

Comprehensive Quality Care Bone & Joint Hospital Attracts Loyalty

Read Terry's story on page 2

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Terry Meler-Flinn, RN

From 10-Year-Old Observer to Director of perioperative services: A 39-Year Journey in Nursing.

story and photo by James Coburn, Staff Writer

Terry Meler-Flinn, RN, knew as a 10-year-old that she wanted to become a nurse. She is in her 39th year of service at SSM Health Bone & Joint Hospital at St. Anthony. Her sister was born with hip dysplasia and as a 3-year-old was a patient there.

Terry's parents allowed her to stay with her sister overnight. She learned how the staff cared for her sister by observing and listening to the staff. The surgeon explained things to her as well as he could to a child.

"That intrigued me at the time. He showed me the X-rays. I really felt involved with her care, though I was just her sister being a family member at her side," Terry said. "So ever since then nursing was my goal. I

wanted to be a nurse and I wanted to work at Bone & Joint."

The culture at Bone & Joint continues to keep her going. Terry serves as director of perioperative services.

"Orthopedics is my first love," she said.

Perioperative services take a multidisciplinary approach to ensure that patients are assessed properly upon arrival. Patients must be well enough to have surgery. A patient-centered team follows the patients throughout their pre-admission, procedure, recovery, and post-recovery.

"My staff here, I think is very committed to nursing care. They're always in a learning mode and they always seem to really put their patients first,"

Terry said. "They come to work with a caring attitude, and it really shows with how they interact with their patients."

Bone and Joint nurses are highly skilled individuals in their understanding of bone disease as experts in their field. Bone and Joint is co-managed by physicians and hospital leadership with engagement by all the care providers.

Physicians at SSM Health Bone & Joint Hospital at St. Anthony partner with the nursing staff to ensure all the processes meet the best needs of the patients.

The nurses are very dedicated, engaged, making sure that things that don't work are worked on until those processes are changed and improved. There's a lot of tenure at that facility, Terry said.

Terry began her career as a circulator and a scrub nurse at Bone & Joint after earning her nursing degree at Oklahoma City Community College.

Throughout the years, Terry developed her skills in acute care and rehabilitation. She

would work in the ER on weekends. She said the medical staff were great orthopedic mentors.

"I was able to grow and elevate into the role that I'm in today," Terry said. "And I feel like it's helped me to maintain quality. I just wanted to make sure we were still No. 1."

Many remarkable advances in technology evolved to impact her as a nurse. The manual phase of forming the bone has been replaced by computerized assistance.

When she arrived at Bone & Joint there was a surgeon who did not have to use cutting jigs to form the joint replacements.

"He was so good, he sat there and eye-balled it," she said. "The prosthesis fit perfect. Throughout the years the instrumentations became more complex. There are more pieces before getting to that final implant that it has evolved that now we have robotics."

Bone & Joint was one of the first hospitals in the United

Continued next page



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Terry Meler-Flinn, RN, is a kind spirit serving patients at SSM Health Bone & Joint Hospital at St. Anthony.

Serving

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States to use a MAKOplasty robotic arm system to perform a hip or knee replacement.

Adaptation was always exciting, she said. Learning opens new avenues for patient recovery.

"I think as a nurse we try to nourish other people and give them care. There's been times when I've seen patients and their families return. They give the nurses a pat on the back or a thank you," Terry said.

She wishes more people in the world today would have more compassion and empathy.

"I think you learn to look at the world a little differently. I think my career has helped me to kind of see the whole person and not just gearing in on one aspect of a person. We're all human and we all need feedback, love, and we need care and support. I think looking at the whole picture has kind of given me a new aspect on life."

She loves dogs and all creatures, large and small. Her home borders the countryside, giving her opportunities to feed foxes, raccoons, possums, and different critters on her land.

"We have a lot of racoons. They bring their babies up there. They're cute little things," she said.

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33 Years of Compassionate Care

story and photo by Vickie Jenkins, staff writer

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Tina Austin, RN, is the Director of Clinical Services and brings 33 years of experience to her role. She is not only an exceptional nurse but also a role model for the entire medical staff.

“When I was a little girl, I always thought I would grow up to be a teacher,” Tina shared. “I learned the Golden Rule, striving to treat others with respect and kindness. My plans changed,

but in many ways, being a director feels a lot like teaching,” she emphasized. “I try to be patient with everyone, teaching important values and guiding others, just as a teacher would.

I learned at an early age, learning to respect those around me. Whether meeting someone for the first time or reconnecting with familiar faces, I have always enjoyed being around people. I’m definitely a people person,” she said with a smile.

As the Director of Warr Acres Nursing Center, Tina oversees many responsibilities. “We currently have 57 residents, though that number may vary,” she explained. “We’re in the process of remodeling to accommodate more residents.” Despite her leadership role, Tina remains hands-on. “Our nurses, and CMA’s give excellent care, and even though I’m the Director, I’m still on the floor, starting IV’s, or taking vitals. There’s



Tina Austin, RN, Director of Clinical Services.

nothing that I won’t do myself,” she added.

When asking Tina why she wanted to become a nurse she replied, “After graduation, I went to cosmetology school. I was married by then and had been working in a salon for two years, but I wasn’t making much money. During a conversation with my husband, he suggested that I find a stable job and I realized he was right. At that exact moment, a TV commercial about 911 came on and it hit me, I wanted a job where I could truly help people.

That when I decided to enter the medical field and become a nurse. I earned my RN in two years and I’ve loved every minute of it.”

Tina’s nursing journey career began at John Peters Smith County Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas where she worked in the ER. “I loved the fast-paced environment of the ER. I thrived in the ER’s energy and intensity,” she reflected. “It was an incredible experience, but over

Continued next page

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AUSTIN

Continued from Page 4

the years I had the opportunity to work in a wide range of healthcare settings." Tina has cared for patients in long-term facilities, supporting those with dementia, and Parkinson's, and she has worked in hospitals across multiple states. "Each experience has been valuable, but no matter where I go, I always feel myself drawn back to nursing centers," she said. "There something special about the deep, personal connections I get to form with the residents. It often reminds me of my own parents and grandparents. In these settings, I feel a deep sense of purpose and belonging. It's where I truly feel at home, and I know it's making a lasting imprint on the lives of the people I care for."

Even as the Director of Clinical Services, Tina doesn't shy away from working alongside her nursing staff. "I'm very hands on," Tina explained. "I start IV's, take vitals and if my nurses need

help, I'm right there beside them. Currently the facility cares for 57 residents but that number can vary. I am not above doing what the other nurses do on the floor."

When asked what advice she would give to someone entering the medical field, Tina responded. "I would tell them it is the best career they could ever choose. While it requires plenty of hard work the rewards are immense. You'll always have job security because nurses are needed everywhere. You will have countless opportunities to grow and explore different areas of the field. There's always a new path to take in nursing and that's what makes it such a fulfilling profession."

Having spent 33 years caring for others, Tina still loves her work. Her dedication to her residents is evident. Each day brings new opportunities to connect with residents, making a difference in their lives and it is that connection that shows her compassion, keeping her coming back each new day.

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Lori Coker, LPN, MDS

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Tamara Adams, LPN

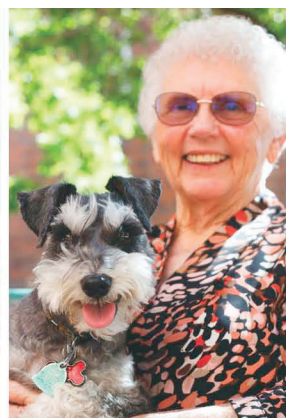
"I would choose a rose because everyone needs love."



Matthew Briner, LPN



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(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2024 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)



Graduates Among Best in State, Nation

For more than 50 years, the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) has provided Oklahoma with highly skilled and educated nurses. Graduates of UCO's nursing programs are known for being some of the best nurses in Oklahoma, as well as the nation.

For more than 50 years, the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) has provided Oklahoma with highly skilled and educated nurses. Graduates of UCO's nursing programs are known for being some of the best nurses in Oklahoma, as well as the nation.

Accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), UCO bachelor's and master's programs prepare tomorrow's nursing leaders through various settings, which helps meet the demand at all levels of nursing services needed in Oklahoma. Central offers traditional and nontraditional programs to support any student wanting to pursue a nursing career or further their nursing education.

Traditional Nursing Program, B.S.

Central's traditional, on-campus nursing program is for students who are not yet licensed to practice nursing as an RN.

When Abbie Yates, a senior in UCO's traditional nursing program, transferred to Central, she could instantly feel that Central's nursing professors were invested in her education and success. "The professors at UCO take the opportunity to get to know their students and create connections. Nursing at UCO is a well-oiled program that is constantly improving based on the needs of their students," said Yates. As she approaches graduation, Yates knows she will be prepared to enter the workforce. "UCO has one of the highest number of clinical hours compared to many nursing schools around Oklahoma, and I believe it better prepares us for entry into practice."

Online RN to B.S. in Nursing Track

Central's RN to B.S. track is available 100% online for RNs who want to further their nursing education. Upon successful completion, nurses earn a Bachelor of Science in nursing. With both part- and full-time options available and for as low as \$8,500, Central's program is designed to provide flexibility for students, with the option to complete the track in as little as 10 months.

Fast-Track B.S.

For those who have earned a traditional bachelor's degree in another field and are ready for a career in nursing, Central's Fast Track in nursing is for them. The fast-track program can be completed in just 16 months and provides the flexibility of hybrid



courses. Upon successful completion, students will have earned a B.S. in nursing.

After Kanece Ham started her career in neuroscience research, she realized she wanted to combine her love for neurology and the complexity of the brain with helping people in their lives. That is when she decided to pursue Central's fast-track program to become a psychiatric nurse. "When researching programs, I was excited to see that UCO had a fast-track program, which would allow me to get my degree in nursing within 16 months-providing me the ability to reenter the workforce and begin working in the meaningful way I always had aspired to do," said Ham.

Online M.S. in Nursing

The Master of Science in nursing degree program at UCO offers working RNs flexibility through fully online courses with both part- and full-time options available. The program can be completed in as little as 16 months, if pursued full time. The online Master of Science in nursing can be completed for as little as \$15,000. Nursing graduate students can choose from two tracks - nursing education or nursing leadership.

Micaela Carothers is a cardiac nurse who graduated from UCO's traditional nursing program. The compassion and dedication she received from UCO nursing faculty inspired her to continue her nursing education at Central. The M.S. in nursing provided her with the flexibility she needed to succeed. "With the program being online, the classes are very flexible around my workdays," said Carothers. "I feel that I am effectively able to meet the class expectations and continue working without feeling overwhelmed."

The Future of Nursing

All UCO nursing programs offer real-world instruction from supportive nursing faculty who are experts in their fields. Graduates from UCO nursing programs are recognized within the health care community for their knowledge, professionalism and leadership potential. Central prides itself as a smart investment for success and for preparing future leaders in an opportunity-rich environment. For more information about Central's nursing programs, visit <https://www.uco.edu/cms/academics/nursing>.

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EPIC Conference at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum

story by Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

The 42nd annual EPIC Educational Conference will be held Friday, Nov. 15 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, located at 1700 NE 63rd Street in Oklahoma City.

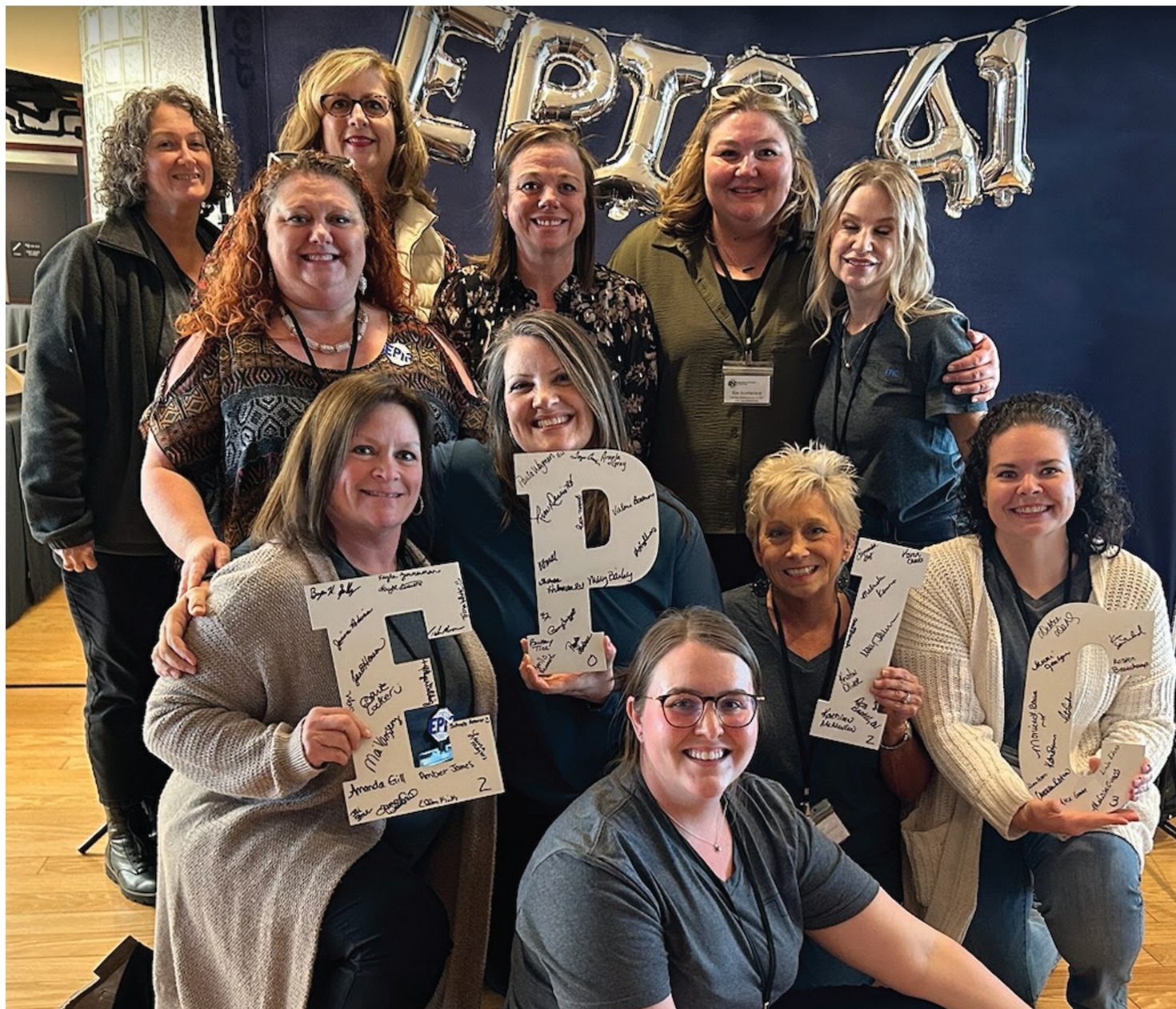
They exist to provide a collective voice for epidemiologists and preventionists in infection control regarding issues related to infection for improving and maintaining quality patient care and safety.

They promote and foster networking and educational endeavors for all disciplines with common interests in infection control and prevention activities.

"Each year, EPIC holds an engaging and informative educational conference aimed at enhancing the knowledge and experience of attendees," said Samantha Goza, President of EPIC. "Our conference is designed to bring together professionals from various disciplines, including epidemiologists and preventionists in infection control, to foster a vibrant atmosphere of learning and networking. We extend a warm invitation to individuals from all backgrounds and levels of expertise to join us for a full day dedicated to expanding their understanding and connections in the field."

Goza said the EPIC conference, a significant event in the field of epidemiology and infection control, has been attracting professionals from all over the world for years.

"With its reputation for delivering high-quality content and promoting collaboration, this conference has been held in various locations, each carefully selected for its convenience and welcoming atmosphere," she said. "The organizers have consistently ensured that participants can



The 42nd annual EPIC Educational Conference will be held Friday, Nov. 15 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. The Epidemiologist and Preventionists in Infection Control (EPIC) is a non-profit association.

engage in meaningful discussions, forge new connections, and acquire valuable knowledge, making every edition of the conference a resounding success."

The conference fee is \$150.00 per person (plus a \$1 processing fee). The registration deadline is Oct. 31 and includes complementary membership for calendar year 2025. A 2025 membership is included per ticket and 6.5 hours of contact hours.

The Exhibit Hall opens at 7 a.m. to showcase healthcare products and the latest technology.

Goza said the conference will feature five speakers including:

- John LaRochelle, President of Lighthouse Environmental Infection Prevention, Sponsored By Lighthouse. *You Can't Manage What You Don't Measure.*

- Dr. Corri Levine, PhD, MS, MPH, and sponsored by Region VI RESPTC *Preparing to Care for Special Pathogen Patients*

- Maureen Spencer, RN, M.Ed., CIC, FAPIC, Sponsored by Ethicon *Foundation to Surgical Stewardship Using a Bundle as a Foundation to Prevent SSIs*

- Chad Flora, RN, BSN, CNOR, Sponsored by Monlycke Health Care *Fostering a Culture of Essential Evidence-based Patient Care*

- Jolianne Stone, MPH, State

Epidemiologist *Office of the State Epidemiologist, Oklahoma State Department of Health State Disease Yearly Update*

Goza said EPIC is a grassroots group.

"We have another organization for our profession, it's called APIC, but it's quite exclusive," she said. "So EPIC was established to give more of a group that's not as expensive to join but still provides education and resources to those who work in this discipline. It's just a more affordable group to join for the state of Oklahoma. We have members that are across the United States as well. And then

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EPIC

Continued from Page 10

we provide monthly education and in-services for our members.”

Goza said providing continuing education is important.

“A lot of the things that we’re doing are constantly evolving and changing, so we all have to stay abreast of the latest recommendations and things that are traveling throughout our communities, things that are changing,” she said.

Goza said EPIC’s membership continues to grow.

“I would say that we probably have around 100 members currently,” she said. “We have members that are outside the state of Oklahoma.”

Goza said this year is the first time EPIC has held its conference at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum.

“We had it at the Petroleum Club last year, but we had limited seating, and so this year we moved to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum so we could

have unlimited seating this year and unlimited vendor opportunities,” she said.

Goza said EPIC’s future goals include reducing the number of healthcare-acquired infections, to prevent increased multidrug-resistant organism transmission; better communication between healthcare facilities; and improved antibiotic stewardship.

Goza said the EPIC conference is open to all healthcare arenas.

“We would encourage all healthcare setting types to come, whether it’s long-term care, acute care, outpatient facilities, and anybody that’s new or experienced in infection control,” she said.

Organizational groups of 4 or more will be provided with a 10% discount. Coupon Code must be entered at registration for discount. Coupon codes can be received by contacting Debbie Dahl, treasurer at Debbie.Dahl@ssmhealth.com

For more information about EPIC visit <http://www.epicokla.org>

Helping Our Seniors Balance Their Lives

story and photo by
Vickie Jenkins, staff writer

Located at 3844 N. MacArthur Blvd. in Warr Acres, OK you will find Home Instead Senior Care. This facility offers a range of services to seniors who need assistance to better balance their lives. Here, you will find Kim Kennon, RN, a highly qualified nurse with 13 years of nursing experience.

Home Instead offers personal care through our CNA's and caregivers, including services involving memory care for Alzheimer's and dementia, hospice care, meal preparation, transportation, housekeeping, medication reminders and chronic illness care. Balancing work and other life responsibilities can be overwhelming, but Home Instead's services help you regain a sense of control and feel at ease when you can't always be present for your loved one. Our compassionate and professional caregivers provide the relief and support our clients need and deserve.

With a friendly smile, Kim said, "I love my job. Even though we are a small office, we continue to grow. This private duty nursing company for senior care offers customized care plans with top-quality care. When a client needs constant personal health care assistance to ensure their safety, we are here for them."

Kim grew up in Kingfisher, OK and attended school at Redlands in El Reno. "When I was young, I wanted to be a pharmacist, but later, pursued nursing," she said. Her first job as a nurse was in MedSurg department at Kingfisher Hospital. She then worked at Mercy Home Health, where she developed an interest in case management. Now, she works at Home Instead. Her duties include training new caregivers, conducting client assessments and ensuring everything runs smoothly in the office. There are about 70 caregivers, some of whom are CNA's, all striving to be respectable to the seniors and their families.

When asked what qualities make a good nurse, Kim replied, "I think



Kim Kennon, RN, with Home Instead Senior Care grew up in Kingfisher, OK and attended school at Redlands in El Reno.

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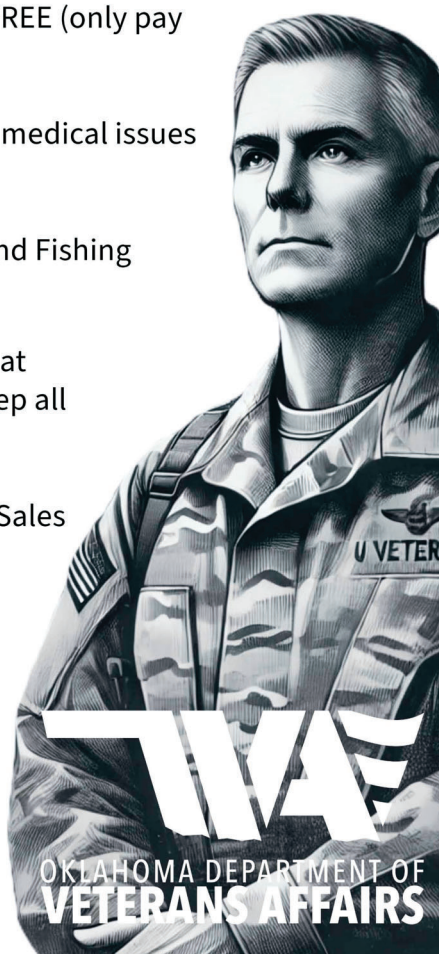
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one of the most important qualities is paying close attention to detail. A nurse needs to be able to see the big picture. Last but not least, every nurse needs to have a heart," she said with a smile.

"Sometimes, working at Home Instead can be challenging, especially when a client needs our services for a longer period of time, but they can't afford it," Kim commented. "That makes me want to care even more about our seniors and check into other ways that we might be able to help," she added.

"A reassuring sign that things are going in the right direction is when we meet our clients needs. I say WE because here at Home Instead, we are a team and get along well together. Even though we are a small office, we achieve big things. I am so proud of our team, standing strong in their own special way."

Kim's strengths include the ability to keep everything in scope, maintain a smooth workflow and ensure everything stays on track. She is especially detail-oriented and pays close attention to each situation. "I feel like I have a special way of explaining things to clients whether it's a question about insulin, wound care or their medication. All the medical details are charted, and I make sure there is no misunderstanding," she said.

When asked what keeps her motivated at work, Kim replied, "I think it is our team. We are like a family. We try to stay positive in everything we do. How we act reflects back to our clients. When they are happy, we are happy," she commented. "We have gotten a lot of positive feedback from our clients and their families. That makes me feel very proud of the people at Home Instead Senior Care," she added.

When Kim is not working, she enjoys spending time with her 11-year-old, son, Daniel. "He is into sports, especially basketball and loves doing anything outside. I guess you could call me one of those 'sports moms' because I enjoy watching his basketball games," she said. "He is also big into playing video games and that is a losing battle for me, no matter how much I try to keep up."

Milestone in Construction Held for Oklahoma's Comprehensive Pediatric Behavioral Health Center

OU Health celebrated a Topping Out Ceremony for the Oklahoma Children's Hospital OU Health Behavioral Health Center, marking a significant milestone in the construction project for the state's first and only comprehensive pediatric behavioral and mental health center.

Leaders from OU Health, the University of Oklahoma, University Hospitals Authority & Trust, state lawmakers, project and construction teams, philanthropic donors, patients, physicians, and key stakeholders gathered to mark the final stages of construction on the building's exterior.

Set to open its doors in December 2026, the new 172,775-square-foot, six-story Behavioral Health Center will play a vital role in treating Oklahoma's youth experiencing mental health crisis. Bringing much-needed services to Oklahoma families, it will be the only such facility in the state that is part of a comprehensive children's hospital.

"Currently, many patients and families in Oklahoma struggle to find the necessary care for their children experiencing a behavioral health crisis and as the state's leading academic health system, OU Health is committed to expanding our services to address this critical need," said Dr. Richard Lofgren, M.D., MPH, president and CEO of OU Health. "The new Behavioral Health Center will bridge this gap by offering access to specialized expertise and treatment for a variety of conditions. The Topping Out Ceremony marks an important milestone in the creation of the center."

As the academic partner of OU Health, the University of Oklahoma will also educate the state's future mental healthcare workforce at the facility, contributing to the betterment of the state.

"The University of Oklahoma is honored to contribute to the Behavioral Health Center, where our students will gain essential clinical experience, preparing them to address our state's critical mental and behavioral health needs," said OU President Joseph Harroz Jr. "OU's longstanding history of educating the vast majority of Oklahoma's health care professionals has been instrumental in improving the health of our state, with the Behavioral Health Center standing ready to proudly continue this important work."

A Needed Resource for Oklahoma Families

One in five Oklahoma youth struggles with mental health issues, and children from every background and economic status can be affected. Data from the 2019-20 school year indicates that nearly 10% of middle and high school students have attempted suicide and more than 17% have contemplated it. At Oklahoma Children's Hospital, the emergency room has seen a troubling rise in cases of suicidal ideation, increasing from 1-2 instances per week to 1-2 per shift.

"Many children with significant mental health concerns require more extensive and specialized care than is currently available in Oklahoma," said child and adolescent psychiatrist Rachel Zettl, M.D. "The new Behavioral Health Center is designed to significantly improve outcomes for children by providing a dedicated space where children can receive the comprehensive care they need, whether it's for a brief inpatient stay, long-term treatment, or intensive outpatient services."

Oklahoma is currently ranked 33rd in the nation for access to mental health services and support and suicide remains one of the leading causes of death among young people aged 10 to 24 in the state. It's estimated that 40% of youth who need mental health services aren't receiving them.

"The topping out of the new Behavioral Health Center marks a significant milestone in our commitment to providing essential mental health services to Oklahoman children. This facility will ensure that quality care is accessible to all, paving the way for a brighter future for our state," said state Sen. Pro Tem Greg Treat of Oklahoma City.

"The State of Oklahoma is proud to play a role in the launch of the Behavioral Health Center. This facility will not only provide essential support to children with mental health challenges but also attract mental health professionals from across the nation, improving health outcomes statewide," said state Rep. Kevin Wallace of Wellston.

Reimagining Care Delivery

The Behavioral Health Center reimagines the delivery of care for children and adolescents, focusing on



Behavioral Health Center Topping Out Ceremony

patient and provider safety, family-centered care, stress reduction, and best practices. This innovative facility is designed to enhance the well-being of patients, families, and staff.

Key features include:

- **Inpatient Services:** Two floors dedicated to inpatient care, adding 72 beds for both short-term stabilization and long-term care. Unique to this center, all rooms allow a parent to stay with their children during treatment, offering a family-centered care option not available elsewhere in Oklahoma.

- **Outpatient Services:** Intensive outpatient and partial hospitalization programs.

- **Specialized Units:** A neurodevelopmental unit.

- **Recreational Facilities:** A two-story gymnasium and several outdoor and garden spaces to enhance the healing process.

- **Support Areas:** Conference and family resource areas.

Visionary Leadership & Giving

Philanthropic giving from the E.L. and Thelma Gaylord Foundation, Devon Energy, Junior League of Oklahoma City, Fred Jones Family

Foundation, Sarkeys Foundation, Presbyterian Health Foundation and the Robert Glenn Rapp Foundation has helped lay the groundwork for the capital campaign. Oklahoma First Lady Sara Stitt serves as honorary chair of the campaign along with former Oklahoma first ladies Kim Henry, Cathy Keating, and Rhonda Walters.

The Behavioral Health Center will cost approximately \$140 million. The Oklahoma state Legislature has committed \$59.2 million in state and federal funds. In addition, the University Hospitals Authority & Trust has committed \$46.4 million. The remaining amount is being raised through philanthropic efforts.

"The foresight and dedication of so many who have made this crucial facility a reality cannot be understated," said Rainey Williams Jr., University Hospital Authority & Trust Board Chair and OU Health Board of Director Chair. "We are grateful to the Legislature and donors for their financial support, as well as to those individuals who've contributed ideas, resources and time."

To learn more about the Oklahoma Children's Hospital OU Health Behavioral Health Center, and to take part in the philanthropic campaign, visit <https://OklahomaChildrens.org/SoaringSpirits>.

Love Family Women's Center

story and photo by
Vickie Jenkins, staff writer

Reaching a milestone, for the first time in 50 years, Mercy welcomed new life and care for women in a new woman's center on the campus of Mercy Hospital. With an opening date of April 7, 2024, the Love Family Women's Center, offers a host of new services for families and women of all ages. Their multi-specialty team of OB/GYN physicians, certified nurses, midwives and pediatricians deliver comprehensive care with compassion. There are 73 spacious rooms dedicated to women's health care, including new childbirth suites to serve women and infants, Oklahoma City's first obstetrics emergency department, three large C-section suites connected to the hospital, Oklahoma's first hospital-based midwifery program and dedicated space for women's surgical rest and recovery.

Greeted with a warm smile, I met Carol Beecher, RN, OB/GYN manager of mother, baby and women's education. She clearly loves her job, bringing 28 years of experience as an OB/GYN nurse. "I love working in labor and delivery, helping to bring babies into the world," Carol remarked.

Growing up in Kingfisher, Oklahoma, Carol graduated from Kingfisher High School, unsure of what to pursue in college. At 18 years old, she took a job working for an obstetrician at Enid Hospital and this experience helped her decide on her career path. Carol pursued a degree in nursing, graduating from Redlands Community College in El Reno, Oklahoma and became an OB/GYN nurse.

Carol explained that she served as an OB/GYN assistant manager at Mercy for 12 years and has been a manager for the last year. Currently, she is one of two managers at Love Family Women's Center. Carol stays busy throughout the day managing unit staffing, overseeing productivity, statistical work, assisting in labor and delivery when needed, advocating for patients, handling hiring, firing and counseling. "I stay busy all day but it is a good busy," she said. "I work with wonderful people and we work well together. To describe my job in one word, I would say, 'amazing,'" she commented.

When asked if she had any mentors in nursing school, Carol replied, "When I worked at Enid hospital, there was a labor and delivery nurse whom I highly respected. She taught me so much and was always nice and patient. Looking back, I realize how much she meant to me and the lasting impression she left on my life."

Asking Carol what qualities a good nurse should have, Carol replied, "I think a good nurse needs motivation, the ability to be a team player, and some leadership skills," she added, "I have faith in the people we have here and in Love Family Women's Center."

Carol enjoys being a nurse because she loves caring for people. "Being a labor and delivery nurse is such a joyous experience and I'm there to support the mothers and family members," she explained. "Sometimes, it's not always a joyous moment for some parents, but we have a wonderful support team. I'm glad to be a part of a baby's life."

I asked Carol about her strongest qualities as a nurse. "I think my strongest qualities are my honesty and dependability, and I always strive to do my best," she said. "I'm a good listener and I never make assumptions. I tell my new nurses if they have a question and don't know the answer, they should always ask. There is no such thing as a bad question."

When asked what advice she would give to someone pursuing a career in nursing, Carol replied, "I would tell them that during clinicals, they shouldn't be afraid to try different areas. Keep an open mind. There are so many different opportunities in nursing and you'll never know unless you try. Never give up. If you stay



With the newly opened Love Family Women's Center, you will find Carol Beecher, RN, the OB/GYN Manager of Mother, Baby and Women's Education. With 28 years of experience as an OB/GYN nurse, Carol is ready to welcome all new parents-to-be.

strong, you will achieve having the most rewarding job you will ever know."

Even though Carol stays busy at work, she makes time to spend with her family. "I like to garden

but I love to travel. When I travel, I like to listen to audio books. Our most recent trip was to Scottsdale, Arizona. It was fun but my happy place is definitely the beach!"

Visit Love Family Women's Center at
www.mercy.net/practice/love-family-womens-center

Small Town, Big Impact: The Life of a Dedicated Nurse

story and photo by Vickie Jenkins, staff writer

Locust Grove, Oklahoma is a small town located in Mayes County in the northeastern part of the state. It has a rural atmosphere with a close-knit family. Despite its small size, the town has local businesses, schools and community events that bring residents together.

Utica Park Clinic in Locust Grove, Oklahoma is home to Dr. Lora Collier, M.D. and Mitchell Collier, M.D. along with Jennifer Russell, LPN. Jennifer has been a nurse for 12 years and has worked at Utica Park Clinic for seven years. Despite being a small town with a modest medical office, Locust Grove offers quality care and professionalism in its family practice. The clinic handles a variety of medical procedures including blood draws, lab work, x-rays, and tests for common medical issues, such as ear, nose and throat conditions. As the only medical facility in town, the clinic stays busy, often seeing around 250 patients a week from the community and surrounding area; Claremore, Muskogee, Broken Arrow, Owasso, Bixby, Sapulpa, Sand Springs and Tulsa. "Sometimes, we have a whole waiting room full of people, which can be a little overwhelming at times, but we manage," Jennifer said.

Jennifer grew up on a farm in Oaks, Oklahoma, a very small town that most people had never heard of. It was one of those towns where the neighbors lived down the road and everyone knew each other. Living on the farm, Jennifer had lots of pets and took care of them all. As a child, she dreamed of becoming a veterinarian. However, that changed when she was 13 years old. Her grandfather, who lived next door was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Jennifer would spend a lot of time at her grandparents' house, helping care for him. She vividly recalls the compassion and kind care her grandfather received from the nurses, which left a lasting impression on her. "That was a big turning point in my life. I decided that I wanted to be just like those nurses, taking care of others. At 13 years

old, I knew I was supposed to be a nurse," Jennifer explained.

"I went to Platt College in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to earn my nursing degree. My first job as a nurse was at a long-term care facility and I also worked in a pharmacy. I started out in the photo department, but the staff knew about my interest in nursing, so they provided me with on-the-job-training in the pharmacy. I gained valuable experience over the five years I worked there. I even considered continuing my education to become a pharmacist, but I decided to continue my career in nursing."

Asking Jennifer what qualities a good nurse should have, she replied, "The first quality a nurse should have is positivity. They should also genuinely care for others and have compassion. Additionally, they need to demonstrate kindness, respect and treat everyone with dignity."

Jennifer shared that her strongest quality is caring for people, whether at work, at home, or in the community. She emphasized that she cares deeply from the heart. However, she acknowledged that one of her challenges in the clinic comes from dealing with patients who don't take their medication as prescribed, as well as those that lack patience. "Whatever the situation, we explain the importance of the issue, and it all works out in the end," she added.

When asked about her biggest reward as a nurse, Jennifer said, "It's when a patient is satisfied with their care and we get positive feedback after leaving the office. When they leave with a smile on their face, that's when I know I've done my job," she answered.

Jennifer's advice to anyone considering a career in the medical field is to pursue it out of love and genuine care for the patients. "Always do your best in everything you do," she emphasized. "If you decide to become a nurse, you'll have many opportunities to choose from, so pick the path that feels right for you. Being a nurse offers job security no matter where you



You will find Jennifer Russell, LPN at Utica Park Clinic in Locust Grove, Oklahoma, where she is dedicated to providing the utmost care to her patients.

live. There will always be a need for nurses," Jennifer explained.

When not working, Jennifer enjoys spending time with her husband and two sons, ages 15 and 11, plus caring for their five pit bulls and three cats. Having grown up

on a farm in Oaks, Oklahoma and having experienced the transitions of moving from one town to another, Jennifer eventually found her way back to living on a farm in Oaks, Oklahoma and she now feels that she is definitely home.

(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2024 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

NCLEX-RN Pass Rates Soar at WOSC

The last few years have been undeniably rough on the nursing profession.

The pandemic brought lasting change to the profession and forced nursing education to change.

But students and educators at Western Oklahoma State College of Nursing have thrived, showing significant improvements in NCLEX-RN first-time pass rates in all four programs.

In fact, the Altus campus and the online LPN-to-RN program had 100-percent first-time pass rates in 2023.

Diane Fairchild, MSN, RN is the Director of Nursing at WOSC.

She sees the superior pass rates as proof her college's programs are adapting and thriving.

She has a good idea why.

"The dedicated faculty focus on critical thinking and clinical judgment in both the classroom and the clinical area," Fairchild said. "(Nursing education) has changed dramatically because of Covid. Nurses think differently about going into the field. Covid has impacted nursing tremendously.

"I think we're seeing overall somewhat of a decline in those who are interested in entering the field. I think Covid has made us take a step back and some students are afraid."

The NCLEX-RN changed formats in April 2023 adapting to a more critical thinking format. The "next generation" testing focused on a clinical judgment model and evolving case studies.

Nationwide, the current first-time RN pass rate for U.S.-educated students sits at 88.56 percent. Oklahoma's pass rate is slightly lower.

Fairchild said the profession has seen an exodus of nurses leaving the bedside since Covid for a variety of reasons. That puts an even greater focus on training the next generation of nurses.



"It's also driven those who truly have the desire to care for patients, I think Covid has driven some people with the desire to care for others into nursing because they want to do what they can to take care of people in those moments. They want to make sure that patients are not alone when end-of-life is near."

Western Oklahoma State has one of the only ADN programs in southwest Oklahoma.

Established as Altus Junior College in 1926, it is the oldest original municipal two-year college still in existence in Oklahoma.

The Nursing Program at Western Oklahoma State College was established in 1981 and has been preparing qualified nurses for many years.

The WOSC nursing program is offered at three campus sites: Altus, Lawton, and Elk City. Western's ADN program has several program tracks.

Face-to-face classes for both general and advanced standing entry students are available as well as online classes with a face-to-face clinical component for advanced standing students. Students in the face-to-face track take daytime classes at all three campuses.

"One of our major goals is to meet the needs of southwest Oklahoma by having a high-quality nursing program and having nurses go into our communities to stay and meet the nursing needs of the people in that community," Fairchild said.

"We have to meet student needs. Students have different study habits from students many years ago. Our students need more active learning and education with emphasis on clinical judgment and soft skills," Fairchild said. "I see an increased need for communication with other healthcare providers and with patients. Patient teaching is vital in nursing. Nursing instructors and faculty need to meet those needs by encouraging better communication skills and critical thinking."

WOSC NCLEX-RN pass rates for the LPN-to-RN track had already met or exceeded the requirements of the Oklahoma Board of Nursing for the past several years.

She credits the faculty for adapting quickly to meet the students both during and after the pandemic.

"Many of the instructors spend more time with students, helping individually with tutoring. They have come up with more active lessons in the classroom so the students are more engaged. They go into clinicals and teach at the bedside, not just in the classroom. Overall, they just love their students and they express that to them.

"When students struggle, they build them up instead of tearing them down."

For more information about the Western Oklahoma State College of Nursing program visit <https://www.wosc.edu/nursing>.

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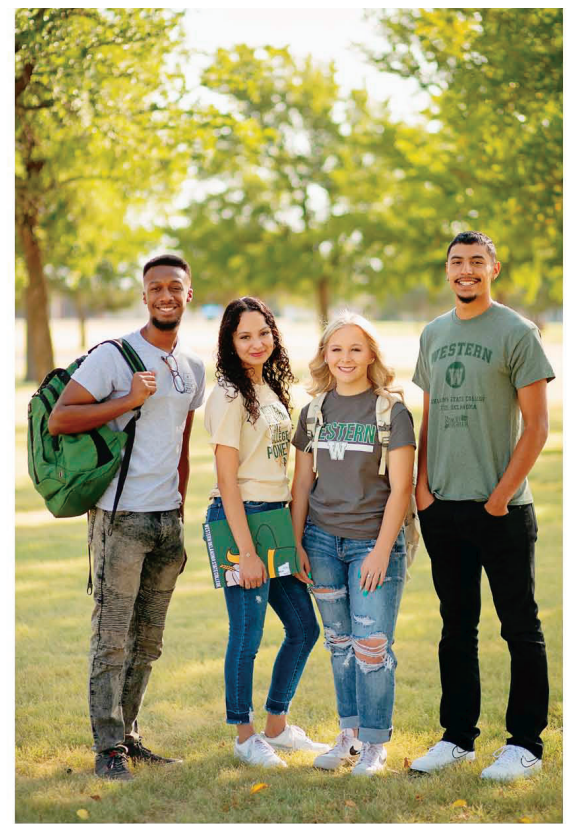
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