

Peace of mind *Hospice nurse provides comfort*



Ashley Lewis, RN, case manager at Valir Hospice, learned early in life the difference a good nurse can make.

story and photo by James Coburn, staff writer

When Ashley Lewis was in high school, her father was diagnosed with cancer. Chemotherapy offered him a slight chance of survival.

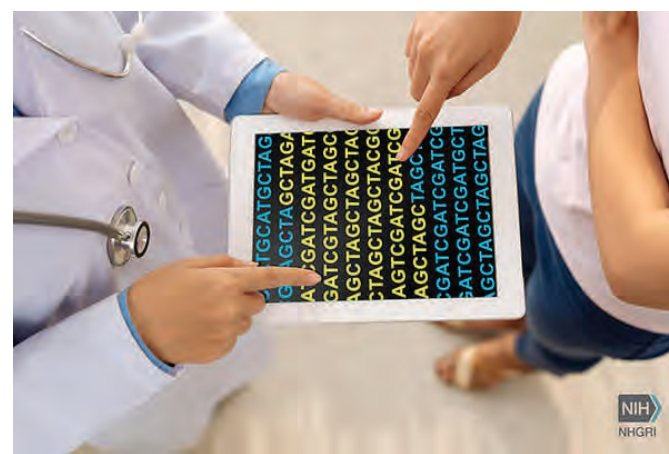
"The nursing staff took wonderful care

of him, and he ended up coming into remission," said Lewis, RN, case manager at Valir Hospice. "It wouldn't have been without

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ACSCAN Applauds Passage of Legislation Expanding Access to Biomarker Testing

*The legislation is aimed at
improving health outcomes
for All Oklahomans*



Recently, the Oklahoma Senate passed Senate Bill 513 to increase access to biomarker testing, which can help determine the best treatment plan for each patient. The American Cancer Society, Cancer Action Network, is sponsoring this significant policy change to ensure cancer patients have access to precision medicine.

Dubbed 'the right treatment at the right time,' precision medicine has played a critical role in improving cancer outcomes. For example, patients with certain lung cancer types who received biomarker testing and targeted therapy had a 31% reduction in mortality. But to determine if a patient will benefit from certain targeted therapies, doctors must test for specific biomarkers – such as gene mutations – found in blood, tissues, or other biospecimens that provide insight into physiological processes, medical conditions, or diseases.

"The advances in cancer treatment that have come from being able to tailor approaches to a person's condition are critical for winning the fight against cancer. This legislation will bring the hope and promise of precision medicine to people with a cancer diagnosis across the state on a more equitable

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LEWIS

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the nursing staff. So, that is what led me to being a nurse, just that compassionate care of them working and doing whatever they could to save my dad."

Healthcare runs in her family. Her dad was a paramedic, and her sister is a nurse practitioner in Ardmore.

Lewis is a graduate of Murray State College, located in Tishomingo. Most of her career has been in hospice during her seven years as a nurse. She also worked in cardiology, skilled nursing and did COVID relief as a travel nurse. March marks her one-year anniversary at Valir Hospice.

Her first impression of Valir Hospice came when she was working at another hospice company. Lewis observed within a facility that the nurses and CNAs there were polite and compassionate.

"They seemed to have a really good rapport built up and were very friendly," Lewis said. "They would even say hi to me when I walked by even though I was with another company at the time. I'd always heard good things about Valir. And so, I decided to make

the change and see if I could be part of this wonderful company."

Hospice nurses bring comfort to patients and family members in either the patient's home or a facility. Lewis said Valir Hospice provides that extra "icing on top of care." Hospice nurses ensure their terminally ill patient is receiving the best quality of care.

"We build a rapport with them. It kind of feels like a second home, a second family," Lewis continued. "We give them that peace of mind that they're going to be taken well care of, and their symptoms are going to be managed to the best of our abilities towards the end of life."

She takes the patient's hand upon meeting them, introduces herself and first asks them how they are feeling. Lewis will ask, "Can I do anything for you?" And she will manage any immediate discomfort they may have before she explains the normal flow of hospice care. Lewis will hold her patient's hand again, telling them she wants to make sure they are comfortable before she leaves.

"I make sure everything is there for them," Lewis explained. "And if there is anything else needed, I will get it right after the visit and make

sure it is handled the same day."

She always gives them a hug whenever possible and tells them she will see them again during her next visit.

"If you need me, call me," she says. "I am always here for you."

Hospice nurses need to be kindhearted and not robotic like patients sometimes experience in other places, Lewis said, so that when a decline arises the patient is educated with a sense of expectations. This makes the end-of-life process flow easier for them, she said. They are not caught blind sighted in a panic, she added.

"They just want you to be yourself like you are at home. Talk to them like you would talk to a family member, your friend," Lewis continued. "Get down to their level where they can understand. I always let them know if I ever do nursing talk — stop me. It will not hurt my feelings."

Memories of being with her patients motivate her journey as a hospice nurse. Being a hospice nurse can be tiring and overwhelming at times, she said. But Lewis keeps pushing forward to alleviate any discomfort her patients have.

Once she witnessed the personal side of nursing during her father's

illness, Lewis knew she could do it and began pushing herself a little harder in life.

She also has a good support system at home.

"I have a wonderful, better half as I call him. His name is Scott," Lewis said. "And then his daughter Wyle— they're just my daily motivation to keep me doing what I'm doing. And if it wasn't for them and the support system here at Valir Hospice, I don't know where I would be."

The staff at Valir Hospice has become a second family for Lewis in providing good quality care, she said.

"Communication is key and just being there for each other," she said. "We might not like the same things outside of hospice, but right here you're doing a job, you're caring for others and that's a solid point."

For more information about Valir Hospice visit:

<https://www.valir.com/hospice-care>



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BIOMARKER

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basis,” said Matt Glanville, Oklahoma government relations director for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. “It’s time for us to make the future of modern medicine accessible to more Oklahomans.”

Despite its benefits, access to biomarker testing has not kept pace with the rate of innovation due to several barriers, including lack of coverage by private health insurance and Medicaid programs.


For more information on precision medicine, cancer biomarkers, current barriers to biomarker testing, and ACS CAN’s policy recommendations, visit: <https://www.fightcancer.org/biomarkers>.

The American Cancer Society Cancer

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CAREERS IN NURSING:

A HELPING HAND - OKLAHOMA ALERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC BRINGS RELIEF

story and photo by James Coburn, Staff Writer

An allergy doesn't only present itself with a sneeze.

"Typically, people will have nasal congestion, runny and itchy eyes and maybe a cough," said Angela Turney, LPN, nurse manager at the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic. "If they have a rash or eczema, we'll see them."

The Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic tests for air-born allergens as well as venom testing, patch testing, food challenges and a variety of allergies. Asthma education and pulmonary function testing is available. Immunotherapy involves skin testing on the patient's arms or back.

Patients may be allergic to mold, grass, weeds, dogs and cats. A physician will order a serum for a regiment of weekly injections.

Patients are sometimes surprised to learn their allergy is not from what they thought it would be.

"Then we have the ones that come in and are allergic to cats and dogs, and they're not about to get rid of

that dog," Turney explained. "Their dog sleeps in their bed and they're not getting rid of it."

Patients often find they are allergic to more than one item. And the clinic usually tests for 60 items.

"With allergies and asthma, nurses don't usually get that training in school. So, unless they've worked in an allergy and asthma clinic they usually come here with no experience."

The Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic spends from five to seven weeks training nurses for the task. They must be flexible and either work at one of the clinics as a float nurse or work specifically with a physician or nurse practitioner.

Turney earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Health Care Administration from the University of Phoenix and has been an LPN for 26 years. She studied to be an LPN and worked in women's healthcare for 11 years prior to coming to the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic 13 years ago.

She found that being a nurse at the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic on the campus of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center was far different from her role in women's healthcare. The change was made easy by a great team of doctors and nurses. Currently there are 46 nurses and CNAs on staff and each doctor or nurse practitioner has two nurses working with them.

"We work well together as a team with five different locations. I can call on them anytime and they are flexible," she said.

The nursing staff has a lot of long-term patients. They may even see generations of patients from a grandparent, parent, and a child.

"When patients come, they are long-term patients for the most part," Turney said. "So, when they call, they want to talk to the nurse because they've developed a relationship with them."

A new patient's first appointment may take three or four hours, Turney

continued. And most of the patient's time is spent with their nurse doing testing and documenting their history. Follow-up appointments are made by the nurse. Prescription education is given.

"So, it's really important that they are able to communicate well with generational patients, and we see anyone from 2 all the way to 102," Turney said. "So, the nurses need to work well with geriatrics and children. They need to be able to calm the nerves of children with anxiety. When they come in here, their anxiety is high. You walk in with a bunch of needles, and they need to be able to calm that child down."

Asthma is also problematic. An example of allergy induced asthma could be by encountering cat hair. Patients learn to avoid it as best as they can.

"We put them on an inhaler for the long-term, or they might have a short acting bronchodilator for

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Angela Turney, the nurse manager at the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic enjoys finding ways to help the nursing staff be flexible by balancing work with their personal lives whenever a need arises.

ALERGY

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emergencies,” Turney said. “A lot of children come in. They’re athletic and they get shortness of breath when they’re playing ball. And so, they have a rescue inhaler. We ask them to use it about 15 minutes before they start playing.”

It’s important for patients living with asthma to be compliant with the medications the physician prescribes.

“If they’re not, they’re probably going to have exacerbations and will probably end up in the ER,” she said.

Some of the nurses on staff have asthma and allergies. They have an opportunity upon being hired to be skin tested.

“They are more able to understand what the patients are saying when


they’ve experienced it themselves,” Turney said.

Turney became a nurse because she wants to help people. She helps not only patients but the nursing staff.

“Everyone has a story. Everyone has life happen to them,” she said. “And I like to be able to help them adjust during their difficult times.”

For more information on Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic, visit <https://oklahomaallergy.com/>









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A photograph of three healthcare professionals, two women and one man, wearing teal scrubs. They are standing in a row, with the woman in the center slightly in front of the others. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. A large yellow diagonal shape is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

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Leann Laubach, Ph.D., is an assistant professor and the baccalaureate program coordinator in the Department of Nursing at the University of Central Oklahoma.

She has been teaching at UCO since 2005 and has 22 years of experience as a nurse in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

"They set their own goals so it's a more personalized experience. It's not the goals I set for you as the instructor," Laubach said of the program's online offerings. "They are related to your ultimate goal for your degree. I think that's really where we pride ourselves both in our RN to BSN and our master's program is the personalization of the degree and maintaining that close contact with our students so we can help you be successful in our programs."

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"It's protecting students against inflation," Laubach said.

Laubach noted the flexibility of the program benefits students in ways

A UCO nursing degree opens up a myriad of possibilities.

that make it possible to advance their degrees.

"There's great value in that for someone who maybe is working full time and or has a family, they can carve those hours out in a time frame that works for them. I see that as very valuable for both programs. It makes it so students can do the work when they need to do the work and not at a time that works better for me."

The recent pandemic has created a divide for many nurses who enjoy their chosen careers but may feel burnt out in their current roles.

"I think now has challenged people to think outside of being at the bedside that whole time," Laubach said. "I think they are seeking education because they want that change. I think that's the future of where nursing is going that nurses are realizing they want to stay in nursing but they don't know if they want to stay at the bedside the whole time."

There is a definite opportunity for nurses to use their experiences to better the next generation of nursing through education or mentorship.

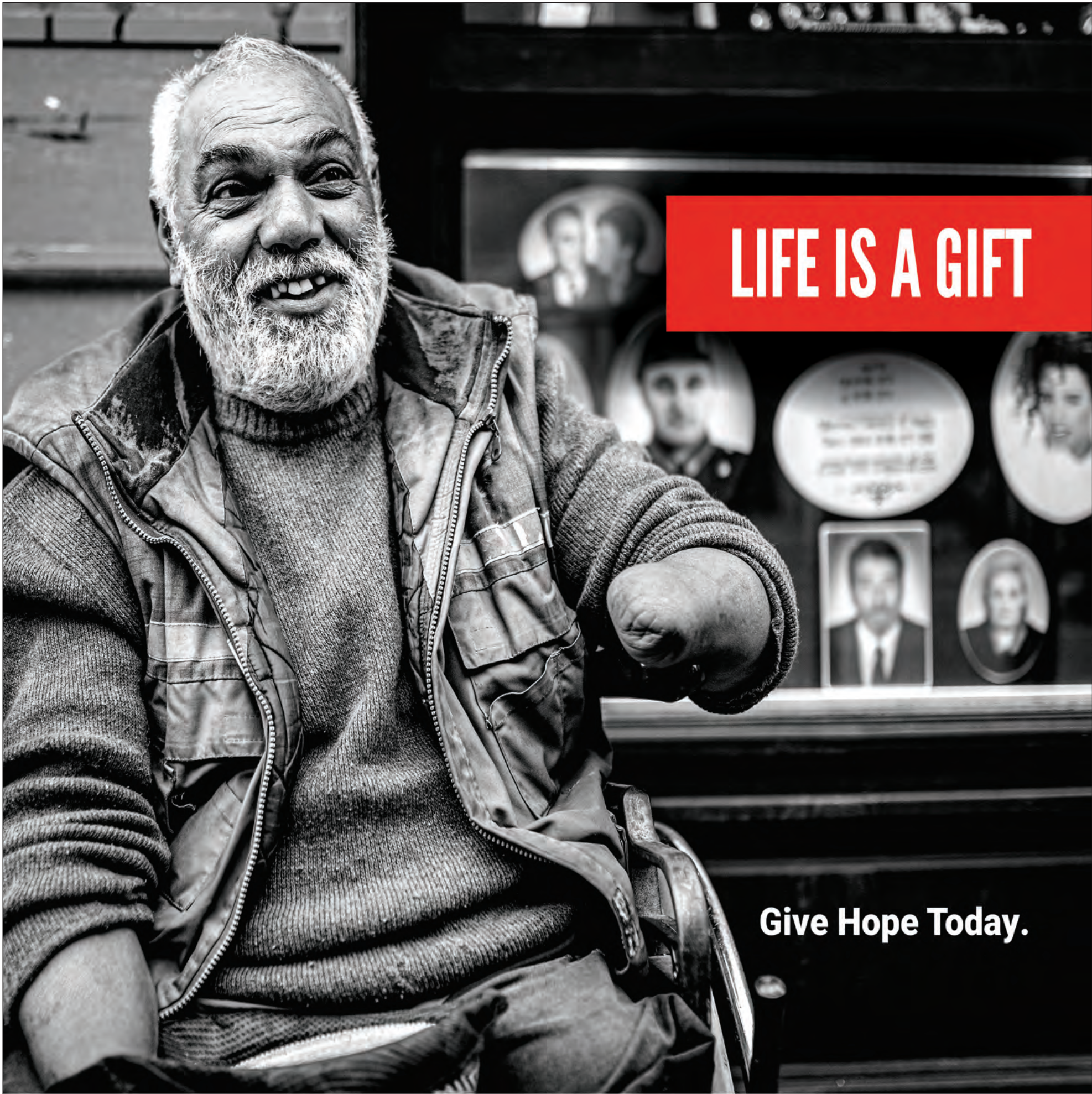
"I think for nurses who find they are passionate about teaching new nurses it's an advantage to come back and get an education or leadership degree," Laubach said. "A leadership degree would allow students to be the clinical leaders, the charge nurse and give them the skillset they need to be successful."

"The advantage of coming back to get your master's degree or even your bachelor's degree is expanding the way you think. The biggest thing is the growth mindset that occurs from the next degree to the next degree."

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Oklahoma's
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McEver retires as OMRF's vice president of research

Physician-scientist Rod McEver, M.D., who returned to the place of his high school internship and became one of the state's preeminent scientists, retired Monday following a 35-year career at the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

McEver, a graduate of Oklahoma City's John Marshall High School, first came to OMRF as a Sir Alexander Fleming Scholar at age 17. He earned his bachelor's degree from Yale University and attended medical school at the University of Chicago before returning to OMRF to open his lab in 1987.

The hematologist and cardiovascular biologist served the foundation as a principal investigator, program chair and, since 2016, as its vice president of research. He will continue to support OMRF in an emeritus role as a Distinguished Career Scientist.

"I can think of no one who better personifies OMRF's mission than Dr. Rod McEver," said OMRF President Andrew Weyrich, Ph.D. "Not only

has his work made a difference for patients worldwide, but he has been an incredible mentor to hundreds of scientists. He is who we all aspire to be."

McEver's pioneering work with blood cells led to his discovery of P-selectin, a molecule that plays a crucial role in inflammation and blood clotting. That discovery ultimately gave birth to the first FDA-approved treatment for the pain crises in sickle cell disease. The condition affects an estimated 100,000 Americans and 5 million people worldwide.

Succeeding McEver as vice president of research is OMRF scientist Courtney Griffin, Ph.D., who holds the foundation's Scott Zarrow Chair in Biomedical Research. Her lab studies blood vessel development and its connection to disease and good health. She joined OMRF in 2008.

Griffin served as scientific director for the Oklahoma Center for Adult Stem Cell Research from 2019 to 2023 and is an adjunct professor of cell



Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation physician-scientist Rod McEver, M.D.

biology at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. She earned her doctorate at the University of California, San Francisco, following her bachelor's degree at Harvard University.

The last 15 years has been critical to my development as a thoughtful researcher and leader," said Griffin. "He is the ultimate model of a scientific leader, and I am grateful for how he's prepared me for this new role."

"Dr. McEver's mentorship over



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INTEGRIS Health is looking for both sponsors and teams to play in its inaugural Pickleball Tournament on Saturday, April 15 at Chicken N Pickle in Oklahoma City!

The tournament will bring together true pickleball competitors, those who play for fun and even those trying the sport for the very first time.

But the event is about more than just fun and games. It is an official fundraiser to help support the life-changing services provided at the INTEGRIS Health Arcadia Trails Center for Addiction Recovery.

The facility is Oklahoma's most advanced state-of-the-art addiction, mental health and trauma treatment center in Edmond, offering a full continuum of care to include both inpatient and outpatient services for adults 18 and older.

The event will be held from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, April 15 at Chicken N Pickle, located at 8400 N. Oklahoma Ave. in Oklahoma City.

There are several opportunities to sponsor, play or both! However, there are limited spots available to play, so act fast before the bracket is full. The deadline to sponsor and be included in printed materials is Wednesday, March 15. Attached is a sponsorship form, or you can register online at <https://www.integrisingiving.org/pickleball>.

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Mother-Daughter Team Delivered Valentine's to Hospitalized



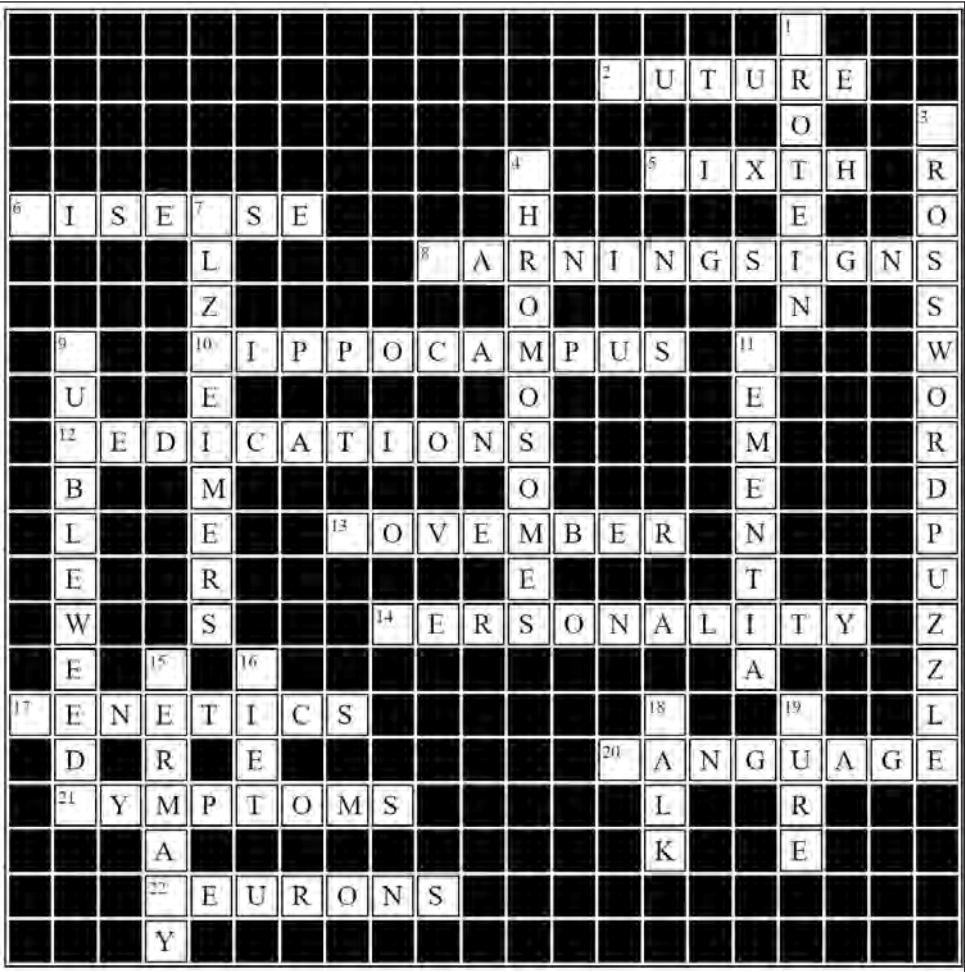
Sherry and her daughter, Alisha, delivered special Valentine's Day presents to patients hospitalized at INTEGRIS Health Baptist Medical Center this holiday.

The pair had seen another family do something similar around Christmas time and felt called to do the same. They reached out to the INTEGRIS Health Pastoral Care department, who helped facilitate their visit.

Pastoral Care Manager Brian Warfield escorted the women to

several different areas of the hospital so they could hand out their thoughtful gifts. "We were delighted to partner with these lovely women as they offered a tangible expression of kindness and encouragement to the sick and injured being cared for at our hospital."

In all, the mother-daughter duo known as Gifts2U delivered approximately 100 valentines, each containing a pair of socks and ChapStick.

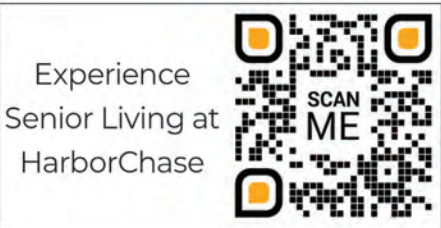


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