



Anita Bhandari and Reena Daniel are grateful for their nursing careers at Epworth Villa.

Story and photo by James Coburn, Staff Writer

Anita Bhandari, RN, and Reena Daniel, LPN, say their lives have been enriched by their nursing careers at Epworth Villa, located in Oklahoma City.

"We always strive to give the best care possible," Daniel said.

Both women are charge nurses at Epworth on the skilled nursing unit, and both are furthering their education to advance their careers. They thrive on learning.

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Home for for Christmas



Casen Hazlewood of Ponca City has spent much of his young life in the hospital.

Casen Hazlewood of Ponca City is only two years old, yet he has spent much of his young life in the hospital. Casen was born on May 6, 2019 at just 26 weeks gestation. His mother Kari Hazlewood recalls the difficult pregnancy. "Casen and his identical twin brother, Hudson, had issues from the very beginning. They were diagnosed early on with what's called twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, where one of the babies gets more blood and nutrients than the other. In our case, Hudson was the dominant twin leaving Casen malnourished."

When the boys were born, each weighed barely over a pound. Hudson was seemingly healthy given his size, while Casen struggled to survive. "Casen is a fighter. He has been battling something since before he was even born," says Kari. "He may be tiny but he's as tough as they

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EPWORTH

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Daniel is working toward her Bachelor of Science degree in nursing at Oklahoma State University, while Bhandari is working toward becoming a nurse practitioner with a focus in gerontology.

Bhandari had already worked for one year as a CNA at Epworth Villa before becoming an RN. Helping seniors at Epworth is her purpose in life.

"That's why I'm furthering my education," she said.

Seven years ago, Bhandari began working at Epworth after earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from Wichita State University.

Daniel never thought she wanted to be a nurse even though all her family is in the medical field. However, her aspirations changed when she worked as a CNA at Mercy Hospital. She went to nursing school at Platt College where she earned her credentials to become an LPN. She joined the team at Epworth more than 10 years ago.

Today, Bhandari and Daniel arrive at work in the morning for their assignments. They make sure the certified medication aides and certified nurse aides are there. They know from their reports who among the residents needs some extra care.

The staff has a methodology of best practices to ensure that everybody is cared for according to each resident's acuity level.

"I know I can go to anybody," Bhandari said. "If I have any concerns — if I have anything

I want to bring up to my administrator, she is very open to any of our ideas and she goes for it. It just feels like a big family. I've been here for so long. I had my bridal shower, my baby shower here and everything. We're a community, we're just bonded together, and we work well."

This inviting sense of community transfers to all stages of residential care. Bhandari said it touches her heart to see people's lives change from being independent to being more dependent on others.

"That change is very hard mentally and physically once you get into that age," she said. "And for that change it just makes a big difference to have somebody there listening to you."

The first encounters a nurse has with a patient is always important, Bhandari said. Getting to know a resident's needs brings opportunities to learn how to motivate and encourage them during challenging times. Patients are assessed as individuals to tailor a personalized plan. Bhandari learns what sustains a person's wellbeing. For some it's being home with their pets. So, they will share photos and talk about what is dear to them.

In her own life Bhandari sets herself at ease by being with her 4-year-old daughter and family. Writing is relaxing for her, too. Her life is well balanced by being a nurse.

"I've just loved working here," Bhandari said. "I know there are changes in leadership, rules, and protocols. Change is always difficult, but I've always loved working here.

It's a big part of my life. I'm very grateful for Epworth Villa."

As with Bhandari, Daniel is mother as well. She is married with two children.

"So, pretty much right now, I'm pretty busy with working and taking care of the family and being in school," Daniel said.

She loves to read and these days most of her reading comes from textbooks for learning.

"I love being a nurse, I wouldn't want to do anything other than what I'm doing right now," she continued.

Daniel is grateful for being a nurse in a skilled nursing unit, so she doesn't visualize a nursing career in management. Her patients receiving skilled nursing care are generally there for a month, two weeks or possibly 100 days.

"I want to be on the floor where I can interact with patients and families. It's what I enjoy doing," she said. "I love when they get here, they are not able to do basic things and when they leave, they're able to function on their own. When

they leave, they always say thank you and they tell us how great we were. We have a lot of patients the come back because they love the care that we gave them. We love working here because it's a great place to work and a great place for the residents. And, we really strive for these patients to be well taken care of, so when they leave here, they leave here happy."

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HUDSON

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come."

It was determined Casen had selective intrauterine growth restriction, a condition that occurs when there is unequal placental sharing which leads to suboptimal growth of one twin. Casen was noticeably smaller and more compromised than his brother.

Sadly and unexpectedly, Hudson developed an infection and passed away 12 days after birth. When Casen came down with the same infection his parents feared the worse, but Casen somehow pulled through - as he would time and time again.

Casen would spend the first 154 days of his life in the neonatal intensive care unit.

"He was born in May and we finally got to take him home in October 2019," remembers his mom. "We were home for six days when he suddenly stopped breathing and we had to rush him back to the hospital. This would unfortunately become our routine."

Kari says each time Casen gets

a mild cold or runs even a low-grade fever, he undoubtedly ends up back in the hospital. "Since his lungs aren't fully developed he has a lot of respiratory issues and goes downhill fast, so at the first sign of sickness we just start heading to INTEGRIS Children's. They are like our second family. We have spent so much time there. They all treat Casen as if he is their own child." Doctors are hopeful Casen will eventually outgrow his frequent hospital visits as his lungs continue to develop and mature.

The staff at the pediatric intensive care unit at INTEGRIS Baptist Medical Center held a bubble send-off for Casen at the end of his last hospitalization, signifying the 177 days he has spent in the PICU overtime. "We just love Kari and Donnie and the entire Hazlewood family and wanted to do something really special for them," says Erica Liddell, a certified child life specialist at INTEGRIS Children's. "In all, between the NICU and the PICU and the 14 surgeries he's endured, Casen has spent almost an entire year in the hospital. That's half of his little life. So, we wanted to celebrate him in a big way."

The send-off, which also included big sis Brynlee, was just in time for the holidays. The Hazlewoods say their Christmas wish is to keep Casen healthy and at home. "As much as we love the folks at INTEGRIS Children's and want them to continue to be a part of Casen's life," says Kari. "We are hoping to see them less often in the new year! We want to see them socially, not just when Casen is sick."



The Hazlewoods say their Christmas wish is to keep Casen healthy and at home.



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ER nurse is named Nurse of the Year at Norman Regional

Norman Regional Health System honored eight nurses for their commitment to patients and the community in 2021.

Each year, a group of Norman Regional physicians along with the Norman Regional Health Foundation provide an award for the exceptional care that was provided over the past year by Norman Regional's nursing staff.

Joel Pickard, RN, of the Emergency Department, was named Nurse of the Year. Pickard was praised for always helping his co-workers, his dedication to his patients and his passion for quality care.

His colleagues noted that Pickard, "has a special passion for not only doing his job well but making sure the emergency department is functioning on an excellent level. He has gone above and beyond in expanding his skills to help care for patients - specifically mastering ultrasound IV placement, which greatly improves patient care."

Two nurses were named as the runner-up for Nurse of the Year. They are Debbie Brown, RN, of Labor, Delivery and Recovery and Cassandra Gibson, RN, of Progressive Care.

Brown was praised for being an experienced nurse. "Debbie is a



Joel Pickard, RN, of the Emergency Department, was named Nurse of the Year (center) Cassandra Gibson, RN of Progressive Care (left) and Debbie Brown, RN, of Labor, Delivery and Recovery (right).

See AWARD Page 5

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AWARD

Continued from Page 4

nurse who loves caring for both her patients and the people around her," her nominator wrote. Gibson was another nurse recognized for her willingness to help in all situations. "I feel she is a perfect example of a Norman Regional healer and exemplifies all the characteristics of a super nurse," said her nominator.

Other nominees were: Meghan Bedwell, RN, Maegan Dover, RN,

Susan Erne, LPN, Mark Veal, RN, and Pam Wilbur, RN.

The finalists received a cash prize funded by physicians.

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Omicron Variant Discovered in Oklahoma Wastewater

The Omicron variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 was discovered in sewage samples collected in Tulsa on Friday, December 17.

The discovery of the Omicron variant was made through the efforts of a team comprised of scientists, epidemiologists and public health leaders from the University of Oklahoma, OU Health, the Tulsa Health Department and the City of Tulsa and supported by the Pandemic Prevention Institute at the Rockefeller Foundation. People

infected with SARS-CoV-2 shed the virus in their waste before they develop symptoms of COVID-19, allowing scientists to provide an early warning of surges and, now, the presence of the new variant.

Since September 2020, the team has been monitoring wastewater drainages in Tulsa, Oklahoma City and, more recently, several smaller cities. Wastewater samples are collected by a team led by Jason Vogel, Ph.D., Grant Graves and Caitlin Miller of the



Oklahoma Water Survey at OU and are analyzed by a team of microbiologists led by Bradley Stevenson, Ph.D., Ralph Tanner, Ph.D. and Erin Jeffries of the Department of Microbiology and Plant Biology at OU.

"By collecting wastewater from multiple communities across the state, we have a sampling network that represents more than 1.2 million Oklahomans," Vogel said. "That has allowed us to sample more than 30 percent of the state's population and detect the Omicron variant in wastewater as it starts to move into the state."

"We have seen the concentration of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater increasing recently, to concentrations higher than we have ever observed. This increase has been driven by COVID-19 caused by the Delta variant. However, the recent detection of the Omicron variant in wastewater means that a significant number of Tulsans are now infected with it. While our data suggests that infections from the Omicron variant are still a fraction of the infections from Delta variant SARS-CoV-2, Omicron is on the rise. Monitoring wastewater will allow us to track its prevalence more quickly and with less effort than patient testing," Stevenson said.

"The detection of Omicron in Tulsa's sewage highlights the power of wastewater testing as an early signal and complement to other surveillance approaches. The Rockefeller Foundation and the

team at the Pandemic Prevention Institute are proud to support this cutting-edge work," said Megan Diamond, manager and wastewater lead at The Rockefeller Foundation.

Public health officials reiterated the importance of getting vaccinated or receiving a booster shot and wearing a mask in public indoor settings. Because wastewater analysis predicts the presence of the virus about a week before infections may be reported through human testing, researchers know the Omicron variant is already spreading in the state.

"Although the Delta variant of COVID-19 is still the most dominant variant in Oklahoma currently, Omicron will most likely become the dominant variant in a few weeks or months," said infectious disease epidemiologist Katrin Kuhn, Ph.D. of the Hudson College of Public Health at the OU Health Sciences Center. "The evidence thus far shows that the Omicron variant is more transmissible than previous variants, so it is important that people get vaccinated if they're not already, or get the booster if they're eligible. Vaccinations are very effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalizations and death."

"It is more important than ever that people who are unvaccinated get vaccinated as soon as possible and those who are fully vaccinated get their booster," said Tulsa Health

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NURSE TALK



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I would be a sparkler!



Kyla Fodje, LPN

A sparkler...Fun to watch, but can be dangerous if not careful.



Robin Williams, LPN

I would be a black cat!



Mary Daniels, RCC

OMICRON

Continued from Page 8

Department Executive Director Dr. Bruce Dart. "It's also important to stay home when sick to prevent the spread of illness. Testing is a great resource to know your COVID-19 status before going around others. Masking indoors where social distancing may be difficult, regardless of vaccination status, is also recommended. The Tulsa Health Department encourages all residents to continue to take a layered prevention approach to stay safe."

Even though the Omicron variant appears to be more easily transmitted than the Delta variant, early evidence suggests that the symptoms of infection could be milder, Kuhn said. That points toward a classic trajectory for viruses in general, including possibly SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

"For viruses to survive in the human population, in time they often evolve to become more transmissible but less lethal in

order to keep multiplying," Kuhn said. "That's actually good news. Even though we may have to learn to live with COVID-19 indefinitely, a positive scenario is for it to become milder and eventually turn into something like the common cold."

The characteristics of the Omicron variant also underscore the importance of wastewater surveillance, Kuhn said. Because people infected by Omicron may not experience major symptoms, they may not get tested; therefore, official test results won't accurately reflect the infection rate.

"If people don't feel as sick with an Omicron infection as they do with the Delta variant, they may not get tested, but wastewater analysis provides a picture of everyone who is infected whether they have symptoms or not and whether or not they get tested," she said. "In that respect, it's actually more important to monitor the wastewater because it gives us a very good indication of how much transmission there is in a community."

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Stavros Hall

The OBU College of Nursing resides inside Jane E. and Nick K. Stavros Hall, a 32,000-square-foot facility designed to provide cutting-edge nursing education for both undergraduate and graduate-level students. Opened in 2016, it is located on the northeast corner of




Stavros Hall at Oklahoma Baptist University in Shawnee, Ok.

the OBU campus in Shawnee. The facility features six high-fidelity skills simulation labs, a medium skills lab, a health assessment skills lab, and a home health and bathing training room, totaling 24 beds. The high-tech simulation labs are equipped with the industry's

most advanced medical simulation solutions, providing students with realistic training scenarios for their future nursing careers.

Stavros Hall includes five classrooms, a 109-seat lecture hall and computer lab, as well as spaces

Continued next page




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Built in 2016, OBU's 32,000-square-foot nursing facility provides cutting-edge nursing education.



OBU

Continued from Page 10

for students to study, meet and interact with faculty. It features multiple skills and simulation labs equipped with video recording technology, allowing instructors to interact with nursing students during procedures. With full control of the state-of-the-art human simulators, instructors train future nurses to expect the unexpected and react with life-saving speed to evolving situations in real-time. The video technology allows instructors to offer the best possible feedback to students, as they review the scenario together following each simulation.

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Your OBU journey will help you discover who you are, your passions and your purpose in life. Every subject is explored through a Christian worldview. Faith and knowledge blend together harmoniously to develop critical and analytical thinkers who can write, speak and communicate clearly, persuasively and with confidence.

Apply today and be a Future Shaper in the College of Nursing at OBU. Visit: <https://www.okbu.edu/>



Our black belt angel. No amount of words can describe the love that Austin gave to our lives. Shortly before he died, we were discussing a friend's little girl that was on the heart transplant list. I asked Austin and his 16-year-old brother if they wanted to be donors. Austin's response was, "I won't be needing them any more, so sure!" That conversation gave us the courage to honor his wishes a few months later. Working out with friends, he collapsed with a heart condition we never knew he had. At 12 years old he left this world too soon, but showed us how to live every day to the fullest. After 4 years in karate he had just received his red belt, and after his death his instructor honored him with his black belt. We are so grateful to be able to call him our son. He will always be our "black belt angel." Love, Dad, Mom and Dillon

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SITUATION UPDATE: COVID-19

COVID-19 Cases	694,210
New Cases	1,011
New Cases 7 day Average	1,186
Active Cases	12,950
CDC/NCHS Provisional Deaths (As of 12/23/21)	12,348

Acute Care OSDH Licensed Facilities/Location**	Recent 3 day Ave. Hospitalizations
	Cases (ICU)
Region 1 (NW)	40 (14)
Region 2 (NE)	50 (20)
Region 3 (SW)	93 (21)
Region 4 (EC)	20 (6)
Region 5 (SE)	15 (1)
Region 6 (Central)	66 (15)
Region 7 (Tulsa)	232 (78)
Region 8 (OKC)	199 (66)
Total	715* (221)
Other Types of Facilities	
Focus Facilities	12 (4)
Rehabilitation Facilities	3 (0)
Tribal Facilities	20 (3)
Other Facilities Total	35 (7)

*Includes 17 hospitalizations in pediatric beds.

**Focus, Rehabilitation and Tribal Facilities numbers are not assigned to a specific region as their patient populations reside across the state. Information provided through survey of Oklahoma hospitals as reported to HHS as of the time of this report. Response rate affects data. Facilities may update previously reported information as necessary.

Data Source: Acute Disease Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. *As of 2021-12-24 at 7:00 a.m.

ICYMI: New York And Minnesota Set To Deploy National Guard To Nursing Homes As Facilities Nationwide Continue To Face Historic Workforce Crisis

In case you missed it, New York and Minnesota have announced they will deploy the National Guard to help nursing homes alleviate staffing shortages – underscoring the severity of the ongoing workforce crisis affecting the industry. The National Guard will help nursing homes that need caregivers to continue to provide care to their residents. However, long term solutions are still needed.

New York and Minnesota are hardly the only states where long term care providers are facing workforce challenges, as caregivers continue to leave the field. The latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) found that nursing homes lost an estimated 234,000 jobs since the beginning of the pandemic. In November alone, nursing homes lost 8,400 jobs.

Providers are doing everything they can to recruit and retain new workers, but unfortunately there aren't enough applicants to fill vacancies. Facilities are having to turn away new residents because of staffing shortages, many of which would help relieve the strain on overwhelmed hospitals. Meanwhile, other long term care facilities have shut their doors for good, forcing vulnerable seniors and individuals with disabilities to find new care.

As long term care facilities grapple with this ongoing crisis, lawmakers are looking to enact two unfunded mandates in the Build

Back Better Act. The mandates, one that would require nursing homes to have a registered nurse (RN) on-staff 24 hours a day and another that would require the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to conduct a study on minimum staffing ratios and implement the regulations within one year, will only make the current crisis worse.

The staffing mandates are estimated to cost billions of dollars yet the legislative provisions offer no resources to nursing home providers to help implement. The American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) estimates that if the HHS study found that nursing homes need to increase clinical and direct care staff by 25 percent, it would require hiring more than 150,000 RNs, licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and certified nursing assistants (CNAs), costing \$10.7 billion per year. The RN mandate would require hiring 21,000 more nurses, costing \$2.5 billion a year.

Providers support having a RN on staff 24 hours a day, but need additional funding to make this mandate possible. AHCA and LeadingAge included having a RN on staff in their comprehensive reform agenda, the Care for Our Seniors Act, but note it will require significant investments. If providers are already struggling to fill essential positions in their facilities, providers will be unable

NCAL

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to comply with the new, costly mandates and be forced to further limit the number of residents they can serve.

These dire staffing shortages demand immediate attention from lawmakers or thousands of vulnerable residents may be at risk of losing the care they need. Caregivers have given it their all during the pandemic and now need

the full support of Congress and state governments to keep doing the heroic work their residents need.



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