

Integris partnering to empower healthcare



Kerri Bayer, the chief nurse executive at INTEGRIS Health, says the system is helping people enter the medical profession. Photo provided.

by Bobby Anderson, RN - staff writer

The recent pandemic highlighted several things.

For many, it showed how precarious their job situation really is.

In the healthcare world, it exposed an already glaring need for people to care for others.

That's why INTEGRIS Health Chief Nurse Executive Kerri Bayer believes the health system's newest initiative tackles some of those problems head on.

"We are creating a pathway for anyone who is interested in working in healthcare to get their foot in the door," Bayer said of the system's new Health University. "If you are recently unemployed or work in any industry and just kind of want to know what the healthcare world is about, we're making it very easy for those community members to

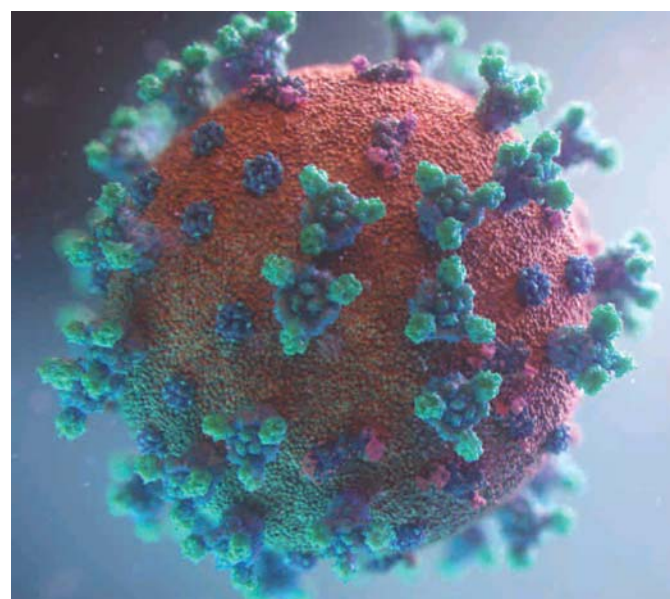
come in and be employed. The health system will pay for employees to become a certified nursing assistant and orient to the hospital setting."

INTEGRIS Health University, powered by INTEGRIS Health and Oklahoma Christian University, is the result of an innovative academic partnership designed to increase the available pipeline of nurses.

There has been a nursing shortage in the United States, including Oklahoma, for many years - long

See INTEGRIS Page 2

Should we fear Covid variants?



A Covid-19 variant that appears more contagious than the earliest strain of the virus is increasingly circulating in the U.S. But is the mutation something to fear?

Only if you're unvaccinated, say experts at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

"Viruses mutate to survive," said OMRF immunologist Eliza Chakravarty, M.D. "Becoming more transmissible is helpful from an evolutionary perspective. But with vaccines, we can mount a defense we didn't have last year."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has classified the delta variant, first identified in India, as a "variant of concern." The CDC gave the mutation that now accounts for more than 20% of new infections in the U.S. the designation based on growing evidence that the variant spreads more easily and causes more severe cases of Covid-19 when compared to other variants.

The variant's prevalence has more than doubled in recent weeks. What started as a seemingly small percentage of cases doesn't mean small

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INTEGRIS

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before the existence of COVID-19.

One thing the pandemic painfully brought to light, is that nurses are the backbone of the medical profession and we desperately need more of them.

INTEGRIS Health University creates flexibility for candidates by allowing them to work in a hospital setting while receiving their necessary credits. It uses a transformational nursing education model that is moving away from traditional education to a more blended approach with hands-on learning and online instruction.

"It's hard for people who have to still maintain a job and so they've created this curriculum that has been approved by the Board of Nursing to be able to do this online and we're augmenting that with a clinical experience within the hospital," Bayer said. "We're helping you maintain your employment, get a paycheck and ultimately once you go through the curriculum and have that clinical experience you can be employed at INTEGRIS Health and have a nursing job."

The Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) to Registered Nurse (RN) program is open to CNAs and non-CNAs alike, meaning you do not have to be a CNA to participate. In fact, if a candidate is not already a CNA, INTEGRIS Health will pay for that candidate to become one through partnerships with several different vocational schools.

"INTEGRIS Health is eager to partner with academic institutions across the state to begin strategically transforming the future of nursing for Oklahoma," Bayer said. "It is through intentional effort that we will begin establishing pathways into the most noble and trusted profession of nursing in a way that aligns with student needs of today."

Bayer saw the headlines during the pandemic of people being laid off.

"I feel like during the pandemic it highlighted the amazing opportunity and the amazing work our healthcare providers (were doing). They're in this position to really make a huge difference and I hope it's been something that has been recognized and maybe appealing to some."

"The pandemic has created a situation where now we can help

support you and get your feet under you, get you into healthcare, get you employed and provide you with an incredible profession."

Oklahoma is ranked No. 46 per capita in terms of the nursing shortage.

"We are not only committed to growing the nursing workforce, but to ensuring life-long success for our nurses," she said.

Bayer earned her Master of Science degree in Nursing from the University of Oklahoma and a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from the University of Central Oklahoma.

Bayer has more than 20 years of INTEGRIS Health nursing experience. Her background includes front-line nursing in intensive care, regulatory compliance, quality, safety, nursing education and many clinical leadership roles within INTEGRIS Health. Bayer is a member of the American Association of Critical Care Nurses.

She stresses the program is intended

for both recent high school graduates and adults. Each student will perform delegated direct patient care activities to an assigned group of patients, under the supervision of a Registered Nurse.

"And if for some reason nursing is not it we will have an avenue to connect you with other specialties within healthcare," Bayer said. "I don't think people realize within a hospital we have so many opportunities both within healthcare but also on the administration side, finance, informatics and IT - there's so much within the world of healthcare."

"If (nursing) isn't your thing we can get you plugged in and get you started there."



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FEAR

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danger for a virus that has claimed more than 600,000 lives in the U.S., said OMRF physician-scientist Hal Scofield, M.D.

"The delta variant appears prime to become the dominant coronavirus strain in the U.S., as it is now in the United Kingdom and India," said Scofield, noting that the variant is striking teens and young adults with increasing speed. "For communities with low levels of vaccination in Oklahoma, this could mean serious trouble come fall."

There is good news for the fully vaccinated, Scofield said. In a study published in May, researchers in the U.K. found that a two-dose regimen of the Pfizer vaccine was 88% effective against symptomatic Covid-19 from the delta variant. CDC officials anticipate similar results for Moderna's vaccine. And the effectiveness of Johnson & Johnson's one-dose shot appears only slightly lowered — 60%, vs. the 66% seen in clinical trials — against the variant.

Despite this, in the same U.K. study, scientists found that one dose



Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation physician-scientist Eliza Chakravarty, M.D.

of the Pfizer vaccine is just 33% effective against the virus.

"It's a reminder of how critical full vaccination is," said Chakravarty.

"If you are unvaccinated and waiting to see whether there will be a spike in cases before getting your shot, or if you've delayed in getting your second dose, the time to act is now."

Although infections of Covid-19 are rare in fully vaccinated people, Scofield said that testing should

remain top of mind to track the progression of the delta variant in the state.

"If you're vaccinated, we're on the cusp of returning to regular life," said Scofield. "But if you're sick with symptoms such as coughing, fever and difficulty breathing, you still need a Covid test."

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CAREERS IN NURSING

A NURSE FOR ALL SEASONS: ADON OFFERS FLEXIBILITY, KINDNESS

photo by James Coburn, staff writer

Candice Chambers feels compelled to help people in life. She is at the right place. A family like environment has kept her part of the nursing team at The Timbers Skilled Nursing & Therapy in Edmond since 2006.

"It's like a second family said Chambers, LPN, ADON, and wound care nurse. I'm a resident advocate for a vulnerable population that I have a lot of passion for," she said.

Chambers earned her LPN license in 2004 after graduating from Francis Tuttle in Oklahoma City. And, she has been the ADON since 2011. Chambers career brings a depth of empathy to the profession. She was a CNA and a CMA at another facility before becoming a nurse.

Every day is a learning experience, even though she has been a nurse for a long time. She said there are always opportunities for her to learn something new.

Her work allows her to know the residents on a more personal level

than if she was in another type of nursing, she said.

"For some of them it is their last stop. Some of them don't have a lot of family and we sort of become their family, their caretakers and their providers," she continued.

She is a flexible nurse for all seasons not only as a wound care nurse, but also by bridging gaps as the assistant director of nurses for whatever needs to be done at a given moment.

None of her family is part of the health care industry. Nursing is something she decided to do later in life at the spur of the moment after graduating high school, she said. Her career choice soon became a calling. She is gratified to work in a career that enables her to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

"Whether it's small little things everyday they ask of you — nurses get to help them by giving things they need. A lot of them rely on

our ability to take care of them." Chambers said. "It's rewarding when you have people feeling like you're their family helping them."

Some patients are there for therapy after recovering from a hospital stay. The nursing team helps make their transition of returning home easier. Family communication is a vital part of their jobs whether in rehab or long-term care.

"We make sure they're aware of things that are going on, so they have that level of comfort knowing what their loved ones are dealing with when changes come up," Chambers said.

Social gatherings and activities are less restrictive as COVID-19 dissipates in the state. The staff is there to provide a safe and comfortable environment for the patients to enjoy their freedoms.

"They exercise. I know they play Bingo. They just like sitting outside and looking out the window while

talking together," she explained.

Chambers enjoys spending her leisure time with her family, including her parents and the extracurricular activities that her children are involved in at school.

Her residents motivate her to accept each day as an opportunity. She is confident in the solid group of health care professionals dedicated to the best patient care they can provide.

They have even provided care of patients who had at one time worked as nurses there at The Timbers.

Chambers said she would feel confident in having one of her own family members at The Timbers. A variety of patient needs are met from strokes to post-operative care.

"Some members of our management have had their family members and loved ones here," she said. "And I would feel good

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CHAMBERS

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about having my elderly grandparents here."

The nursing staff will do something to brighten a patient's day when hours become difficult.

"We can get them a coke, a magazine they like — whatever. Just something small can make difference in making them happy in that moment," she said.

One of the biggest compliments she can receive are all of the scores of thankfulness given by former patients. And the nursing staff gets to reflect on the benefits of compassion and skills they have provided to the elders. Their personal rewards are tangible.

"I know that they still have a lot of appreciative thankfulness for my helping them in rehab or getting done what they needed to do here," she said. "Sometimes they will come by and say, 'Tell her I said hello. I love everything she has done for me.' Sometimes they communicate that way. You know that while they were here, there was something that you did that made a difference for them."



Candice Chambers, LPN, ADON, brings a confident, soothing voice to The Timbers Skilled Nursing & Therapy in Edmond.

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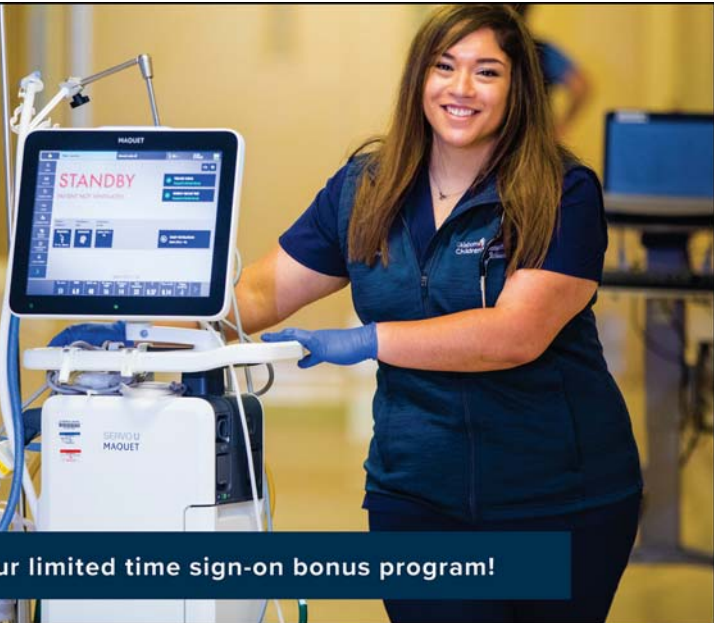
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Stavros Hall at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Ok.

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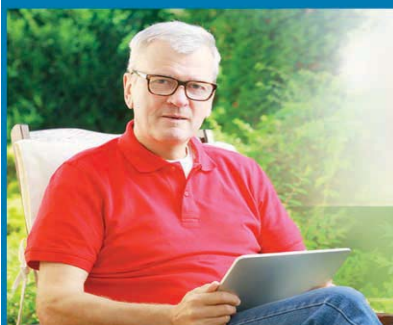
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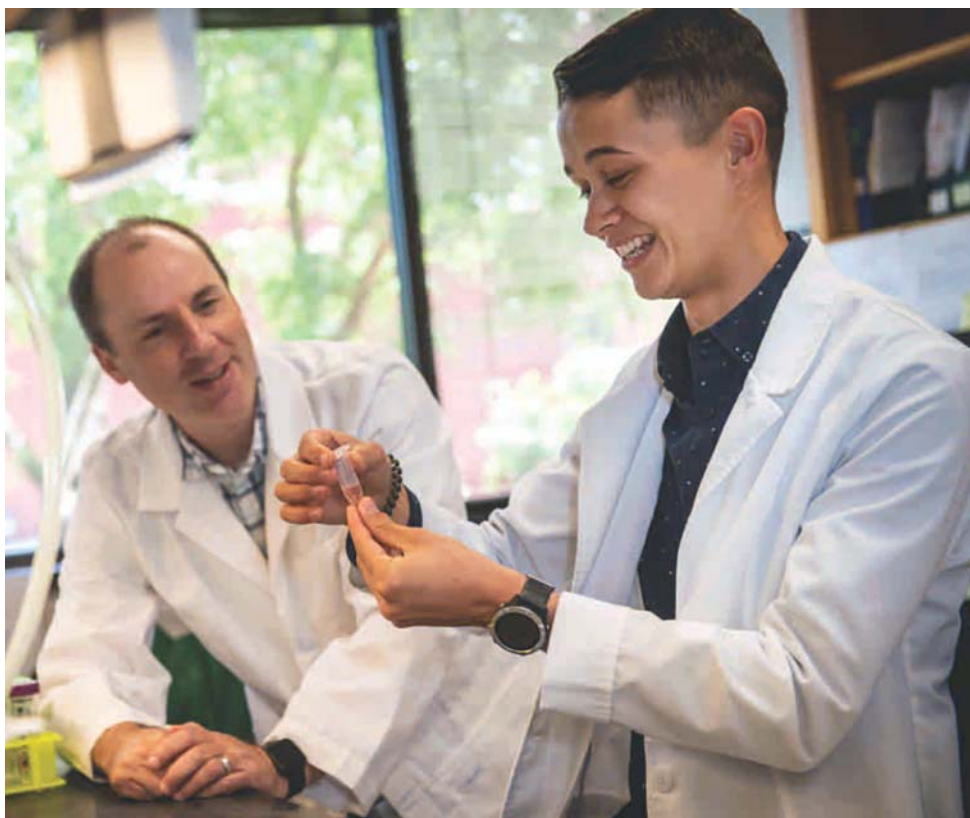
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Military students conclude summer of research at OMRF



U.S. Naval Academy Midshipman Second Class Stephen Scholl holds a sample as Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation scientist Chris Sansam, Ph.D., looks on.

Three students from United States service academies have completed biomedical research summer internships at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

OMRF welcomed two students from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, and one from the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, to its 11th class for the John H. Saxon Service Academy Summer Research Program.

John Saxon III, M.D., a Muskogee physician and OMRF board member since 2000, established the program to honor his father, a West Point graduate who taught for five years at the

U.S. Air Force Academy and was a career Air Force pilot before passing away in 1996.

The Saxon program provides service academy students with an opportunity to work side-by-side with OMRF senior scientists.

Chesapeake, Virginia, native Andrew Nixon is a midshipman second class in the 3rd company at the U.S. Naval Academy. Nixon worked in the lab with OMRF scientist Lorin Olson, Ph.D., on gene expression in the development of knee joints. "What we're looking at can potentially help us devise ways to promote healing or reduce damage in joints by knowing what to target in a clinical setting," said Nixon.



Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation 2021 John H. Saxon Service Academy Summer Research Program. From left, U.S. Naval Academy Midshipman Second Class Stephen Scholl, Air Force Academy squadron commander Erika Willis, and U.S. Naval Academy Midshipman Second Class Andrew Nixon.

Nixon, a chemistry major, said the Saxon program provided a unique experience to see how scientists conduct the research that may ultimately end up in a clinical setting. "This has shown me the backbone of medical science. OMRF is where the research happens that benefits us all," he said. "It's been a privilege to be a part of it."

Stephen Scholl, from Annapolis, is a midshipman second class in the 9th company at the Naval Academy. Scholl worked with OMRF scientist Chris Sansam, Ph.D., studying a specific gene called "TICRR," which plays a role in cancer.

"In just a short time, I've been exposed to many new ways of thinking and I've learned a lot from my incredible mentors," said Scholl, an operations research major. "I plan to go to medical school and eventually join the Navy medical corps. This experience in the research side of medicine has been eye-opening and invaluable."

Air Force Academy squadron commander Erika Willis of Colorado

Springs is pursuing a degree in biology. Willis studied under the guidance of Courtney Griffin, Ph.D., working to observe the expression of proteins in the lungs to better understand the lungs' susceptibility to inflammatory infections.

"Everything about this experience was great," said Willis. "It's not just that it's an incredible learning experience, but also that everyone here is so willing to help. I've dreamed of being a doctor since elementary school, and this one-of-a-kind experience has shown me the foundation of medicine and what I want to do with my life."

OMRF Vice President of Human Resources Courtney Greenwood said this exposure to real-world medical research is invaluable to the students and adds fresh perspectives to OMRF's labs.

"While the experience is short, it has long-lasting effects on the students and OMRF," said Greenwood. "We're grateful to Dr. Saxon for supporting this unique program."



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