



Aimee Jones is set to earn her Master of Public Health degree at the OU Hudson College of Public Health.

story and photo by James Coburn, Staff Writer

Aimee Jones, RN, wants to see the best outcomes for newborns. She is gaining a deeper understanding of disease prevention through education.

Jones had always wanted to work in the medical field since an early age. She chose nursing because it is patient centered with a great health care focus in helping people.

"I'm trying to prevent more disease and the later stages of disease," Jones said.

Jones is currently a pediatric nurse at the Bethany Children's Health Center. She is working toward her Master of Public Health degree at the Hudson College of Public Health, located on the campus of the University of

Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. Being in her fourth semester, she will graduate in May.

Jones became a registered nurse three years ago after earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree at Oklahoma City University's Kramer School of Nursing. "They prepare you well for nursing."

## JONES

Continued from Page 1

"You spend a full two years doing clinicals — learning the basic skills first, and then you build on those skills when you're out in the field" she said of Kramer. "And the staff is there to help you with any questions. And once you're in clinicals, they can come around to help you do specialized things. They have a lot of experience as well, and so they know a lot of information. So, you have good training."

After she graduates from the OU Hudson College of Public Health, Jones plans to work at the Bethany Children's Hospital for a while and perhaps to work for some tribal communities in the public health field. "I've always wanted to advance and get a master's degree," Jones said. "I'm a Gates Millennium Scholar, so they will fund seven different degree areas for master programs and public health was one of those and it fit with my previous degree experience."

There is a lot of education needed for pediatric and maternal

education in the developmental stages of pregnancy, Jones said. Master degree programs offer various routes such as epidemiology and specific health promotion programs.

"My degree specifically encompasses all that, so I kind of get a little bit of everything in my training," she said. "So, I think it is good overall to get experience in different areas. For me personally, I feel like it's been challenging, especially during this COVID time."

Jones is relieved that COVID rates continue to decline in Oklahoma. As a result, Hudson College facilitates more in-person classes. She commends the professors for their comprehensive knowledge and depth of experience in their field.

"They'll be ready to help with anything they can. You can just email them or talk to them," she said. "All of my professors are very willing to help. Also, they have some connections they can set you up with after graduation. So, they just really want to prepare you after graduation in finding a career field."

A nursing career offers job security in a variety of ways. Nurses

are in demand. They can work with adults, children, and teenagers. Mental health is becoming a more prominent role for nurses today, Jones said.

"You can move upward in nursing," she said. "There's a lot you can do. You don't have to stay at one place forever if you like to move around."

Her field of nursing requires a lot of empathy for her patients and parents. Communication is key for a nurse working with the pediatric population. Teamwork is essential in nursing in order to ensure best practices.

The staff has been very supportive at the Bethany Children's Health Center, she continued.

A lot of patients there require complex care. They may have been born with a health condition. It's different from a typical hospital environment.

"Some live there for the long-term. They require more specialized care with ventilators and kind of around-the-clock care. Others are there for rehabilitation after an accident and they are learning how to do basic life

skills again," Jones explained.

A lot of her long-term care patients can speak normally. They have different capabilities. Even the patients at Bethany Children's Health Center who cannot speak have individual ways of communicating what they like and dislike, Jones said. Non-verbal observation skills are an important tool in recognizing pain.

"You just kind of get to know that about people," Jones said. "There are all types of things they are getting to do that they might not be able to do otherwise."

Jones said staff at Bethany Children's Health Center demonstrates love and commitment for the children there. They make sure the children are dressed comfortably every day. Music therapy is helpful, too.

Jones also has an affinity with music, especially during her leisure time. She relaxes by taking walks on her days off. She said it helps her to watch a show or read a book.

"Family is a big one for me," she said.

For more information on Bethany Children's Health Center visit <https://www.bethanychildrens.org/>

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# Situation Update: COVID-19

<b>New Cases 7 Day Average</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>New Cases Week of 5/1/22 - 5/7/22</b>	<b>1,046</b>
<b>Active Cases</b>	<b>2,040</b>
<b>Total Cases</b>	<b>1,043,536</b>
<b>CDC/NCHS Provisional Deaths</b>	<b>15,996</b>
<b>Acute Care OSDH Licensed Facilities/Location**</b>	<b>Recent 3 day Ave. Hospitalizations</b>
	<b>Cases (ICU)</b>
Region 1 (NW)	1 (1)
Region 2 (NE)	2 (0)
Region 3 (SW)	6 (1)
Region 4 (EC)	0 (0)
Region 5 (SE)	1 (0)
Region 6 (Central)	7 (1)
Region 7 (Tulsa)	16 (7)
Region 8 (OKC)	29 (4)
<b>Total</b>	<b>62* (14)</b>
<b>Other Types of Facilities</b>	
Focus Facilities	1 (1)
Rehabilitation Facilities	0 (0)
Tribal Facilities	1 (0)
<b>Other Facilities Total</b>	<b>2 (1)</b>

\*Includes 15 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 2022-05-12 at 7:00 a.m.

# CAREERS IN NURSING

## BRIDGING THE GAP: A KIND HEART CONNECTS WITH PATIENTS

by James Coburn - staff writer

Being kind to the senior clients benefiting from the services provided by Valir PACE touches the life of Lahna Garrison, CNA, and the home care coordinator at the midtown Oklahoma City office.

"I love it — it's very special to me — it gives me joy to know that I've helped somebody," Garrison said. "I've worked at more than one place, but I don't ever plan on leaving PACE until I retire. They go above and beyond to make sure the patients are taken care of. I've never experienced that anywhere else I've worked."

She has been with Valir PACE for three years and for 15 years served as CNA for home health prior to joining PACE.

An act of kindness is more valuable than money, and Garrison demonstrates that in her personal life. In both January and February PACE awarded her with gas card

money for being Employee of the Month.

"I felt it was only right to take that and split it down for all the aides, because without them I never would have gotten that," she said.

PACE provides care for seniors in an all-inclusive setting of providers, said Sara Brickey, RN, president of Valir PACE.

"We provide them physical therapy, occupational therapy or speech therapy," Brickey said.

PACE serves individuals 55 and older who reside in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area within a 50-mile radius. PACE serves seniors who must choose between medicine or food.

"There are so many things that can happen that can put you in that situation," Garrison said. "And we want to be there for them to help lift them back up."

There is no copay for any medication provided by PACE.

"My goodness, I have a wonderful staff. They come in every morning making sure everyone is doing good. They take their vitals and check on them every day here at the center making sure they're eating and drinking, and doing activities with them," Garrison said.

PACE also provides nutrition through the expertise of a dietitian. It offers home care, social services, counseling, and assistance with housing. Primary care providers and RN care coordinators instill best practices. Licensed practical nurses offer care at the center and participants' homes. PACE also collaborates with the Department of Human Services.

Transportation is provided by PACE to any of their clients outside appointments such as dialysis or

other specialty appointments.

"The aides really love it," she said, and each patient is different. "The aides that are out in the field go out and help them with day-to-day living. It could be as simple as helping them take a shower, all the way down to cleaning their home or even doing their laundry."

Some of the patients are extremely poor, she said, and cannot afford bath soap and shampoo. But the CNA's make sure they have those items as well as supplies for individuals living with diabetes. A caring heart helps to develop connections with patients, opening trust and confidence. A caring heart gets things done, she explained.

"I've got a card over there that was sent to me with a basket of fruit," she said. "It tells me that I did the right thing with their loved one

See GARRISON Page 5



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# GARRISON

Continued from Page 4

in making sure everything was taken care of and everything was done in order for that patient to have that dignity about their life."

Garrison has reason to feel good about her life. Her path as a caregiver began when she was the primary caregiver of family members. She understands there are times when people need to reach out and ask for help. PACE bridges the gap.

"We like to make sure that they've taken their medication," she said.

An acute emergency can happen to anybody for several reasons, including unemployment, loss of a spouse, sickness, divorce and more.

No one should be embarrassed to ask for food or the necessities of life, Garrison said.

Visiting with a PACE staff member also helps diminish feelings of isolation by giving the patient someone to talk

to, Garrison said. Sometimes their only other option includes going to a nursing home, she explained.

"The gratefulness they have to be on that program, to have the support that they need — you can't ask for anything better than that," she said.

CNAs are the eyes and ears of staff members. CNAs often notice subtle changes with patients and can alert the nursing staff. So, Garrison tries to keep the nurse aides consistent with the same patients whenever possible.

"That way when you walk into the home you pretty well know right away if there is something going on," she explained. "You can tell by their expressions. You can tell by the way they carry themselves."

Some of the clients need clothing. So, Garrison notifies the staff of what sizes she needs.

"The next thing I know, my desk is covered with the size I need so we can let the patient have them," she said.

Visit: <http://www.valirpace.org/> for more information



No one should ever feel embarrassed about asking for help, said Lahna Garrison, CNA, and the home care coordinator at the midtown Oklahoma City office. She was recently honored as Employee of the Month.

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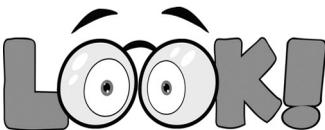
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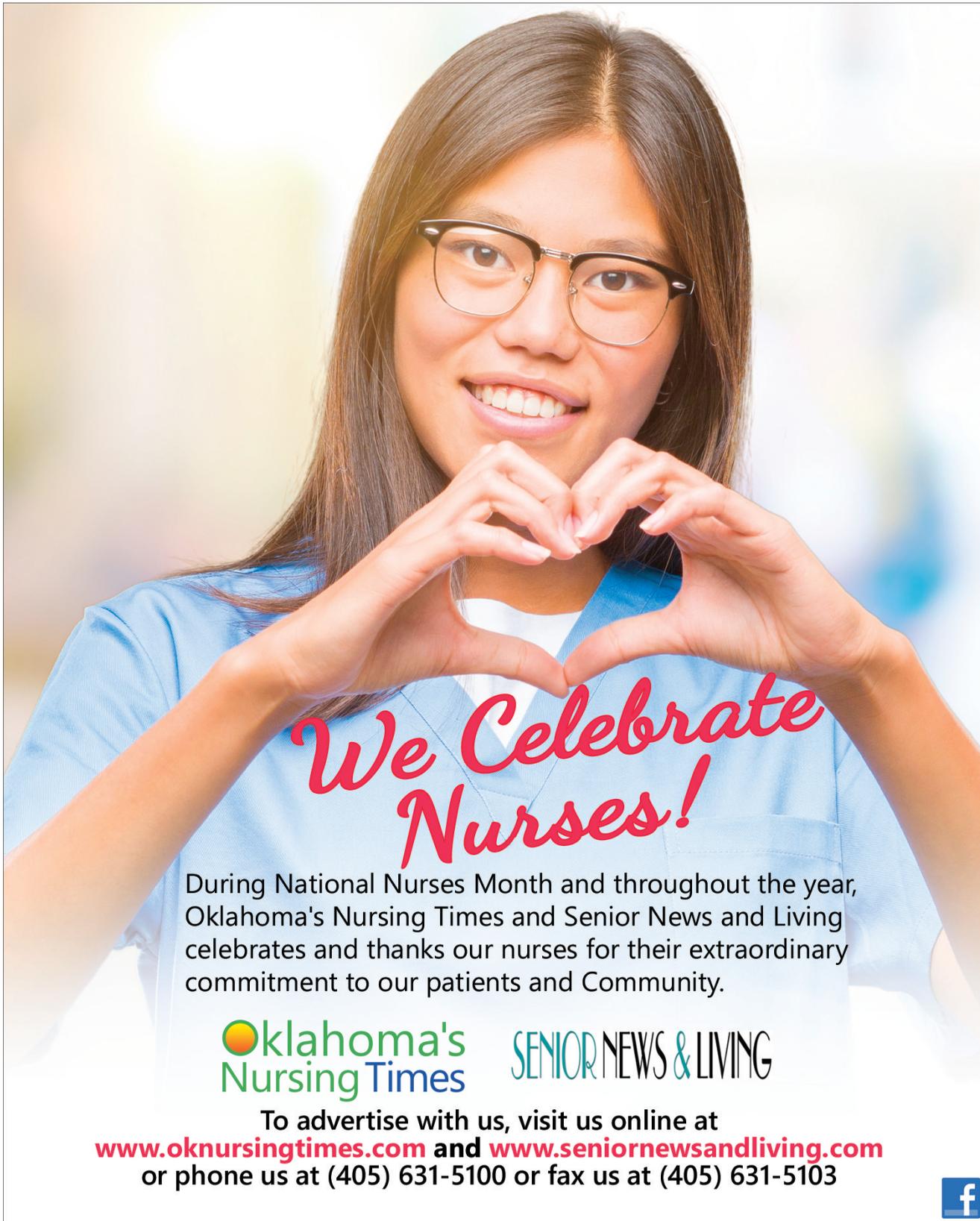
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**Ellie**  
Liver Recipient

Our daughter, Ellie, was born in November 2008. When she was 3 months old, we found out she had a liver problem. We went to Children's Hospital in OKC, but were soon sent to a transplant center in Nebraska for evaluation. On March 18th, Ellie was put on the list for transplant. We came back home to wait. Ellie was treated at Children's twice a week, until she began to lose weight in May. We went back to Nebraska the day after Mother's Day, and she was admitted to the hospital. While there, I was evaluated as a living donor for Ellie, and we soon learned I could give her part of my liver. Ellie's transplant was on May 22, 2009. It was the hardest thing that I've ever done, but the

easiest decision of my life. We came home Father's Day weekend.

Organ, eye and tissue donation saves lives. Please make your decision to donate life and tell your family. Register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor on your Oklahoma driver's license or state ID card or register online at [www.LifeShareRegistry.org](http://www.LifeShareRegistry.org). If you don't have a license or state ID card and do not have internet access, call **800-826-LIFE (5433)** and ask for a donor registration card.



(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2022 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

# OSU's RN to BSN program offers convenience, flexibility

*Oklahoma State University RN to BSN student Sage Holder had long known she was interested in a healthcare career. When two of the most important people in her life – her grandfather and mother – received a cancer diagnosis in the same week during her first year of college, her career path came into focus.*

"I knew I wanted to be in the healthcare system. I just didn't know exactly where or what that was going to look like when I started college. I knew I wanted to be successful, a person that others needed, and to care for the sick," Holder recalls.

Holder began taking pre-medicine classes but during the second semester of her freshman year, she had what she calls an "aha" moment.

"I was either in class or in the hospital, spending time with my family during my grandpa's chemo treatments or my mom's cancer appointments. I began to notice the nurses. I wanted to be the person that the patient could look to for a smile, a laugh, or a shoulder to cry on."

Confident in her decision to pursue nursing, Holder completed prerequisite courses and went on to earn an associate degree in May 2021 and become a Registered Nurse (RN). She landed a job at the Emergency Room at Stillwater Medical Center.

Ready to continue her education by pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Holder found the perfect fit in OSU's fully online RN to BSN program.

"I knew the program would offer flexibility with my lifestyle and allow me to continue working as an RN while taking classes," Holder said. "The faculty have been approachable and easy to reach and to communicate with. I feel like they want me to succeed."

OSU's RN to BSN program, which launched in Fall 2017 and is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), provides students with a convenient and flexible option to complete their bachelor's degree in as little as one year.

OSU students expand their professional nursing knowledge from practical, foundational skills they learned during their associate degree, learning the why behind past education.

"Our students are challenged with a wide array of topics that range from leadership and current trends in nursing to global, cultural and public health, as well as nursing theory," RN to BSN program director Dr. Alana Cluck said.

Ultimately, the mission of the RN to BSN program is to prepare nurses to practice professional nursing that meets the dynamic health care needs of individuals, families, groups, communities and global populations. With



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this degree, graduates are qualified for leadership roles in a variety of healthcare environments.

OSU's RN to BSN program enjoys a 100 percent satisfaction rate among its graduates. Faculty offer personalized attention and are committed to student success.

"Faculty communicate extremely well, especially considering it's an online program. They offer a variety of ways to share information and foster relationships with our peers, which allows us to be successful. It's easy to have a positive experience when you feel your efforts are not only noticed, but also celebrated," RN to BSN graduate Lacy Smith said.

Kobey Trower, a 2019 graduate of the program, appreciated the experience of his peers and the collaborative nature of courses.

"All of the students were working full-time jobs," Trower said. "We had some people who worked in ICU, some in labor and delivery, others in clinic and research settings. The accessibility of the coursework helped us keep on the same page for group projects. It was super convenient for me to work full time and still have a life without being tied down. That aspect of it helped keep my attention and keep me moving through the program."

Holder's experience as a student in the program has been first rate. She encourages any RN considering a four-year degree to explore OSU's program.

"Set up a meeting or a zoom call with a faculty or administrative member and give them the chance to provide information and answer questions that are of concern. That is what I did and it sold me. The faculty were so welcoming and flexible."

Applications for the BSN program for Summer and Fall 2022 are now open. Visit [nursing.okstate.edu](https://nursing.okstate.edu) for more information, to schedule a meeting with program administrators or to apply today.



# ONLINE RN TO BSN APPLY NOW!

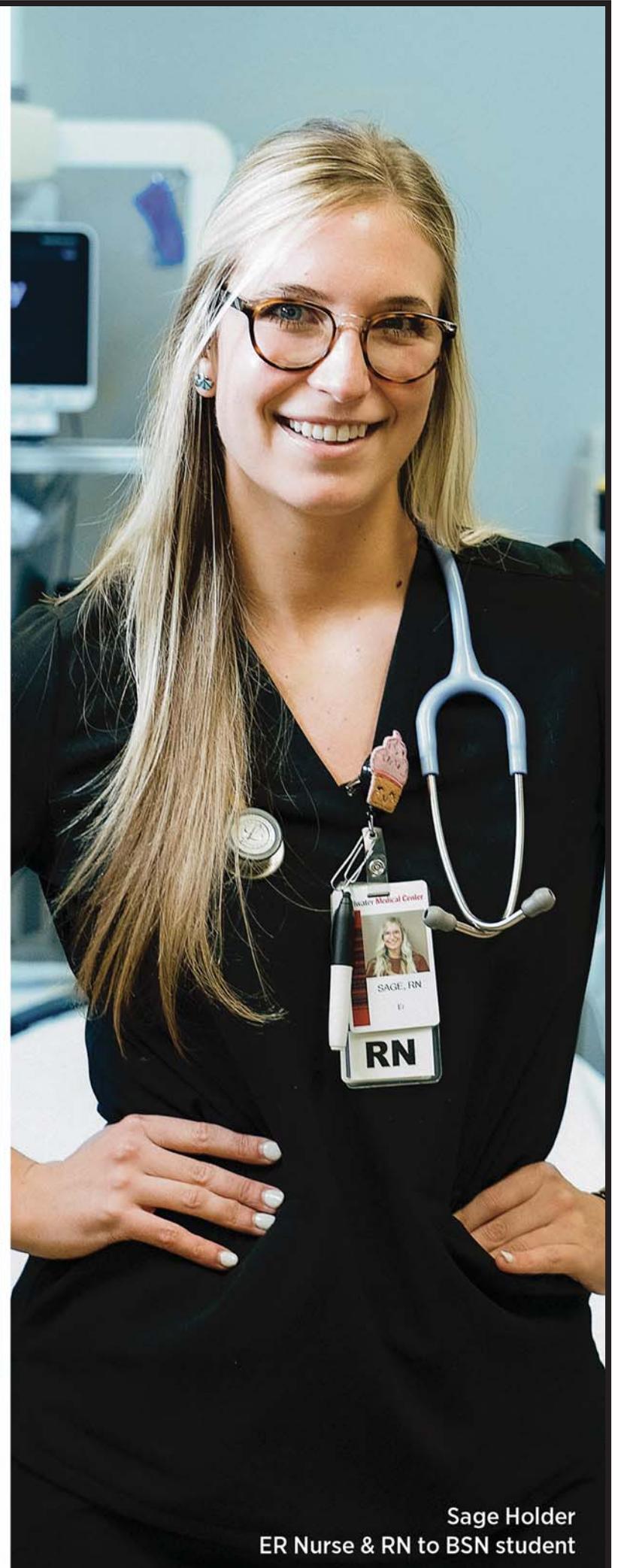
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- Faculty committed to student success
- Transfer scholarships available



"I was truly blown away by the level of professionalism and commitment from the faculty and staff. The knowledge and support I received are unparalleled."

- Kayce (Tuter) Brown, RN to BSN student



Sage Holder  
ER Nurse & RN to BSN student

[nursing.okstate.edu](https://nursing.okstate.edu)

# OSDH Highlights Five Key Topics for Women's Health Month

May is Women's Health Month. The goal when highlighting this month is to empower women to make their health a priority and to help women understand what steps they can take to improve their health.

"Women's Health Month is a great opportunity to remind women to make their health a priority and to build positive health habits," said Joyce Marshall, MPH, director of maternal and child health service at OSDH. "We encourage women of all ages to talk to a health care provider about recommended preventive screenings and ways to develop healthy living habits. We also encourage women to speak up, ask questions of their health care

providers and reach out for help when indicated."

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) is highlighting five key health topics affecting women in all stages of life. Those topics include breast and cervical screenings, congenital syphilis, heart health, preconception health, postpartum depression, and smoking and using e-cigarettes during pregnancy.

## Breast and cervical screenings

While breast cancer is the most frequently diagnosed cancer among Oklahoma women, cervical cancer also has a significant impact on women in our state. Getting the HPV vaccine and regular screenings, as recommended, can

help prevent cervical cancer. Engaging in healthy behaviors increases the chances of living cancer-free, including visiting a healthcare provider for a well-woman visit and scheduling preventive screenings for breast and cervical cancer.

## Congenital syphilis

Congenital syphilis is a disease that occurs when a mother with syphilis passes the infection on to her baby during pregnancy. It can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, low birth weight, extreme health problems or death shortly after birth. In 2020, Oklahoma ranked fifth in the United States for the highest rates of congenital syphilis. This was nearly two times higher than the national rate. Syphilis is easy to cure with antibiotics if caught early. All pregnant women should be tested for syphilis, as many people who are infected do not show symptoms.

## Heart health

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women. Some risk factors for heart disease include high blood pressure, obesity, physical inactivity, an unhealthy diet and smoking. Women are encouraged to see a health care provider for regular well-woman visits, including blood pressure screening.

## Preconception health

To increase the chance of having a healthy baby, women are encouraged to build healthy habits before getting pregnant. Healthy habits include being free of tobacco and e-cigarettes, maintaining a healthy weight, taking multivitamins with 400 mcg of folic acid daily, managing stress, and getting tested/treated for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Spouses, partners, family and friends can assist in encouraging and participating in a woman's healthy choices.

## Postpartum depression

Postpartum depression is the number one complication in pregnancy throughout the United States. While many new mothers experience the "baby blues," – which does not tend to be severe, does not need treatment and generally does not last more than two weeks – postpartum depression symptoms often last longer, are more intense, and have an impact on a new

mother's health and her ability to care for her baby.

A new mother may experience insomnia, irritability, mood swings, persistent sadness and thoughts of harming herself or the baby. These symptoms can significantly impact the mother's ability to parent the way she would like. More than anxiety and depression, there is an umbrella term for mental health concerns in this period of life called PMADs. PMADs is an acronym that stands for Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders. Although Postpartum Depression is the most well-known perinatal mood disorder, PMADs cover other mental health concerns in the time before, during, and after pregnancy such as Postpartum Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Postpartum Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Postpartum Psychosis.

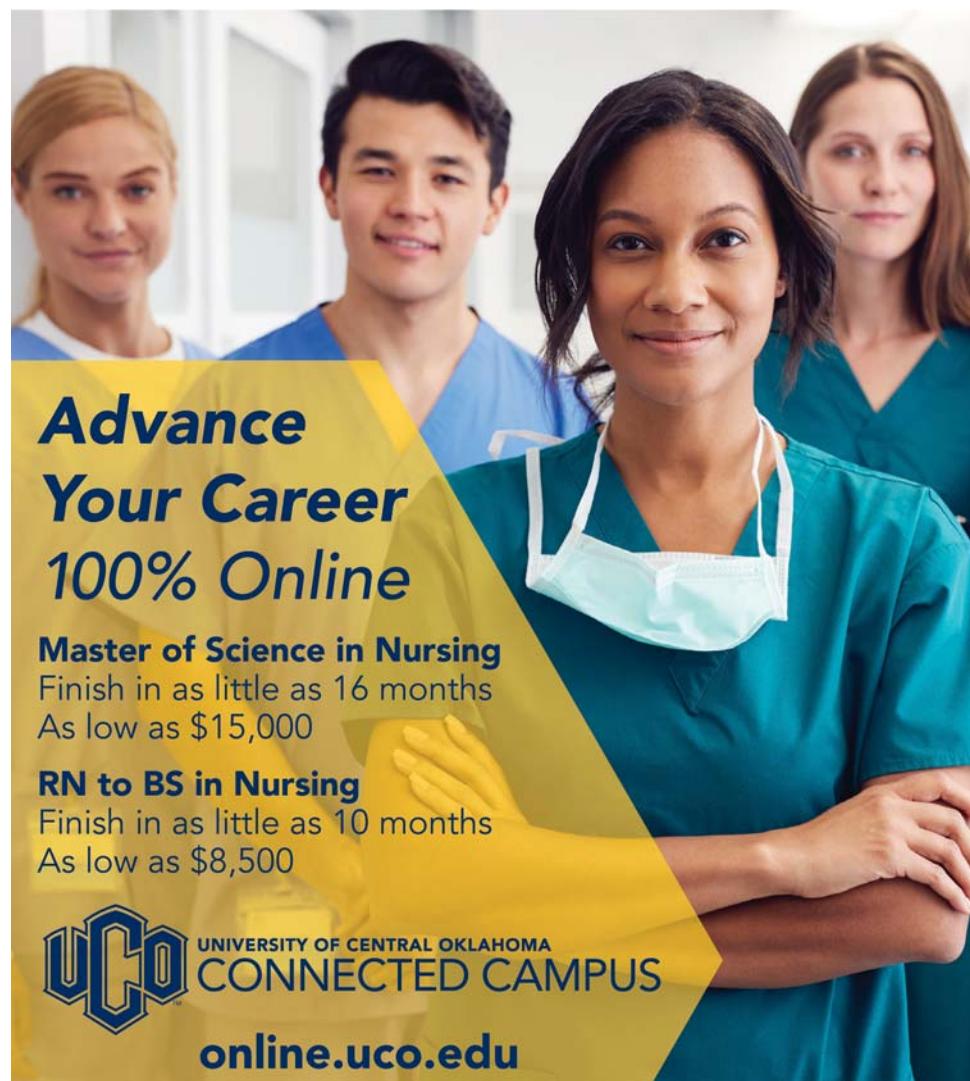
While challenging, regular screening and early intervention can protect the well-being of the mother, baby, and the entire family. While these are serious conditions, treatments such as social support, cognitive-behavioral therapy, group therapy and medication assistance are proven to treat these concerns successfully.

Family and friends should know the signs and help their loved ones seek help. For local mental health services, contact the Postpartum Support International support hotline (toll-free) 1-800-944-4773 or visit <http://www.postpartum.net>.

## Smoking and using e-cigarettes during pregnancy

Smoking and using e-cigarettes while pregnant is harmful to the mother and her baby. Electronic vapor products are not safe during pregnancy because most contain nicotine and other harmful additives. Quitting all forms of tobacco, including e-cigarettes, is best for the mother and baby. Regardless of how far along a mother is in her pregnancy, she and her baby will be healthier after quitting. The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline offers assistance at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669).

For more information about any of these topics, visit the Women's Health page or contact OSDH Maternal and Child Health Services at (405) 426-8111.



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# Courtney's Story: New Mom Survives Harrowing Health Scare

Courtney Elliott's heart stopped beating on a procedure room table on February 2, 2022, three weeks after delivering her baby. Her condition was caused by a massive blood clot, a complication from a COVID-19 infection at 36 weeks pregnant.

It took more than 100 Mercy co-workers from 21 hospital departments working together over nine weeks to save Elliott's life not once, not twice, but three times.

Her story began on New Year's Day 2022, when an at-home COVID-19 test confirmed the body aches, exhaustion and shortness of breath she was experiencing weren't simply the result of late-stage pregnancy.

Elliott initially monitored minor symptoms at home. A week later, her breathing had become so labored, her OB/GYN, Dr. Jennifer Strebel, determined the safest option was to deliver as soon as possible.

"She was having a really hard time breathing," said Dr. Strebel. "I consulted with her maternal-fetal medicine specialist, and together we decided the baby was full term. If we could just deliver the baby, her uterus would decompress and allow her lungs to work more effectively."

Dr. Strebel delivered a healthy 7-pound, 7-ounce baby girl January 12 during an emergency cesarean section at Mercy. It was an otherwise joyous occasion, and Elliott's condition improved immediately.

"Her shortness of breath was gone, she could breathe and walk on her own and she continued to improve over the next five days until we felt it was safe for her to go home," Strebel said.

On January 16, Elliott and her husband took their daughter home to meet her 3-year-old brother and extended family, thinking their medical nightmare was over.

"I was so happy to be home enjoying my newborn baby and

suddenly I felt like I couldn't breathe again," Elliott said.

Within 48 hours, and in the midst of a highly infectious omicron wave of COVID-19 that saw hospitals stretched to their limits, Elliott was in an ambulance headed back to Mercy.

"When she got to the ER, her oxygen levels, which should be 92% or more, were at 45%, which I truly didn't know was possible for someone who was still awake and talking," Strebel said.

After an initial assessment, Elliott learned she was being admitted to the intensive care stepdown unit. The care team tried everything possible to keep her off a ventilator, using multiple oxygen delivery systems to help her lungs. After a week, she continued to decline and was moved to the intensive care unit for closer monitoring.

"She had a horrible cough, and the work she was putting into breathing prior to intubation was so great, she lost thirty pounds in a couple weeks," Dr. Strebel said. "She couldn't eat because she couldn't do anything but work to breathe."

After a few weeks, she started to improve, and her caregivers considered a move back to the stepdown unit. Her nurse advocated to keep her in the ICU one more night, a decision that likely saved Elliott's life. That same day, her oxygen levels deteriorated rapidly, and she was intubated and hooked up to a ventilator that would breathe for her.

"Her blood pressure dropped so low, and the nurses immediately jumped in, but everything we tried to do to intervene medically wasn't working," said Dr. Maroun Tawk, medical director of the intensive care unit.

She was too sick and unstable to get the kind of imaging needed for a clear diagnosis, and there was no time to spare. Dr. Tawk knew something else was wrong but only had adrenaline, intuition and years of experience to make instant decisions.

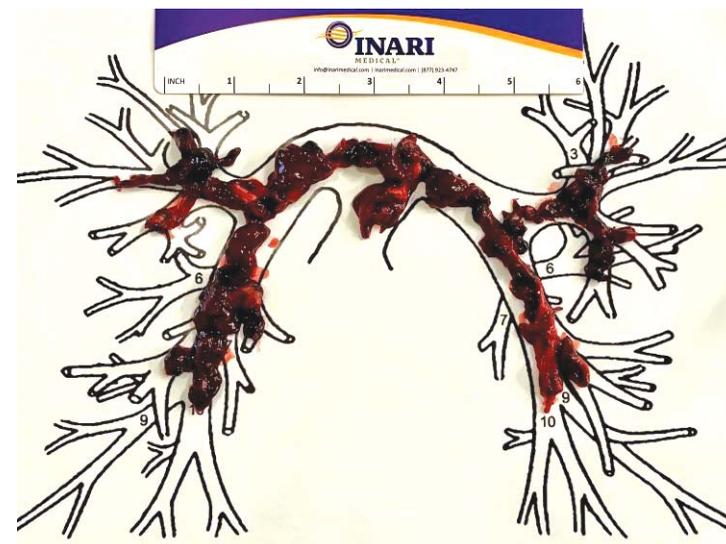
Tawk called Dr. Aaron Graham, interventional radiologist at Mercy, to explain the emergency and ordered a mobile X-ray and echocardiogram immediately to her bedside. He had a rapidly declining patient on the verge of death. The images weren't clear, but his gut said she had a pulmonary embolism blocking blood flow to her heart.

"This was a huge risk," Tawk said. "We had no idea what we were dealing with or what Dr. Graham would find if she even survived the short trip down the hall to the cath lab, but we had to do something. She was dying."

Dr. Graham found a massive bilateral pulmonary embolism unlike anything he and Dr. Tawk had seen before. The clot created a complete



More than 100 Mercy co-workers teamed up to save Courtney Elliott's life.



The blood clot Dr. Aaron Graham removed from Courtney Elliott's lungs and heart.

obstruction of blood flow in her heart and both lungs. Her family learned she had a 5% chance of surviving the procedure to remove the clots.

"She died on the table," Dr. Graham said. "I was going in to pull out the clot in her heart, and her heart just stopped beating. The ICU nurses jumped in to start compressions, but I yelled 'Stop!' I knew I had to get the blood moving again. As soon as I was able to get a portion of that clot out, her heart started right back up, and it was a mad dash to pull out as much of the remaining clot in her heart and lungs as possible."



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