat of a leader and a follower. "I believe that there are times that I

need to follow and a time to lead, depending on the circumstances." Have you received any awards or recognitions in the past? Pam replied, "Yes, I received Manager of the Month for Carter Healthcare in February 2019. I also graduated top of my class in nursing school."

When asking Pam to describe herself, she replied. "I have been a nurse manager in the home health setting for ten years. I enjoy home health and can't image doing any other type of nursing. It is rewarding for me to go into a patient's home and educate them on their disease process. I also enjoy working with various team members and empowering them to be the best home health nurses they can be. Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my family. We like to do fun things like family game night, take day trips to local various sights and of course, the girls in the family love to go shopping together."

Asking Pam how the Coronavirus has changed her life, she replied, "The Coronavirus has definitely impacted my life, like many others, by limiting time spent with family and friends. We

tend to spend more time at home and not doing the things we enjoy doing like traveling, eating out, going to movies, etc. As a nurse I focus on making sure my team members are taking the precautions they need to provide patient care. Making sure they have the appropriate PPE and taking all necessary precautions is my top priority."

I asked Pam would sum up her life in three words. "God, Family and Fun," she answered.

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## ONA

Continued from Page 1

that there should be no retaliation against nurses who choose not to take a COVID-19 vaccine. Nurses, as trusted health care professionals, have a critical role to play in administering COVID Vaccines to Oklahomans. COVID-19 vaccines can be safely administered by nurses and nursing students under the supervision of faculty or other appropriate licensed practitioners.

Our knowledge about COVID-19 and related vaccines is continuously evolving. (See attached COVID-19 Vaccine Facts.) ONA and ANA will share information from reliable sources as we advance our understanding on this topic. Nurses, the most trusted profession, must scrutinize all sources of information, decline to accept misinformation and disseminate only accurate information from credible scientific sources.

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# OU-TU School of Community Medicine Names Dennis for Equity and Community Engagement Role

Syeachia Dennis, M.D., MPH, FAAFP, was recently named assistant dean for Equity and Community Engagement for the OU-TU School of Community Medicine. Dennis, an assistant professor of Family and Community Medicine, previously served as director of Community Medicine Curriculum for the school.

In this new role, Dennis will work with faculty members, residents, students and staff to advance efforts that address social and structural determinants of health and their impact on the community's patient population. She will focus on the development of anti-bias curriculum within the School of Community Medicine and core curriculum for medical students, as well as building strong collaborations with organizations committed to

advancing health equity.

James M. Herman, M.D., MSPH, dean of the OU-TU School of Community Medicine, said, "Dr. Dennis brings significant depth of experience and extensive background to her work with the School of Community Medicine. This new role presents exciting opportunities to move us forward in our goal to eliminate structural racism. Together, our efforts toward equity and inclusion will resonate within graduate medical education. The strategic impact will serve to improve well-being across the OU-TU campus, the Tulsa community and across the state."

Dennis earned her medical degree from Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine, Maywood, Ill., and completed a family medicine residency at West Suburban

Medical Center, Oak Park, Ill. She earned a master's degree in Public Health from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, Md.

Her current projects include the Focus-Forward LARC (long-acting reversible contraceptives) project through the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, as well as collaboration with the Tulsa Birth Equity Initiative toward development of a residency community health longitudinal rotation and a preconception health project.

Dennis serves on the board of directors for the Oklahoma Academy of Family Physicians and participates in the American Academy of Family Physicians Commission on Health of the Public and Science. She has presented nationally and internationally on historical



Syeachia Dennis, M.D., MPH, FAAFP.

See HEART Page 5



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## HEART

Continued from Page 4

trauma, and has taught graduate medical education courses focused on social determinants of health. She is published on the topic of racism as a social determinant of health for students in healthcare professions.

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the OU College of Medicine at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. For more information, visit [ou.edu/tulsa/community\\_medicine](http://ou.edu/tulsa/community_medicine).

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## Index to Classifieds

- 1 0 0 Ambulatory
- 1 0 8 Administrative
- 1 1 3 Case Management
- 1 1 5 Chemical Dependency
- 1 1 8 Clinical Instructors
- 1 1 9 Collection
- 1 2 1 Critical Care
- 1 2 3 Certified Medical Assistant
- 1 2 4 Certified Nurses Aide
- 1 2 7 CRNA
- 1 2 9 Dental
- 1 3 0 Dialysis
- 1 3 1 Dietary
- 1 3 7 Education
- 1 4 0 General Nursing
- 1 4 3 Geriatrics and Long Term Care
- 1 4 6 HMO
- 1 4 9 Home Health
- 1 5 2 Hospice
- 1 5 4 Housekeeping
- 1 5 5 Infection Control
- 1 5 6 Instructor
- 1 5 8 IV Therapy
- 1 6 1 Licensed Practical Nurse
- 1 6 4 Managerial
- 1 6 5 Massage Therapy
- 1 6 7 Medical/Surgical
- 1 7 0 Nurse Practitioner
- 1 7 3 OB/Gyn
- 1 7 6 Occupational Health
- 1 7 9 Office
- 1 8 2 Oncology
- 1 8 5 O.R./PACU
- 1 8 8 Orthopedic
- 1 9 0 Pediatric
- 1 9 1 Pharmacist
- 1 9 2 Physicians Assistant
- 1 9 7 Public Health
- 2 0 0 Rehabilitation
- 2 0 4 Registered Nurse
- 2 0 7 Research
- 2 1 0 Sales Representative
- 2 1 3 Service
- 2 1 7 School Nurse
- 2 2 0 Spec Producers
- 2 2 3 Support Staff
- 2 2 5 Traveling Nurse
- 2 2 6 Miscellaneous

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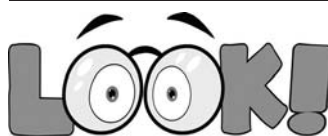
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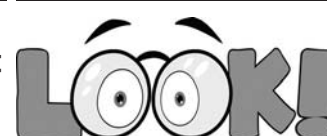
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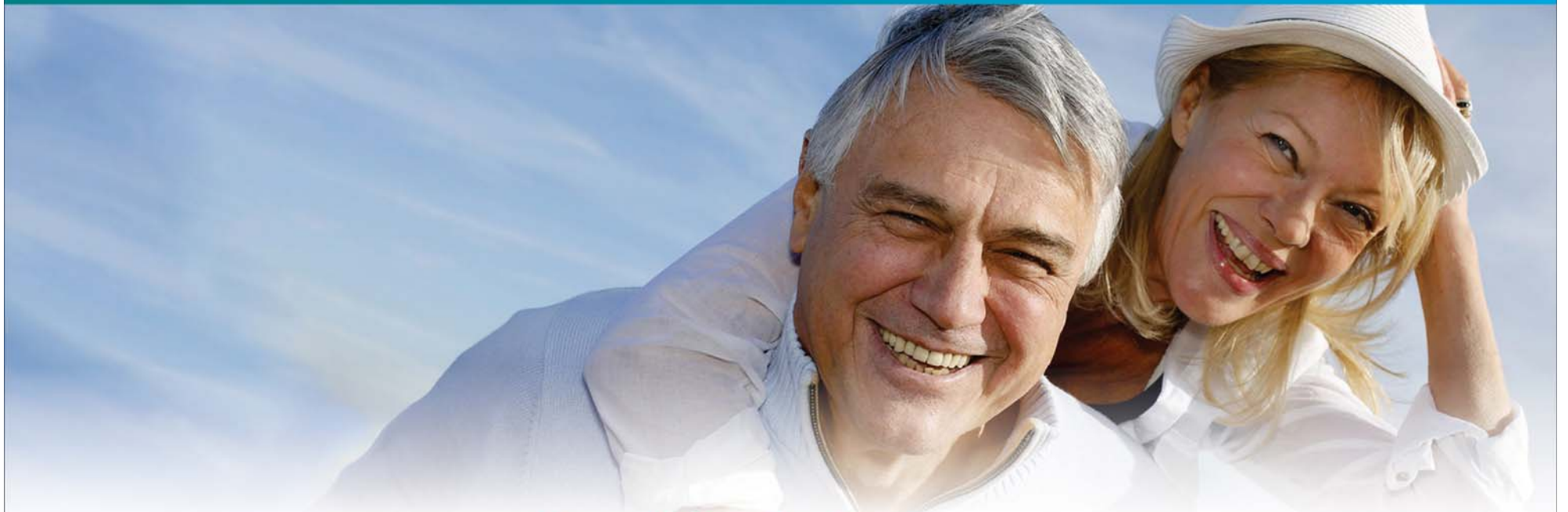


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(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2020 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

# Saint Francis Health System provides learning opportunities for nurses at every level

*State's largest healthcare provider encourages its nurses to grow professionally*

Saint Francis Health System, Oklahoma's largest healthcare provider, has more than 10,000 employees at more than 100 locations throughout eastern Oklahoma. Nurses in the Saint Francis Health System network—which includes Warren Clinic, the state's largest physician group—can pursue careers in large communities (Tulsa, Broken Arrow, McAlester, Muskogee) and small (Vinita, Glenpool, Coweta, Owasso, Sand Springs).

Wherever they choose to work, nurses can enjoy the benefits of a locally owned, locally led and locally focused not-for-profit health system dedicated to high-quality, patient-centered care. To this end, Saint Francis Health System offers a wide range of programs and services to help its nurses grow professionally, which ultimately serves to help maintain the health system's high standards of clinical excellence.

## The Pursuit of Excellence

Nurses can take advantage of Saint Francis Health System opportunities even while they're still pursuing a degree.

The health system offers a registered nurse scholarship that funds up to \$8,000 in tuition at an accredited school of nursing. There is also the Saint Francis Extern Program, a nine-week shadow program designed for students in their final year of an accredited RN program. Both the RN scholarship and the extern program are great ways for aspiring nurses to get their foot inside the door.

## Making the Transition from School to Vocation

Once accepted into the Saint Francis Health System nursing program, new nurses embark on a yearlong nurse residency program (NRP), designed to help in the transition from the classroom to

clinical bedside experiences and real-world professional nursing practice. The NRP includes professional nursing orientation, unit-specific orientation with a preceptor, specialty classes and a variety of nurse residency seminars.

The NRP is tailored to the education needs of newly licensed nurses, and is based upon Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) competencies. During orientation, new nurses become familiar with the health system's policies, procedures and equipment, and participate in specialty classes specific to the patient population they will be caring for.

## Help Along the Way

Saint Francis Health System provides reimbursement for the RN NCLEX (National Council Licensure Exam). Each year, there are three KAPLAN (RN NCLEX) review courses held at the Saint Francis Education Center: in January (for December graduates), May (May grads) and August (July grads). These courses are free for those who have accepted a position; full registration fee is required for all others. For new hires who cannot attend the courses, they can receive reimbursement of up to \$350 for specific courses, such as HESI, ATI and KAPLAN.

Other educational benefits for RNs include specialty classes offering patient-focused content (e.g., pediatric, ICU and cardiac classes); nurse residency seminars that focus on communication and teamwork, critical thinking, patient/family-centered care, case management, discharge planning and more; baccalaureate- and graduate-level continuing education classes; and national certification programs that include IABP, CRRT, LVAD and ECMO.

Saint Francis Health System

## Education Opportunities in Action

*Kaytie Hull, RN, BSN, is currently a charge nurse at Saint Francis Hospital's patient tower and trauma center. She started working for Saint Francis Health System in 2011 as a nurse technician and has since worked her way up to Clinical Ladder III. Along the way, she has made the most of the nursing opportunities, flexible scheduling and incentives offered by the health system, including the nursing school scholarship, the extern program and tuition reimbursement for her BSN. Last year she began working on her MSN, which she is scheduled to complete in 2020. "Saint Francis provides a great work/life balance and many opportunities for employees to grow and achieve their goals," she says. "I wouldn't work anywhere else."*

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# OU Health Sciences Center Students Address Inequalities Through Bridges to Access Conference

Health profession students at the OU Health Sciences Center are holding their annual Bridges to Access Conference on Feb. 13 via Zoom. This year's event will focus on the numerous ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected health beyond the disease itself, particularly how it has exposed societal inequalities that overwhelmingly impact minority populations.

The conference is organized by the OU Community Health Alliance, a medical student organization that seeks to uplift, educate and empower patients through volunteer activities and understanding the numerous social determinants of health. The Bridges to Access Conference shares that goal by bringing together students from all seven colleges at the OU

Health Sciences Center to hear speakers from around the nation and to discuss issues affecting health.

"Issues like food deserts, income and employment inequality, as well as access to health insurance, have only worsened since the pandemic began," said OU College of Medicine student Jan Bian, chair of this year's conference. "Redlining and a racist criminal justice system have ensured that marginalized communities, especially Black and Indigenous people of color, bear the brunt of the consequences of the global pandemic. These issues are not new, but they have been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic.

"As future healthcare providers, it is our responsibility to care for



our patients' health," she added. "In order to do so effectively, we must have a basic understanding of the systemic racial and socioeconomic issues that affect their lives. Furthermore, we should be actively seeking out and advocating for solutions to these problems."

Keynote speakers for this year's conference and their topics are:

- Arline T. Geronimus, Sc.D., Professor of Public Health, University of Michigan, "Weathering," the effect of racialized stressors on the health of marginalized communities

- Oklahoma City Council Ward 7 Councilwoman Nikki Nice, "Solutions for Health Equity"

Other speakers include:

- Keeley White, MPH, Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, "Food Insecurity in Oklahoma"

- Michael Osterholm, Ph.D., MPH, Centers for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, "Pandemic Preparedness"

- Halley Reeves, OU Health, "Redlining and Health Outcomes"

- Damion Shade, Oklahoma Policy Institute, "Criminal Justice Reform in Oklahoma"

- Jenna Morey, "ReMerge Oklahoma," an alternative to incarceration for women

- Priya Samant, M.D., MPH, "The Response of Free Clinics to COVID-19"

- Jabraan Pasha, M.D., OU Health, "Unlocking Implicit Bias"

- Caylee Dodson and Julie Garner, RestoreOKC, "Fixing the Cycle of Poor Education, Lack of Sustainable Jobs, and Unaffordable Housing in Oklahoma City"

The Bridges to Access Conference is one of numerous ways that OU Health Sciences Center students are working to improve the health and quality of life of the patients they will serve in their careers.

"There is a national imperative and sense of urgency that we have to do better in addressing the healthcare inequities that continue to persist," said Robert Salinas, M.D., Assistant Dean for Diversity in the OU College of Medicine. "A conference like this helps prepare the next generation of physician leaders who, in working across other healthcare disciplines, will help create the change that is needed."

For more information about the Bridges to Access Conference and to register, visit [www.bridgestoaccess.org](http://www.bridgestoaccess.org).

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Paige Jenkins, LPN

*I definitely prefer dogs! They are much more playful!!*



Angela Warnke, RN

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Carter  
Healthcare

*I prefer cats! I have three cats and one kitten but I don't want to be referred to as The Cat Lady. Cats are self sufficient. All they want is lots of love!*



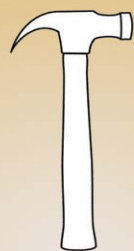
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# SITUATION UPDATE: COVID-19

Cases	413,542
*Total Cumulative Negative Specimens to Date (02/12/21)	2,957,605
*Total Cumulative Number of Specimens to Date (02/12/21)	3,343,102
Acute Care OSDH Licensed Facility Hospitalizations (02/12/21)	755
Other Types of Facilities Hospitalizations (02/12/21)	78
Total Cumulative Hospitalizations	23,248
Total Cumulative Deaths	4,024

- As of this advisory, there are 413,542 cases of COVID-19 in Oklahoma.
- 1,370 is today's 7-day rolling average for the number of new cases reported.
- Oklahoma has reached a dark milestone in its battle against COVID-19 with more than 4,000 deaths reported. Statement from Commissioner Frye: "Every Oklahoma life is precious. While our cases and hospitalizations come down, we continue to mourn with

families that suffer the loss of their loved ones. Please remember to stay vigilant as we continue to battle COVID-19 in our state."

- There are 30 additional deaths identified to report.

There are 4,024 total deaths in the state.

- Additional hospitalization data can be found in the Hospital Tiers report, published evenings Monday through Friday.
- Register online to receive a notification when you're eligible to schedule a COVID-19 vaccine appointment at [vaccinate.oklahoma.gov](https://vaccinate.oklahoma.gov).
- For more information, visit <https://oklahoma.gov/covid19.html>.

**\*The total includes laboratory information provided to OSDH at the time of the report. As a result, counts are subject to change. Total counts may not reflect unique individuals.**

**\*\*\*The purpose of publishing aggregated statistical COVID-19 data through the OSDH Dashboard, the Executive Order Report, and the Weekly Epidemiology and Surveillance Report is to support the needs of the general public in receiving important and necessary information regarding the state of the health and safety of the citizens of Oklahoma. These resources may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be used in any way that would determine the identity of any reported cases.**

Data Source: Acute Disease Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. \*As of 2021-02-14 at 7:00 a.m.

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# Young Oklahoman Man Survives Four Open Heart Surgeries in Six Weeks

An Oklahoma college student defies death multiple times as he survives four major heart surgeries in just six weeks' time. All the lifesaving procedures took place at INTEGRIS Health, the only health system in the region equipped to offer the wide variety of therapies needed to save this young man's life.

Twenty-four-year-old Mason Hightower from Duncan, Okla. was born with a

congenital heart defect. He had his first open heart surgery at the age of ten. His condition appeared to be under control until Sept. 2020 when the now University of Oklahoma graduate student began having chest pain, shortness of breath and running a fever.

"I was a normal, healthy, active guy just beginning my life. I had no way of knowing how sick I would become," Mason remembers.

Hightower went to the emergency room in Duncan but was quickly transferred to INTEGRIS Baptist Medical Center in Oklahoma City for a higher level of care.

The INTEGRIS Cardiovascular Physician team discovered Mason had a serious life-threatening infection called 'endocarditis'. The infection was rapidly deteriorating the valves inside his heart. In fact, a small portion of infected tissue had broken off and traveled to his brain causing a series of strokes.

Hightower required emergent surgery to repair the valves. The aortic valve needed a complete replacement. It was a difficult procedure with significant risk. David Vanhooser, M.D., a thoracic and cardiovascular surgeon, was the lead surgeon.

"When I opened Mason's heart, we found that the damage was much worse than expected. The infection had destroyed not only

his two main heart valves but also the supporting fibrous structure inside the heart that held the valves in place. The infection had literally eaten away the inside of his heart," Vanhooser declared.

Mason nearly died in surgery. Thankfully, because Hightower was at INTEGRIS Baptist Medical Center, his life was saved by a technology called ECMO, or extra corporeal membrane oxygenation.

Aly El Banayosy, M.D., the medical director of the Advanced Critical Care and ECMO Program at INTEGRIS Health confirms, "ECMO therapy came at the perfect time for Mason. He is a true miracle and I was honored to work alongside colleagues and staff to provide Mason with the very best care possible and a second chance at life. He really did come to the right place at the right time."

While on ECMO, Hightower underwent a second surgery which confirmed his heart was in deed destroyed and there was no hope for its recovery. Vanhooser gave Mason's parents the dismal prognosis that he might not make it through the night.

"It was terrifying, the worst thing I have ever gone through," says Jeanine Hightower, Mason's mother. "I remember pleading with the doctors and nurses to try everything in their power to save my son. I told them he was a fighter, and if they didn't give up on him - he wouldn't give up on them."

ECMO support was able to buy Mason enough time for the team to evaluate whether he could be transitioned to heart transplant, or if he could be bridged to one of the many mechanical support device options available at INTEGRIS Advanced Cardiac Care.

Due to Hightower's complete heart failure and the acuity of his illness, the best option available



was to have his heart replaced by a Total Artificial Heart, a therapy that is only offered by a handful of centers in the country. On Oct. 7, Mason was implanted with a TAH by Vanhooser and James Long, M.D., the medical director of the Nazih Zuhdi Transplant Institute and Advanced Cardiac Care.

"Although the total artificial heart could keep Mason alive for an indefinite period of time," states Vanhooser. "We knew this was not the final solution for a 24-year-old graduate student, with years yet to live."

With his artificial heart, Hightower was able to gain enough strength to be considered a suitable candidate for heart transplant. He was placed on the transplant list Oct. 26. Three weeks later, he would receive the perfect donor heart.

This young man went through a lot in a very short amount of time," Vanhooser declares. "There were definite ups and downs along the way, but Mason rallied and recovered each and every time. I have no doubt there was a higher power watching over Mason. It became very apparent

that it was not his time to go."

"We clung to our faith, family and friends. That's the only way we got through this," says Jeanine. "I know that God led us to INTEGRIS. This is the only place in town my son could get absolutely everything he needed to survive all under one roof. That is no accident."

Mason remained hospitalized until Dec. 23. He was discharged just in time to spend Christmas at home. He continues to thrive to this day. "Mason is doing great. He and his wonderfully supportive family have been an inspiration to all of us," says David Nelson, M.D., the chief of the Heart Transplant Program at INTEGRIS Health.

For Mason, the future is full of opportunity. "I will be forever grateful to the many doctors, nurses and staff who cared for me. I always felt love and encouragement from them. Now, I get to spend the rest of my life trying to figure out why I was spared. I know God has a plan for me and I can't wait to discover my purpose."



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*Mitch*



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