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## Cath Lab Intervention Saving Lives

Read the story on page 2

**Inside This Issue** | Page 4, OU Confronts Nursing Shortage

Page 8, Discover Your Path - SWOSU

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SEE OUR AD ON PAGE 2



# Chris Deemer, RN

## Saves Lives at SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital-Midwest'

story and photo by James Coburn, Staff Writer

A new cardiac catheterization (cath) lab will be retro-fitted in January with updated equipment at SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital-Midwest. The new equipment will provide better imaging quality, said Chris Deemer, a registered nurse serving in the cardiac cath lab at SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital-Midwest. Two functioning rooms continue to be in place during implementation.

"I believe it will be beneficial to the patients and that it will reduce radiation exposure and then obviously improve diagnostic capacity or ability of the physician based on improved imagery," Deemer said.

The cath lab is used to test or treat heart or blood vessel problems, such as clogged arteries or irregular heartbeats. A thin

hollow tube called a catheter enters the arterial system either from the right wrist or right groin. Coronary access to blood vessels on the surface of the heart prevents the heart muscle from damage.

"We visualize the circulation using contrast in real time under fluoroscopy or X-Ray," he said. "If there are areas where the cardiologist can intervene either by expanding a balloon and/or a stent to hold the vessel open, then we do so. It's an assessment of the circulation on the surface of the heart, the arteries that supply the heart muscle itself, and a diagnostic tool for determining cardiac function."

Having an interventional cath lab in Midwest City saves lives. Patients transferring from outlying areas such as Shawnee save time by coming to SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital-Midwest without

needing to go to the main SSM campus in midtown Oklahoma City.

"My requirement when being on-call is to be within the building within 30 minutes," he said.

Deemer has devoted his nursing career to cardiac care. He began as a nursing assistant at Oklahoma Heart Hospital-South while attending nursing school at OSU/OKC. He has been an RN since January of 2015.

He recalled bringing a warm blanket to a patient early in his career. The woman's grateful response for such a small thing became etched in his memory. Deemer had been a restaurant manager before his nursing career.

"I never had anybody respond like that when I brought their properly cooked rib-eye or whatever," he said. "Now it's a privilege to be entrusted with people's care. And it's obviously a lot of responsibility. It's an opportunity to help people by providing comfort and reassurance. It's an opportunity to serve."

Deemer began working for Saints in August of 2022.

"This really is an exciting opportunity because this hospital had been here for decades, a very

long time," he said.

He said the hospital has already benefited from SSM's 2021 acquisition and investment.

"There's tremendous financial and other investment that's taken place in the hospital itself and surrounding property," he said. "Not only is it a remodeling of the hospital itself, but community revitalization," he said. "Patients comment on it regularly that it's so much nicer and 'I'm glad that Saints is here.'"

His workflow involves both inpatient and outpatient care. A pre-post team helps prepare patients arriving in the cath lab. The lab also includes an ECHO cardiography staff that Deemer works closely with.

Both a physician and Deemer meet with the patient before their catheterization. Deemer likes to explain the procedure. Some patients want a lot of explanation while others only want an abbreviated version with the high points.

A third registered nurse was recently hired to serve with Deemer and another nurse in the cath lab.

"We all work well together.

See DEEMER Page 3

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Chris Deemer, RN, SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital-Midwest, enjoys the modern updates that have taken place and are ongoing at the hospital.

DEEMER

Continued from Page 2

Everyone has strengths that we can draw upon for patient care,” he said.

Team members have a group chat informing everyone what to expect as they rotate through their shift. Even when the nurses are not working on a case, they are still in the control room standing by, ready to provide assistance.

“It’s very much team oriented,” Deemer said.

His nursing experience has made him more health conscious for himself and his family, he said.

He also keeps himself prepared for interventions.

“I stopped at a car accident long ago when I was still in nursing school,” he said. “There were a few things I would have liked to have had in the moment before EMS got there to provide a little bit of help. Things of that nature have kind of informed my day to day.”

Deemer balances his life by a fun ride on his motorcycle.

“I ride it like a scalded dog,” he said. “And there is family time of course. I just made cheesecake last night with my 14-year-old daughter. It was our first attempt. So that was a lot of fun.”

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# Oklahoma Universities Confront Nursing Shortage

## | Dean Hoff Visits with The Journal Record

story and photo by Jeff Elkins, The Journal Record

The nationwide nursing shortage continues, but the local outlook remains positive as universities ramp up efforts to reinforce numbers on the front lines. The University of Oklahoma and Marian University's Oklahoma City campus have rolled out programming in the area to address a critical shortage of nursing care professionals. Oklahoma ranks 46th in the U.S. for nurses per capita, with just 7.5 nurses per 1,000 residents, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

At Marian University's Oklahoma City campus, Denise Ruth, faculty site director, saw its largest class of 17 admitted in the fall for its Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing Program, a 16-month second-degree program that combines online coursework with hands-on learning and clinical rotations. The school has a partnership with Mercy Hospital to assist students with a career

transition while providing qualified nursing professionals to Mercy's system. "Our ultimate goal here at Marian is to continue supporting our community that needs the nursing staff to run the hospitals and clinics in the community," Ruth said.

The Fran and Earl Ziegler College of Nursing at the University of Oklahoma began its partnership this fall with the University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma and Murray State College. According to a news release, the guaranteed admission opportunity establishes OU as the preferred collaborator to advance nursing education in Ardmore. As many begin their careers close to where they receive their degree, it's believed that the program will result in more nurses in rural areas where the need is most pronounced. It's the second initiative in recent years to address the shortage. Last year, the college expanded the size of its nursing class capacity for both its traditional BSN program and the




accelerated BSN program.

The school enrolled 296 freshman students in the fall semester of 2020. This fall, the school welcomed 517 new students to the school, according to data from the OU College of Nursing. Julie Hoff, dean of the OU College of Nursing, said the school is graduating more nurses than ever, but the issue is hospitals continue to need nurses, and many graduates end up working in insurance, pharmaceuticals and outpatient care. She said it's important to clarify that the nation is experiencing a "nursing care shortage." "Even though they might be choosing to work in hospitals, they're not staying in hospitals" Hoff said. "The percentage of nurses working in hospitals right now is at an all-time low." Hoff said in 2011, close to 62% of nurses worked in hospitals, but that has declined to nearly 57% in 2023. Nursing professionals have become increasingly outspoken about the conditions of working at hospitals since the COVID-19 pandemic. The American Nurses Association reports burnout, high patient-to-staff ratios and early retirement as reasons for the shortage, only heightened by the surge of Americans seeking care during the pandemic. Additionally, the association reports that 1 in 4 nurses report being assaulted on the job. "We have to recognize that nursing truly is the oxygen of the health care system," Hoff said. "Yes, it takes a team to take care of patients and families, but nurses provide a majority of the direct care in the U.S., and they're very critical

to our fragile health care system."

Mercy Health makes monthly contributions toward any current outstanding student loan debt for nurses who qualify. Pell Grant recipients can receive up to \$20,000 in repayment assistance. Emily Eriksson, executive director of nursing at Mercy, said its program is key during a time when hospitals everywhere are struggling coming out of the pandemic to retain and recruit nurses into the hospital setting, which can be stressful at times.

Eriksson said nursing care is a job that's needed 24 hours a day, and night shifts and weekends can be reasons why some students look outside of a hospital setting for employment. "But we also do have some who have the drive to work in a hospital setting, and those are the ones we're trying to get out there and capture," Eriksson said. Nurse Journal reports the shortage is projected to peak in 2027 and ease over subsequent years. Despite the long-term uphill battle, which is expected to continue, Eriksson said her outlook is optimistic. "We have gotten across the line in the post-pandemic world, and I feel like we're on the right path now to building up that workforce," Eriksson said. "We're getting very creative with how we do staffing and things like that in the hospital setting to help provide some of that work-life balance for our nurses, so they can have that time at home and here in the hospital if that's where they choose to work. But we're on the right track moving forward."



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# Nursing Home Advocates Endorse New Federal Legislation

Care Providers Oklahoma today announced their support of the “Protecting Rural Seniors’ Access to Care Act,” a federal bill that would block implementation of a new staffing mandate proposed by the Biden Administration.

The bill, cosponsored by U.S. Sen. James Lankford (R-Oklahoma), states: “The Secretary of Health and Human Services may not implement, enforce, or otherwise give effect to the proposed rule entitled ‘Medicare and Medicaid Programs; Minimum Staffing Standards for Long-Term Care Facilities and Medicaid Institutional Payment Transparency Reporting’ published by the Department of Health and Human Services on September 6, 2023 (88 Fed. Reg. 61352–61429), and may not promulgate any substantially similar rule.” Similar language has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives as part of the Health and Human Services budget bill.

The rule proposed by the Biden Administration would require specific nursing home staff to spend a minimum number of hours with each resident – 2.45 nurse aide hours per

resident per day (HPRD) and 0.55 registered nurse (RN) HPRD – as well as have a 24-hour registered nurse (RN) on site.

Nursing home professionals have argued that the rule ignores the staffing crisis occurring in Oklahoma and across the nation and imposes impossible to meet goals and crippling financial penalties on a field that is already struggling to recruit and adequately compensate qualified staff.

An analysis of the Biden administration mandate by professional services firm CLA CliftonLarsenAllen, LLP (CLA) drew the following conclusions:

- If implemented, the proposed mandate would require Oklahoma nursing homes to hire an estimated 1,253 additional full-time employees, including 538 nurse aides and 715 RNs.
- The proposed mandate would cost Oklahoma nursing homes approximately \$76 million per year.
- Over 99 percent of nursing homes are currently not meeting at least one of the three proposed staffing requirements: the 2.45 nurse aide HPRD, the 0.55 RN HPRD, and the 24/7 RN.
- If nursing homes are unable to increase their workforce to meet these new requirements, more than 5800 nursing home residents could be impacted by census reductions.

Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt has already signed a letter, along with 14 other governors opposing the mandate.

Care Providers Oklahoma President and CEO Steven Buck thanked Oklahoma’s elected officials for opposing the mandate, which he said would be incredibly damaging to senior care in Oklahoma.

“As I have said for months, this mandate makes the federal government seem completely oblivious to the dual threats impacting seniors receiving care in nursing homes: a severe staff shortage coupled with chronic underfunding,” said Buck. “The Biden administration is quite literally demanding that our facilities hire staffers who do not exist



with money we do not have. That is a recipe for disaster. My thanks go out to Sen. Lankford, Gov. Stitt and others who have worked to block a policy that will negatively impact senior care in Oklahoma and elsewhere.”

Buck went on to say the mandate would ultimately hurt vulnerable seniors the most.

“We can’t hire the number of staffers this mandate is proposing because they don’t exist,” said Buck. “What facilities can do and will do to avoid new penalties is to reduce the number of seniors they are caring for by ceasing to admit new residents. That means vulnerable seniors will be left without the care they need. That is a terrible outcome for these seniors, and it is why we continue to oppose this unworkable, unwise mandate.”



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# Mercy Pioneers Time-saving Chatbot that Redefines Health Care Experience

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Mercy, an innovative health care leader, recently introduced “Toni,” a savvy chatbot designed to make your health care experience smoother and more convenient. Toni acts as a virtual assistant, using smart technology to help with things like scheduling appointments and refilling prescriptions, day and night.

“While consumers encounter chatbots in many industries, they’re relatively new to health care,” said Steve Mackin, Mercy president and CEO. “These tech advancements save patients time. Toni is part of Mercy’s commitment to using technology to make the health care experience better, more convenient and most importantly, private and secure.”

Mercy is one of the first major health systems in the country to provide chatbots. Toni is designed to help you in real-time, providing personalized responses to your questions and needs, 24/7.

“Toni can handle your easier than a phone Carlton, Mercy’s executive development. “Research getting answers from a with forms or making puts you in control of decisions, and the best able to do even more future.”

Here are some key make your health care experience better:

Personalized Interaction: Toni chats with you online in a friendly, human-like way and can even share extra web resources.

24/7 Accessibility: Need help at 3 a.m.? Toni is ready, breaking free from the limits of regular business hours for your convenience.

Secure Identification: Toni accesses your personal health care records to better assist you, but your information stays safe and private, offering a seamless and secure experience.

Instant Assistance: Toni quickly helps with common questions, like confirming and canceling appointments or renewing prescriptions.

Live Agent Connection: If you prefer talking to a real person, Toni can connect you while keeping track of what you discussed.“We named ‘Toni’ after our beloved Sister of Mercy Mary ‘Roch’ Rocklage, who was born Antoinette Marie Rocklage,” said Mackin. “Sister Roch was an icon in health care and humbly stepped into the national spotlight to lead the American Hospital Association and others in her passion for health



requests faster and call,” said Tamara director of product shows people prefer chatbot over dealing phone calls. Toni your health care part is Toni will be for patients in the features of Toni that

care access for all. Although Sister Roch died last year, it’s fitting that we would name this innovation after her because it provides greater access which she championed.”

In the last 30 days, Toni has interacted with over 14,000 users and answered about 42,000 questions, evidence of how Toni immediately adds value by offering personalized help and support to Mercy patients.

Amanda Richards, a social media specialist at Mercy, shared her firsthand experience with Toni, emphasizing how the chatbot makes managing appointments much easier and quicker.

“As a Mercy co-worker who chats with hundreds of patients online each week, I see firsthand how it’s helping our patients and I use Toni, too,” said Richards. “I’m thankful for the convenience Toni offers, because it is even easier to change or cancel an appointment now.”

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CROSSWORD: Heart Attack and Cardiac Conditions

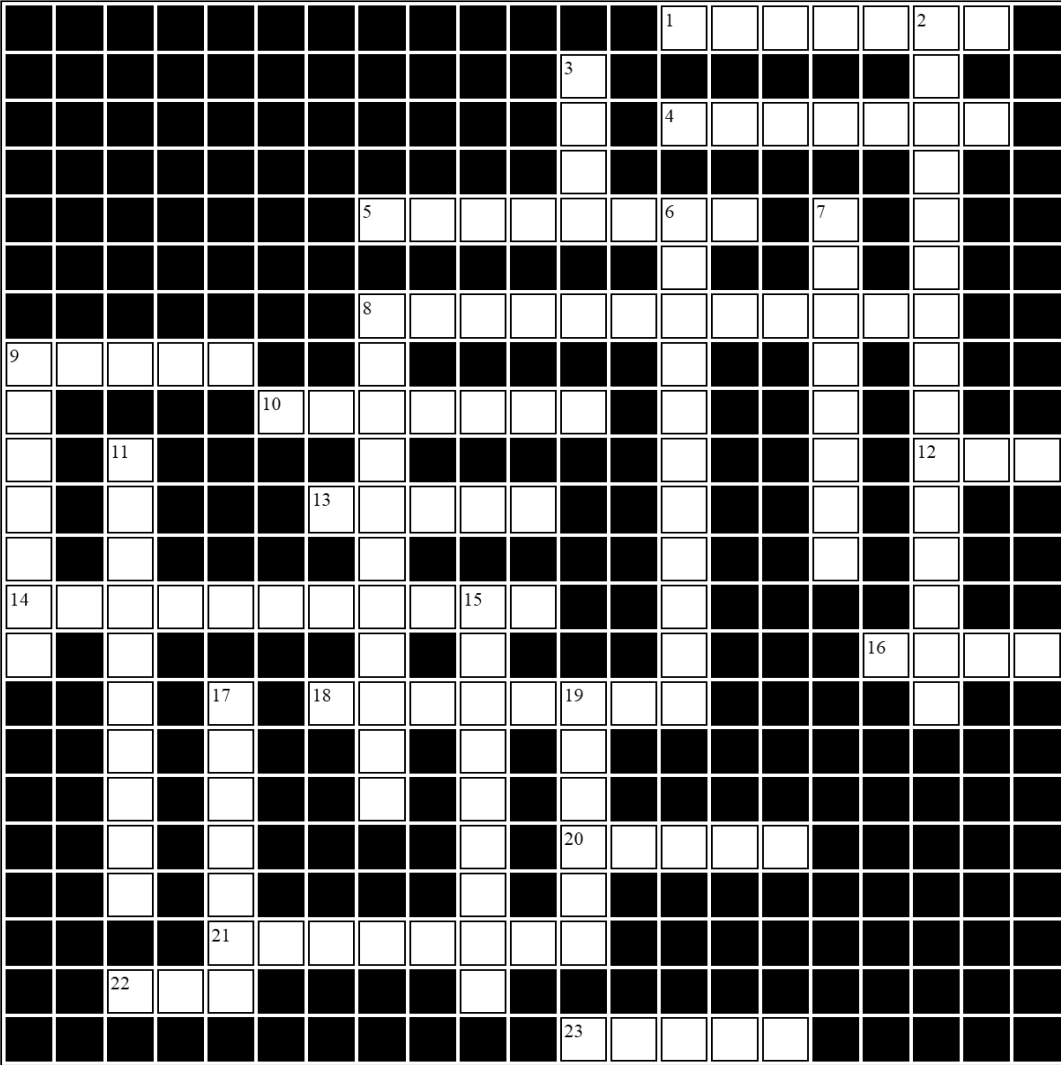
Across

- 1. having to do with the heart
- 4. type of diet to help you live well
- 5. arteries of the heart
- 8. chest pushes during CPR
- 9. carries oxygen and food to the body
- 10. risk factor for heart attack vistims
- 12. emergency medical system
- 13. organ that pumps blood
- 14. death of heart muscle
- 16. bones that protect the heart
- 18. blood vessels with oxygen-rich blood
- 20. largest artery in the body
- 21. to strengthen the heart
- 22. cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- 23. beat felt in the arteries

Down

- 2. narrowing of arteries
- 3. vessel with oxygen-poor blood
- 6. behaviors that increase a persons chance of getting a disease
- 7. build up of material on the inner walls of arteries
- 8. fatty substance made by the body
- 9. combined with compressions for CPR
- 11. pulse, breathing rate, skin charateristics
- 15. most prominent signal of heart attack
- 17. one who performs CPR
- 19. taking oxygen into the lungs

ANSWERS ON PAGE 12







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The SWOSU School of Nursing has a reputation for excellence, offering five different nursing programs to fit the needs of all students. If you're looking to start your nursing career, the traditional BSN program taught on campus is an excellent option. Alternatively, if you're already an RN looking to advance your career, SWOSU offers four online degrees, including an RN to BSN degree and graduate degrees in nursing education and nursing administration.

But the nursing programs at SWOSU don't stop there. The university also offers online professional programs in Health Information Management and Information Management at the graduate level. Additionally, SWOSU has two contractual agreement programs for Occupational Therapy Assistant and Physical Therapist Assistant Programs in partnership with Caddo Kiowa Technology Center.

SWOSU is proud to have six nationally accredited programs in Health Information Management, Nursing, Occupational Therapy Assistant, Physical Therapist Assistant, Radiologic Technology, and Medical Laboratory Technician. The university's professionally and academically qualified faculty are dedicated to mentoring students and helping them achieve their goals.

At SWOSU, students have access to a diverse selection of academic college courses and are rated as one of the most affordable universities in the region. Additionally, SWOSU's location in Weatherford is conveniently located on Interstate 40, less than one hour west of the Oklahoma City metro area. Whether you're a commuter or a traditional student, SWOSU provides accessibility and convenience.

SWOSU's nursing program is more than just traditional classroom learning. The university also boasts a nursing simulation lab that provides hands-on experience in a controlled environment. The lab features high-tech manikins that can simulate a wide range of medical conditions and scenarios, allowing students to practice and

develop their clinical skills in a safe and supportive environment.

SWOSU's nursing programs have a strong emphasis on community service and engagement. Nursing students can participate in various community-based programs and initiatives, such as health fairs and clinics, providing valuable service to the local community while also gaining practical experience and skills.

SWOSU's nursing faculty are experienced professionals who bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the classroom. They are dedicated to helping students succeed and are committed to providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Additionally, the university offers a range of scholarships and financial aid opportunities to help nursing students achieve their academic and career goals.

In summary, SWOSU's nursing programs provide students with a comprehensive education that prepares them for a successful career in nursing. With a strong focus on hands-on experience, community engagement, and academic excellence, SWOSU's nursing programs provide students with the skills, knowledge, and experience they need to make a positive impact in the world of healthcare. Join us at SWOSU and pursue your dreams of becoming a nurse while receiving a top-quality education. We are dedicated to helping our students succeed. For more information on SWOSU's nursing programs visit:

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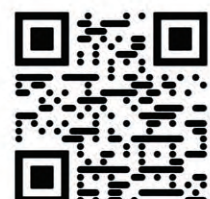
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# Mercy Adds New OB/GYN Specialist



Dr. Jesse Campbell is a regional physician executive at Mercy in Oklahoma at the Love Family Women's Center.

With the addition of a new OB/GYN, Mercy is preparing to serve more patients at the Love Family Women's Center currently under construction on its hospital campus in northwest Oklahoma City. Expected to open next year, the new facility will increase the hospital's capacity to deliver babies by 40%.

"We are excited to be able to serve more women and infants at the Love Family Women's Center when it opens," said Dr. Jesse Campbell, regional physician executive at Mercy in Oklahoma. "Our labor and delivery unit has been at capacity for several years, and we simply need more space. Adding more space means we need physicians and staff to care for patients, and we're excited Dr. Shelby Bassett has joined us as we prepare for the growth to come."

Dr. Bassett recently joined Mercy as an OB/GYN, where she sees patients at Mercy Clinic OB/GYN - North Meridian, across the street from Mercy Hospital Oklahoma City. Dr. Bassett is one of two new specialists Mercy

is adding to serve more families in the region. The second OB/GYN is scheduled to begin in 2024.

"Working in women's health is a great privilege," said Dr. Bassett. "I love building a personal relationship and transitioning through different stages of life alongside my patients. It's especially exciting to be joining the Mercy team as we enter a new era of care at the Love Family Women's Center."

Originally from Birmingham, Alabama, Dr. Bassett was drawn to practice in a metropolitan environment like Oklahoma City where she could work with a wide variety of patients. Her fiancé is also originally from the state.

"I've always been a big problem solver and am constantly searching for ways to improve things. This led me to the challenge of medicine," Dr. Bassett said. "I love the diversity of care that OB/GYN allows. As a physician, I am there during some of my patients' best

see SPECIALIST on page 11



# VICKEY'S MIRACLE

By Theresa Green

Oklahoma City - It's the season when we talk a lot about miracles, and one Oklahoma woman will tell you she is living proof they exist.

Vickey McDonald, 62, spent more than half a year hospitalized.

"I had two heart attacks, seven surgeries, spent almost seven full months in the hospital," she said.

Her prognosis was grim. McDonald says she was told by doctors at the hospital in February that it was unlikely she'd survive.

"It was very grave, yes. She was given really no chance of survival at all. Pretty grim," said Tracy Bates, a nurse practitioner with Valir PACE.

Doctors at the hospital planned to send her home on hospice care, but McDonald chose a different path, enrolling instead in an all-inclusive care program called Valir PACE. It is a holistic program of care that offered help with her medical, therapy, dental, transportation, home care and other needs. It all sounded too good to be true.

"At first, I was like, this is not for real. You got to be kidding me," she said. "But then I realized they really do everything that lady said they would do. They really do."

Now, several days a week, you will find McDonald hard at work in the physical and occupational therapy clinic at PACE in downtown Oklahoma City.

"She's one of the hardest workers I know in therapy," said Kirsten Paschal-Wilson, Valir PACE Therapy Manager.

"She wants to be there. She shows up. She puts in the work, and it doesn't stop at therapy. When she gets home, she keeps putting in the work because she loves her life. She loves to live it and she's going to do it independently."

It's more than just therapy, though. McDonald is seen regularly by the team of health professionals in the PACE clinic too.

"Just seeing her be able to walk out the door and walk back in on a regular basis. A year ago, for sure, I don't know that would have happened," Bates said. "She's very determined to do the very best she can do as long as she possibly can. She's a fighter – 100 percent a fighter."

McDonald's is a story of sheer grit, determination and what many, including her health team at Valir PACE, might call a medical miracle too.

"It's hard not to get emotional," said Bates, her eyes welling with tears, "because it shows that I am where I need to be."

And McDonald says clearly so is she.

"Went to my doctor in August for my six-month check-up. He said, 'Let me explain it to you. When you left the hospital in February, you had a zero percent chance of survival. So whatever you are doing, you need to keep doing it.'"

The grandmother of 10 is determined to keep doing just that, working hard to get healthier, to continue to live life independently and to prove wrong those doctors who gave her no chance of



Vickey McDonald works with physical therapist Ana Stone, PT, at Valir PACE. PACE therapists say Vickey is one of the hardest workers they know in physical therapy, overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds.

survival just ten months ago.

"She swears up and down that she wouldn't have done it without PACE," said Paschal-Wilson, "But I don't think she would have done it without herself either."

"Life is a gift. My family is so

precious to me and I'm thankful that I am able to spend more time with them. I thank God every day for Valir PACE. I'd sing it from the rooftop if I could sing," McDonald said, adding with a chuckle, "When I get my voice back, I might do that."

## SPECIALIST

Continued from Page 10

days, when they welcome a new life into their family. But I also get to make a difference in a patient's quality of life through gynecologic care."

Dr. Bassett earned a bachelor's degree in biology at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and a medical degree from the University of South Alabama in Mobile, Alabama. She recently completed residency in Shreveport, Louisiana, with Louisiana State University Health.

After residency, Dr. Bassett gravitated toward Mercy, where she appreciated the focus on women's health, including the ongoing work with the Love Family Women's Center. The four-story, 175,000-square-foot building will feature an obstetrics emergency department and the state's first hospital-based low intervention birthing unit staffed by certified midwives. It will also serve as a hub for services designed for women of all ages, including women's surgical recovery and physical therapy.

The Tom and Judy Love family, for whom the center is named, gave a \$10 million lead donation to kick off the project, inspiring another \$33 million total in donations toward the Love Family Women's Center.

Three large cesarean section suites in the women's center will connect to the hospital on the first floor via the existing hospital surgical suite. This strategic design allows for quick, safe access to additional hospital services, like Mercy's Level III neonatal intensive care unit, if medical emergencies arise.

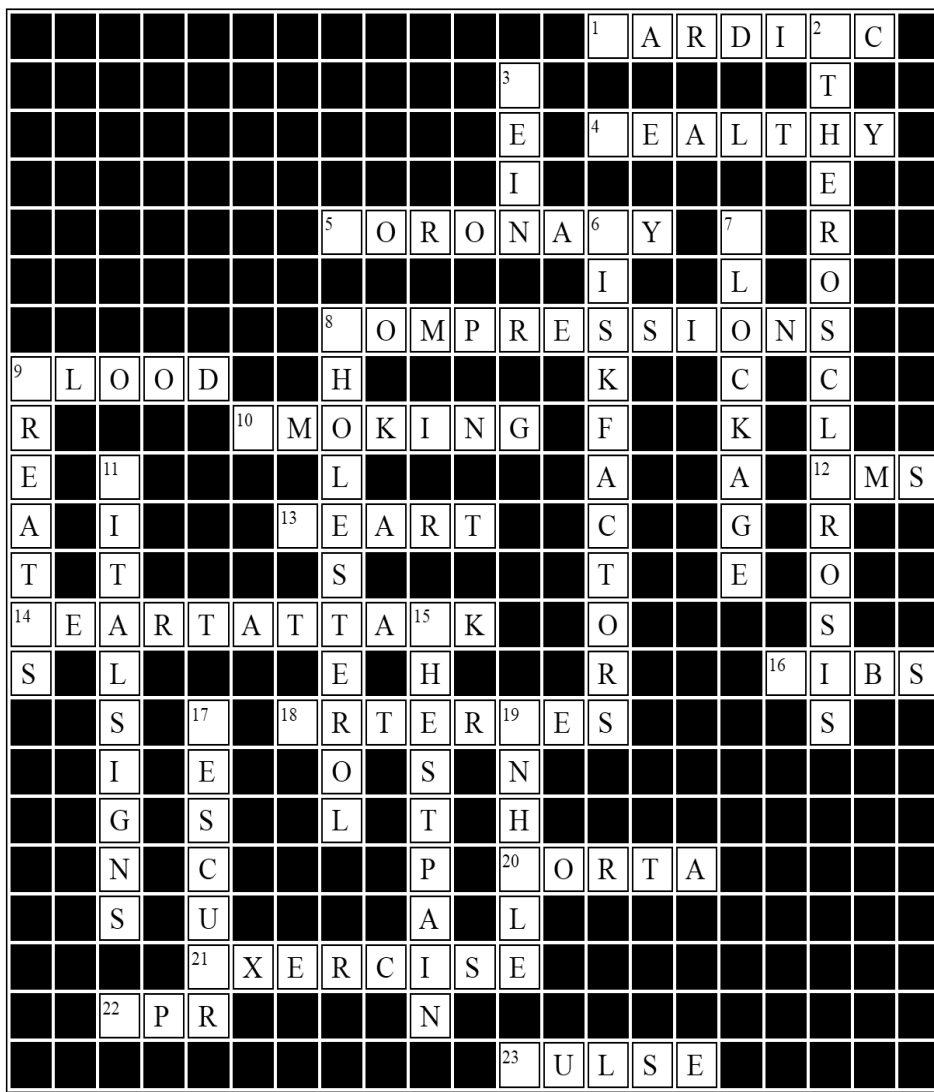
"My goal is always to provide competent, evidence-based care that is driven by a strong doctor-patient relationship," Dr. Bassett said. "I look forward to providing this type of care to my clinic patients and those I meet through the Love Family Women's Center, which I believe will make a positive impact on the overall health of women in this region for generations to come."

Dr. Bassett enjoys music and college sports. She especially enjoys supporting her alma mater, the University of Alabama.

An advertisement for the American Nurses Association (ANA). It features a nurse in blue scrubs with a stethoscope, seen from the back with her right arm raised in a fist. The background is blue with white plus signs and a red graphic element. Large white and red text reads "You've GOT THIS!". A white circular badge on the right says "JOIN FOR ONLY \$15 PER MONTH". At the bottom, logos for the Oklahoma Nurses Association (ONA) and the American Nurses Association (ANA) are shown, along with the website "JOINANA.ORG".



**OKNT** CROSSWORD ANSWERS: Heart Attack/Cardiac Conditions



# OSDH Encourages HIV Testing on World AIDS Day

The impact of the HIV epidemic has been profound, affecting individuals, families and entire communities across the globe. In Oklahoma, an estimated 8,800 individuals have HIV and approximately 17% (1 in 6) are unaware of their status.

HIV has been a recognized virus for over 40 years, and is now a manageable chronic condition through advancements in HIV treatment and prevention.

In Oklahoma, the OSDH Rapid Start program provides equitable access to prevention, care and PrEP medications to clients in rural areas. Additionally, the program has successfully retained more than 90% of their clients in the PrEP program with no resulted seroconversion to HIV positive status for any clients taking PrEP medications.

PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is medication available to prevent persons who are HIV negative from getting HIV.

This year's theme, "World AIDS Day 35: Remember and Commit," pays tribute to those we have lost to

HIV/AIDS.

Remembering the lives lost not only honors their memory, but also emphasizes the urgency of the commitment to end the HIV epidemic.

“Through remembrance, we draw strength and determination to redouble our efforts in fighting the disease and providing support to those with HIV,” said Terrainia Harris, director, Sexual Health & Harm Reduction Service with OSDH. “It’s time to remind ourselves of the importance of compassion, empathy and solidarity in the face of adversity.”

The other aspect of this year's theme, "Commit," emphasizes the collective responsibility to act.

Individuals can make a difference, whether through working to improve equitable access and ending the disparities in relation to prevention, care and treatment; promoting scientific education and awareness; or supporting organizations that work tirelessly to serve those at risk and living with HIV. It will take a whole of society response to end the epidemic.

**When it comes to your patients' health, you are in the driver's seat.**

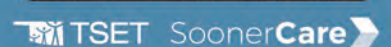
The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline offers **FREE** services to quit tobacco. Encourage your patients to sign up.

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adult smokers  
who saw a  
health care  
professional  
last year did  
not receive  
advice to quit.**

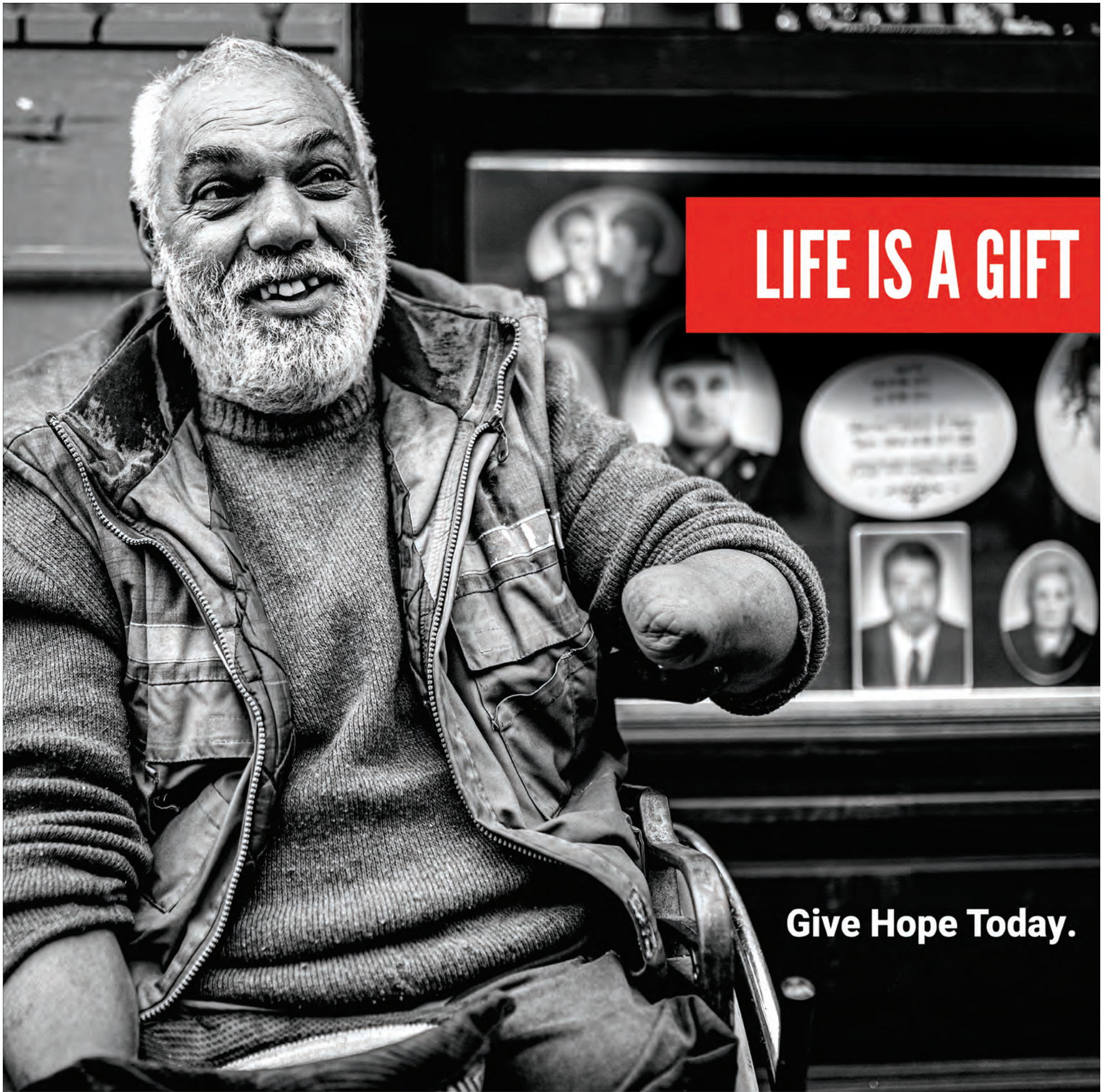
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**Text READY to 34191.**

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