

From Heartbreak to Healing: How Loss Led to a Life of Care

Read Amber's story on page 2

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Amber Cotton, RN

Life Experience Led to Earning ADN and Top Nursing Honors

story by Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

Amber Cotton, an ER Nurse at INTEGRIS Health Edmond Hospital, experienced the loss of her mother after several years of battling breast cancer.

It was through that life experience that Cotton, who was pursuing a master's in agriculture education at the time, connected the dots that she wanted to pursue a nursing career instead.

"After I gave birth to my oldest child, I wanted to become a lactation consultant, but realized I needed to be an RN, so I opted against it and began to pursue a masters of Agricultural education," she said. "However, six years into cancer remission, my mom's breast cancer returned. So, I decided to put my master's program on hold, to focus on her and my growing family."

Cotton, TNCC, ALS, BLS, and PALS Certified, said over time she noticed her mom's behavior changed.

"Over the course of the next three years, we were told her cancer was "at a walk," yet her behavior was changing and she wasn't interested in what she usually loved to eat and do, and went to bed much earlier than usual," she said. "My gut instinct told me to be concerned that it had spread further than we were told, but I trusted her oncologist, who insisted her cancer was barely spreading and manageable."

In July of 2013, after a sudden onset of tonic-clonic seizures, Cotton said they discovered her mom's cancer had metastasized to her brain and other parts of her body and was given weeks-

to-months to live.

"Thanks to God, we had three more, beautiful in their own way, months with her. I was with her when she took her last breath on a beautiful, sunny October Sunday," she said.

Cotton said with encouragement from friends and family, she pursued nursing.

"It was only after connecting the dots, by realizing I should've trusted my gut with my mom's cancer and that I was interested in human health, and through the encouragement of an RN friend of mine, my husband, and my dad, did I decide to "look into" nursing," she said. "So, I made an appointment with an advisor at Oklahoma City Community College. I lovingly like to tell people that walking into OCCC in August of 2016 to 'Look into becoming a nurse' was like being shoved through a door-it was meant to be."

Cotton received her BS in Animal Science from Oklahoma State University in 2003 and ADN from Oklahoma City Community College in 2020.

She will have been with

INTEGRIS Health Edmond Hospital for five years in May.

Cotton was named the 2023 INTEGRIS Health Edmond Hospital Emergency Department Nurse of the Year award recipient; 2023 March of Dimes, Oklahoma Nurse of the Finalist, and was the 2022 INTEGRIS Health Edmond Hospital Emergency Department Rising Star award recipient.

"I work full-time night shift in the ED, as both a bedside nurse and Lead RN," she said. "We nurses have a lot of responsibilities in our ED. We are the patient's primary source of care, from the minute they walk into the doors, until they're discharged or admitted to the hospital. We work closely with our providers, respiratory therapists, and radiology techs and focus on initiatives that aim at improving patient care and satisfaction. We also participate in quality improvement audits."

Cotton also serves as chair of her unit's Unit Based Council.

"My peers and I collaborate on our common goal of improving our unit's efficiency, quality, safety,

Continued next page



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SCAN ME



Amber Cotton works as an ER Nurse at INTEGRIS Health Edmond Hospital.

COTTON
Continued from Page 2

camaraderie, morale, and teamwork,” she said. “We develop ways to ensure patient safety, provide positive patient, family, and caretaker experiences, improve delivery of care, and foster teamwork. We advocate for patients, their families, and our caregivers by listening and bringing suggestions, concerns, and ideas.”

Cotton said she wants to be a calming presence during a patient’s visit to the ER.

“I love being able to care for people during their times of crisis, regardless of how acute their illness is, or whether they feel justified in coming to our ER after their diagnosis,” she said. “I want our patients to know that their concerns are important to us, and we will do our best to

give them the care they need. I hope that we’re able to bring some sense of comfort, even just for a moment.”

Cotton said family time helps her to decompress from a day’s work.

“In this season of life, with kids in middle school, high school, and college, most of my downtime is spent with them and their activities,” she said. “As a family, we prioritize travel and exposure to the world. My dad lives in a beautiful part of Arkansas, so we try to hike and visit with him as often as we can. Personally, I enjoy painting, creating, reading, and being active with my kids. On my off days, I love being at home, on my little acreage—it’s very grounding and helps me recharge.”

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NEWS RELEASE

Hess Named Interim President of OSU

Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame inductee brings over four decades of experience to role

The OSU/A&M Board of Regents has approved the appointment of Dr. Jim Hess as interim president of Oklahoma State University following a special board meeting Friday in Stillwater.

"The board is confident that Dr. Hess will provide the steady leadership needed to continue advancing OSU's momentum and its land-grant mission," the OSU/A&M Board of Regents said in a statement. "His deep institutional knowledge and dedication to student success make him the ideal choice to guide the university during this time. Dr. Hess has a proven track record of leadership and innovation, and his ability to drive meaningful progress will serve the university well in the months ahead."

Hess assumes the OSU presidency immediately and will work closely with university leadership to ensure a smooth transition. The board will provide further updates as it moves forward with a search for the university's next president, following the resignation of Dr. Kayse Shrum.

A native of Henryetta, Oklahoma, Hess has served the higher education system in Oklahoma for over 43 years, and, in 2023, was inducted into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame.

"I have known Jim Hess for many years," Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education Chancellor Sean Burrage said. "His colleagues highly respect him. He brings a deep understanding of Oklahoma higher education and a proven track record of advancing institutional excellence. His many years of leadership within the OSU System demonstrate his ability to build programs that serve our state's needs and create opportunities for students. The State Regents for Higher

Education looks forward to working with Jim as he guides Oklahoma State University during this important period."

Hess most recently served as vice provost for graduate programs at the OSU Center for Health Sciences, where he has exhibited exemplary leadership and vision in various roles going back to 2003.

While chief operating officer of the Center for Health Sciences, his efforts led to the acquisition of the teaching hospital, creating what is now OSU Medical Center - the only osteopathic teaching hospital in the United States. He now serves as the CEO of the OSU Veterinary Medicine Authority and is designated as a Riata Faculty Fellow in the OSU School of Entrepreneurship.

"I'm honored and humbled by the call to serve Oklahoma State at the highest level and am thankful to the OSU A&M Board of Regents for offering me the opportunity," Hess said. "My goal is to make an immediate impact on the university by working with students, faculty, staff, alumni and our partners to continue to advance our shared land-grant mission and help usher in a bright future for our beloved university."

Lawmakers offered strong public support for the appointment.

"As a two-time OSU graduate, I know firsthand the transformative power of Oklahoma State University," said Oklahoma House Speaker Kyle Hilbert. "Jim Hess understands that OSU's impact extends far beyond our campuses - it touches all 77 counties. His leadership at the OSU Center for Health Sciences demonstrates his deep commitment to expanding OSU's positive influence on Oklahoma's communities, workforce and economy. I look forward to working with Dr. Hess and the OSU A&M Board of



Dr. James Hess - OSU Interim President

Regents as we strive to be the premier land-grant institution in the country."

"Dr. Hess is an Oklahoma native with more than 43 years of experience serving in our state's higher education system and through his dedicated work and leadership at OSU's Center for Health Sciences he has continuously demonstrated his capabilities and commitment to the University," said U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas. "Perhaps most notably, he played a critical role in the creation of the OSU Medical Center - the only osteopathic teaching hospital in America. I've seen firsthand the exceptional work he has done through my role as Chairman of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, and I am more than confident he will continue to serve and lead our great institution well in this role."

Hess began his higher education career at Rogers State College in 1981, serving in a number of senior leadership positions there over the next 15 years. In 1996, the University Center at Tulsa and Rogers State were merged to form Rogers University, where Hess served as vice president for administration. Two years later, the institutions

were legislatively separated, and Hess was appointed transition CEO to spin off the four campuses to create OSU Tulsa and Rogers State University. Hess continued with Oklahoma State University, serving as vice president and chief operating officer for OSU Tulsa from 1999 to 2003, doubling enrollment and creating BOB, the Big Orange Bus shuttle service between Tulsa and Stillwater.

Hess initiated several innovative online graduate programs, including the Master of Science in Health Care Administration, the Master of Science in Global Health, the Master of Science in Medical Sciences, the Doctor of Health Care Administration and the Doctor of Forensic Sciences. The result of these innovations was the recognition of the OSU Center for Health Sciences as the only institution in the state's higher education system to achieve consecutive year-over-year enrollment growth over the last 10 years.

Hess resides in Owasso, Oklahoma, with his wife, Angela. They have a son, John; a daughter, Bonnie; one grandson, Johnny; and three granddaughters, Brooklyn, Billie and Bradley.



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NURSE TALK



If you could choose an animal to be, what would you choose?

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Community Hospital North

"I would choose to be a lion. They're very majestic and cool, and one of the most powerful creatures."



Elizabeth Walker, RN

"I would like to be an eagle so I could fly and see really well."



Brandy Mathews, RN

"I'd like to be an octopus to explore the ocean and see everything down there. They're super smart."



Stephanie Petty, RN

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Across

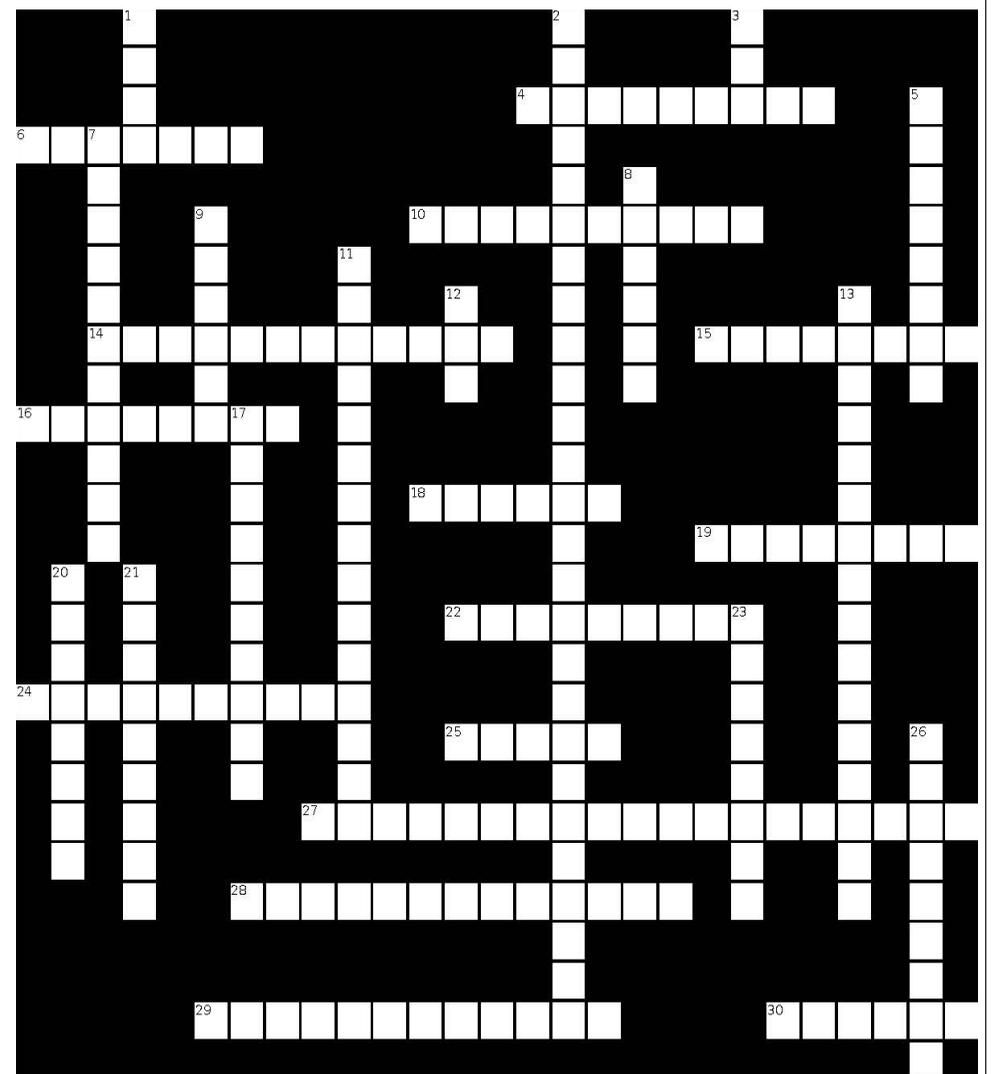
- 4. due to obstruction
- 6. functional unit of kidney
- 10. with prompt intervention
- 14. Patient must be kept on strict
- 15. increase in BUN & Creatinine
- 16. more than 400 cc urine output/day
- 18. inhibits the tubular reabsorption of Na & chloride ions
- 19. osmotic diuretic
- 22. k, phosphate, mg
- 24. normal is 0.5 - 1.2
- 25. loop diuretic
- 27. 75% nephrons not functioning
- 28. no red meat 3 days before doing
- 29. can be felt if you feel under ribcage

ANSWERS ON PAGE 14

- 30. outer layer of kidney

Down

- 1. hemofiltration for unstable clients unable to tolerate HD(initials)
- 2. 125 cc/minute
- 3. normal is 5-20
- 5. less than 400 cc urine output/day
- 7. protein in urine
- 8. inhibits the enzyme carbonic anhydrase, acts on proximal tubules
- 9. rapid decline in renal function
- 11. bolus of fluid
- 12. xray
- 13. symptom free
- 17. damage due to overdose
- 20. due to lack of blood flow, before kidney
- 21. potassium sparing diuretic
- 23. renal dose medication
- 26. na, calcium



Murray State College Foundation Receives Grant, Westheimer Nursing Education Center

The Murray State College Foundation has received a grant from the Jerome Westheimer Family Foundation (Foundation) in support of the Southern Oklahoma Nursing Education Center (SONEC) in Ardmore.

The Foundation is deeply committed to funding impactful education initiatives. In December, it met to review the grant application submitted by the Murray State College Foundation in August to fund the construction of the SONEC.

"The Murray State College Foundation is proud to be a strong partner and operate as an important fundraising vehicle for Murray State," said Larry Sloan, Chair of the Murray State College Foundation. "The Jerome Westheimer Family Foundation's gift is significant in the project's fundraising campaign. We are honored to receive their investment."

The historic nature of the grant has resulted in an offer and acceptance to add the Westheimer name to the facility.

"This facility and its impact on our communities are exactly what the Jerome Westheimer Family Foundation was designed to support," said Jerome Westheimer, Jr., Chair of the Foundation. "We are honored to grant funds to construct the SONEC and see the Westheimer name atop the region's premier nursing education center."

The Westheimer SONEC will be a 42,000-square-foot nursing education facility with classrooms, laboratories, student services, and flexible learning



spaces for Murray State and its education partners. This center will offer more than 30 new jobs in Ardmore to train 250-300 nurses annually.

"Partners like the Jerome Westheimer Family Foundation see the nursing shortage and the need for healthcare professionals in this region and are taking action," said Dr. Tim Faltyn, Murray State College President. "The vision of the Westheimer Southern Oklahoma Nursing Education Center is being realized and shared in our communities. We are grateful and proud to receive their gift and look forward to seeing the Westheimer name atop this important facility."

American Nurses Association Announces the Release of the Revised Code of Ethics for Nurses

The American Nurses Association (ANA) Center for Ethics & Human Rights released the highly anticipated 2025 revision of the Code of Ethics for Nurses (Code). The Code is the foundational ethical framework for nurses at all levels, providing guidance and instruction to effectively and honorably carry out the ethical responsibilities required of the nursing profession.

The 2025 revision addresses current and emerging changes in caring science, health science, nursing humanities, and technology. In the past 10 years, rapid developments in healthcare have brought a new and diverse array of ethical and professional questions for nurses to navigate. Some of the key updates introduced include:

"A new 10th provision, focused on global health: 'Nursing, through organizations and associations, participates in the global nursing and health community to promote human and environmental health, well-being, and flourishing.'"

"Navigation of structural oppressions such as racism and intersectionality among patients, peers and healthcare systems. For the first time, the Code identifies racism as a public health crisis.

"Removal of the false parallel of duty-to-self and duty-to-others, making it clear that this divide is a strain on nurses and is rectified to make clear that a nurse's duty to oneself is a benefit to their patient.

"It is the tremendous responsibility and honor held by the American Nurses Association to maintain the Code of Ethics for Nurses. The Code is the social commitment from nurses to the public that we will uphold the ethical responsibility of our profession in pursuit of the health of our patients," said Liz Stokes, PhD, JD, RN, director of the ANA Center for

Ethics & Human Rights. "The Code was revised to guide the nurses of today and tomorrow who exemplify our profession's moral duty to provide and advocate for safe, quality, and compassionate care for all patients and communities."

For 23 years, the American public has ranked nursing the "Most Honest and Ethical Profession" among other notable professions such as medical doctors, engineers, and veterinarians.

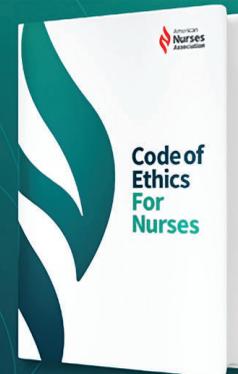
"The Code of Ethics for Nurses is a living, breathing body of work that is exercised and interpreted by nurses every day in all they do. Whether in the boardroom or at the bedside, the Code is a necessary instrument for practice, policy, and standards in all facets of nursing," said American Nurses Association's President Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, PhD, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN. "The phrase 'nursing is a calling,' is true. The identity of being a nurse permeates our very being and all that we do-be it as caretakers, advocates, or educators-we are dedicated to delivering healthcare for all."

To provide better understanding of the Code's foundational values and relational structure, ANA has released peer-reviewed, continuing nursing education (CNE) accredited courses for the first three provisions, with the remaining modules to be released throughout 2025.

For more information about or to join ANA visit <https://www.nursingworld.org/ana>



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Love of Science Leads Buster to Nursing and Teaching Career at KSN

story and photo by
Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

A love of science was an early introduction to a nursing career for Sara Buster, DNP, APRN, CNP, Clinical Assistant Professor Kramer School of Nursing at Oklahoma City University

"I love science, and I love people. Nursing is the best of all of that, and that is why I love it so much," Buster said. "I knew early on that I wanted to be involved in medicine in some form. Not a lot of people in my family are in healthcare so it took me a little bit to figure out what that looked like for me and what that journey was going to be. Once I got into nursing, I cannot imagine doing anything else."

Buster received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from the University of Oklahoma and graduated from Kramer School of Nursing with her DNP in 2017. She also earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, Ark.

"I've always enjoyed the idea of exploring what all is out there and could be," she said. "I changed my major several times in my first undergraduate as I tried assorted opportunities. I tried on the wrong ones, then found the right one."

Buster said most of her nursing career has been as a Nurse Practitioner.

"A lot of my nursing career has been as a Nurse Practitioner, and that's what I've been doing since 2017. I transitioned into my full-time faculty role in 2023, although I have been working as an adjunct with Kramer since 2019," she said.

Buster enjoys building relationships with patients.

"It's just being there with the patient," she said. "Especially with Advanced



Sara Buster, DNP, APRN, CNP, serves as a Clinical Assistant Professor Kramer School of Nursing at Oklahoma City University.

Practice Nursing and being a Nurse Practitioner, you can be there for patients in those moments where maybe it's good news and maybe it's bad news, but you're with them and allow them to be a person while you deliver whatever type of news it is. It's building those relationships and having that ongoing relationship with them."

Buster said when OCU posted a full-time teaching position, she jumped at that opportunity.

"When they reached out that they had a full-time opening I

jumped at the opportunity to come back and work along with some of my mentors and be able to provide that bridge with knowledge to practice for the next generation," she said.

Buster said her hands-on work experience has helped mold her teaching style.

"As an adjunct, I was doing a lot of work with the practice management type roles," she said. "I was talking to the students about what it looked like in the real world and tying it all together. My full-time faculty role has let me use my firsthand experience to kind of bridge the

gap between what they see and learn in the textbook and what that looks like in a real person. I would not trade that experience for anything and being able to share that information when you're seeing it in a patient and how to handle those situations."

Buster said part of her role as a professor is to keep learning,

"I would say that every patient encounter is an opportunity to learn, but in addition, both to keeping my Nurse Practitioner certification, as well as to staying current with OCU and what's expected here," she said. "I am attending continuing education conferences and reading up on new articles that come out. My goal is to try to learn something new every day. Maybe that's from a patient, maybe that's from a student, or maybe that's me seeking out something new to learn, but I'm always learning something."

Buster said outside of work, her family life keeps her busy.

"We (husband and two young children) are busy," she said. "Both of my children are very energetic, so we are always doing something. Even if we are at home, we are on the go."

Buster said honesty is essential when discussing careers with students.

"I tend to err on the side of being honest in saying it is a hard job. Nursing is a very hard job, and knowing that, I think, helps to some degree," she said. "Also being able to really internalize why you are doing what you are doing and being able to revisit that on the days that are tough is what is going to get you through. You need to have a good support system outside of nursing, but you need to be able to internally look back on why you chose this profession and be able to hold that close on the days that are hard."

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RN Eases Fears: Med/Surg Nurse Encourages Others

story and photo by
James Coburn, Staff Writer

Marilyn Nokes loves med/surg nursing best because it encompasses all the functions of the body.

"I like to figure out what is wrong with people when they have problems," said Nokes, RN, Community Hospital North, located in Oklahoma City.

The camaraderie is always most important for a good team. It takes the whole team here - dietary, CNAs, housekeeping. It takes all of us to keep this place running."

Nokes discovered early that she could make a difference in patient care as a hospital certified nurse aide. It inspired her to go to nursing school.

Her career has included ICU, employee health, pulmonary rehabilitation, and she was a director of nursing at a long-term care center.

"I think it's very important to do that job because you realize why nurses are in such a hurry," she said.

Today, she has been a registered nurse for more than three decades. Nokes earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree at Oklahoma City University's Kramer School of Nursing. Today, she enjoys mentoring nursing students coming to the hospital to learn from experienced nurses.

"It's nice to work with them. Often, it's their first semester so this is all new to them. They're a little nervous and not sure if they can make it. But I encourage them. I say, 'Yes, you can make it and we need you, so please finish.' We have a lot of machinery we hook up to with IVs. We have a lot of beepers and noise going on. So, you work with them and explain what it does and why it's doing it."

She found a dedicated team when she came to Community Hospital North a year ago. The team pulls together for patient



Marilyn Nokes, RN, has a knack for being where she is needed in life.

centered care. Nurses depend on one another by sharing ideas about best practices. Be prepared for the expected and unexpected, she said.

"And you've got to listen carefully and do your own investigation because sometimes things aren't obvious," she explained.

At times Nokes sees familiar faces returning to Community Hospital for different procedures. It's a compliment to the staff.

An empathetic nurse with good listening skills helps patients feel comfortable about expressing their concerns, she continued. Everybody is different. So, Nokes learns what can make their hospitalization experience even better.

Patients are not actually complaining. They are afraid, she added.

"Nobody asks to be in the hospital. This is all new to patients that are coming in. We need to take time to explain to them what's going on," Nokes said.

She believes in a holistic approach extending to the family who become primary caregivers at home.

"That's really important not to forget. Sometimes people forget that they are part of the picture," Nokes said.

She has also learned to be flexible in her career. It has meant a lot for Nokes to spend time with families during end-of-life care. All aspects of nursing have given her a chance to give back.

"I think it's always better if you can work with people on their problems and help them solve things," Nokes said. "It's really influenced me. It's what keeps me going every day, the people that I work with and the patients that I have."

Nokes' example is rubbing off on her own family. She has a great-nephew who plans for a nursing career in Oklahoma.

"I said, 'You go for it.'"

According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2023, men represent nearly 12% of all licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, and nurse practitioners.

The percentage of nurses who are men has grown by 59% over the past 10 years.

Being a nurse is a great career with flexibility in scheduling, Nokes said.

"Sometimes you do have to work holidays or weekends, but you're compensated for it. They pay is very good, especially if you're a brand-new nurse coming out of nursing school.

After working in mega-sized hospitals, Nokes enjoys the close-knit family atmosphere she found at Community Hospital North.

She makes a comfortable transition when returning home to a good book or reading a newspaper.

"They're always trying to make you go digital. I say, 'No, I like holding a newspaper. It's my favorite thing to do.'"

Stillwater Medical Hosted Grand Opening of Newborn ICU

story and photo by
Van Mitchell, Staff Writer

Stillwater Medical, in partnership with Oklahoma Children's Hospital OU Health, recently celebrated the ribbon-cutting of the OnCue Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, the only Level II NICU in north-central Oklahoma with a dedicated neonatologist and 24-hour neonatal nurse practitioner coverage. This \$2.5 million investment brings advanced care to the region, reducing the need for patient transport.

The OnCue NICU will open for patients in mid-March, offering a brighter future for families in Stillwater and surrounding communities.

OnCue provided the lead gift to name the facility.

"Today is a milestone for our community. One made possible by the passion, generosity, and unwavering support of those who care for others," Laura Aufleger, President of OnCue said. "Our OnCue team has always believed in giving back and doing the right thing. But this moment is truly extraordinary. This is history in the making. The largest single gift Stillwater Medical has ever received, combined with the generosity of so many has fully funded this unit. (This is) 100% community driven, 100% life changing. Together, we have built the OnCue Neonatal Intensive Care Unit." Aufleger said the OnCue NICU is more than just a building.

"This NICU, it isn't just a building, it's hope," she said. "It is a promise to families that their most fragile moments will be met with the best care right here at home. For local families this is not just a hospital wing, it's a future. It is a place where tiny infants can grow and where parents don't have to travel for miles for the care that their baby needs, and where love and medicine come together to save lives."

Michal Shaw, Vice President of Foundation and Community Relations at Stillwater Medical, said the OnCue NICU is a testament to the power of community. "Together, we've created a space where families will be held in care, compassion, and community, right here in Stillwater," he said.

The OnCue NICU features 10 nurseries, a C-section procedure room, a lactation room, family spaces, and state-of-the-art technology to provide critical care for the community's most vulnerable patients. These patients, typically at or after 32 weeks gestation, will receive monitoring and treatment for conditions like jaundice, feeding issues, or mild respiratory complications, while being cared for by a team of neonatologists, specialized nurses, and respiratory therapists.

Dr. Trent Tipple, M.D., FAAP, Chief of Neonatology at Oklahoma Children's Hospital, said there's a critical need for how we utilize NICU beds in the state of Oklahoma. "We have more babies than beds. But most importantly, we have families who need to be with their babies," he said. "I'm not just a neonatologist; I'm also a NICU dad. And we had the experience of a 35-week delivery and the blessing of a five-minute journey to our baby. By bringing specialized care closer to home, we ensure that newborns receive the high-level medical attention they need without the added stress of traveling long distances. "Having care closer to home means families can stay in their communities while their children receive treatment rather than traveling to Oklahoma City or Tulsa. This facility ensures that even when higher levels of care are needed, the transition will be seamless, minimizing the disruption to families and their support systems."

The need for neonatal care in Oklahoma is great. Prematurity is the leading cause of neonatal death and disability. In Oklahoma, nearly 1 in



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8 babies are born too early, with 11.9% of births being preterm in 2021, compared to the national average of 10.5%. The new neonatal ICU in north-central Oklahoma will address this critical need.

Current Level III and IV NICUs provide the highest level of newborn care but are often at maximum capacity. Having a Level II NICU in the state capable of caring for babies who need more advanced support than routine newborn care, will ensure babies can stay close to home. Research shows babies who remain closer to home recover faster, experiencing improved bonding, breastfeeding rates, and emotional well-being.

OU Health President and CEO Dr. Richard Lofgren, M.D., MPH, FACP, said this strategic partnership expands neonatal intensive care across Oklahoma, bringing needed care to more communities.

"Every child and family in Oklahoma deserve access to the highest quality healthcare close to home," he said. "Providing care within the community ensures the best outcomes and supports families during critical times. As the flagship academic health system, we are committed to delivering essential specialty and sub-specialty services. This partnership with Stillwater Medical is a significant step toward ensuring no child in our state must travel far to receive the care they need."

Denise Webber, CEO of Stillwater Medical, reflected on the facility's impact.

"The OnCue NICU is a shining example of our commitment to improving lives through excellent, quality care close to home. It's personal for us at Stillwater Medical, and this new facility allows us to serve our neighbors - and the state - like never before," Webber said. "Thank you to our local government, our state government, the people, our citizens, our community, our leaders, our team members, our physicians. Thank you to everybody for bringing us here today."

Stillwater Medical Center is a not-for-profit, public trust health system committed to providing high-quality, compassionate care to north-central Oklahoma. It strives to be responsive to the needs of people in the region and serve those needs in a financially sound manner. Since 1978, it has provided compassionate women's healthcare, evolving with the needs of each generation.

FEMA, Cherokee Nation Sign Historic Agreement that Will Help Disaster Survivors

Leaders of FEMA and the Cherokee Nation signed an agreement on Jan. 15 that will enable the Tribal Nation to deploy in support of FEMA's operations during disasters, the first such agreement ever signed.

The Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) is a formal, binding contract. Under the agreement, FEMA's Supplemental Response Team (SRT) program is able to deploy to the Cherokee Nation's Incident Management Team, giving it the opportunity to integrate with federal response. The partnership will also create new opportunities for tribal emergency managers to increase their capacity and capabilities to respond on the federal level, which allows them to bring those skills back to their own communities.



The agreement was signed by Justin Knighten, FEMA Associate Administrator for the Office of External Affairs and Chuck Hoskin, Jr., Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation.

"This intergovernmental agreement with the Cherokee Nation's embodies the spirit of 'Gadugi,' or 'everyone helping each other,'" said Deanne Criswell, FEMA Administrator. "I am so grateful for the Cherokee Nation's partnership and I am confident that this agreement will improve our ability to reach and support survivors during disaster response."

"This agreement is a testament to the strength and expertise of the Cherokee Nation Emergency Management team," said Hoskin, Jr. "Through this collaborative effort, we are stepping up to meet the challenges of an increasingly unpredictable world. By bringing together resources and leveraging the skills of our Incident Management Teams, we're not only fulfilling our responsibility to protect our communities but also contributing to the broader mission of saving lives and restoring hope across the country."

The Supplemental Response Team program's mission is to expand FEMA's ability to respond to disasters by mobilizing our country's best while building the capability and capacity of state, local, Tribal Nation and territorial incident management teams.

FEMA currently works with two other SRTs, New York and New Jersey. However, those two teams are activated through mission assignments. New Jersey plans to also sign a more formal IGSA with FEMA in the near future, along with other teams across the country.



FEMA

NURSING

Continued from Page 14

organization promotes scholarships and tuition assistance programs, which have been a tremendous success in supporting employees' growth and development. "Every employee here is truly special to us, and we are committed to treating them with the utmost respect," Bob said emphasizing the value placed on creating a supportive and empowering work environment.

When asked what qualities make a good nurse, Bob thoughtfully shared his insights. "A good nurse needs to have compassion, patience, and a willingness to learn something new every day," he said. He emphasized the importance of having an open heart and being attentive to the needs of those around you. While he doesn't believe there is one specific quality that defines a great nurse, he strives to carry out traits that promote compassion and care. "I always aim to find solutions that encourage teamwork, and I

make it a priority to be supportive, encouraging and compassionate to others," Bob explained.

Bob mentioned that there are several individuals he would like to publicly thank for the significant impact they've had on his life. "Without their encouragement, I wouldn't be where I am today," he said sincerely. "A heartfelt thank you to Brandie Williams, RN, Pam Brooks, Health Center Administrator, and Allison Boyd, Nurse Director. I'm incredibly grateful for the love, support, and guidance you have given me. There were countless times you gave me that extra push I needed, and it made all the difference. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

In a field that often takes quiet heroes for granted, Bob stands as a beacon of inspiration. His genuine love for his work and the people he serves shines through in every way, reminding us all of the impact one person can have when driven by purpose and compassion. For those that want to make a difference, he proves that nursing is not just a job, it's a calling.

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OU CON Continues to Evolve

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Strengthening partnerships across Oklahoma.

The University of Oklahoma Fran and Earl Ziegler College of Nursing is doing it all and much more to help students reach their nursing dreams.

Dean of Nursing Julie Hoff, Ph.D., MPH, RN, said the college has hired more faculty and staff and provided more student success programming in the areas of peer tutoring, mentoring, and scholarships as larger nursing classes are accepted.

"There's been a big investment in simulation," Hoff said. "One of the ways we accommodated these numbers is we decreased the number of clinical hours in exchange for increasing time in simulation. Simulation enables faculty to ensure certain competencies are achieved by all students regardless of learning site."

Hoff said the added simulation time helps augment student learning when the opportunities don't present themselves during their scheduled clinical rotations.

The last several years have also seen a more diversified faculty with advanced practice nurses coming on to strengthen the educational experiences.

"In many ways, the students love it because they can be in class one day and then be in clinical and see their faculty engaging with teams, as an advanced practice nurse, in the management of patients," Hoff said.

Increasing quality opportunities for students throughout the state has been the hallmark of Hoff's tenure at OU.

Hoff has made a point to have conversations with nursing leaders around the state to emphasize the importance of working together.

"We are so thankful for the clinical partners who are supporting our enrollment in Duncan, Lawton, Norman, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City. In Oklahoma City, we have strengthened our partnerships with Integris Health, Mercy Hospital, SSM Health, and VA Medical Center.



OU Health continues to be a committed clinical partner who plays a crucial role in our success. Additionally, our partnerships with Duncan Regional Hospital, Commanche County Memorial Hospital, and Norman Regional Hospital have played a crucial role in supporting our undergraduate program growth. Our clinical partnerships with Hillcrest Medical Center, Ascension St. John Medical Center, and St. Francis Health System have sustained our ability to train the future nursing workforce in the Tulsa metropolitan area. Additionally, we rely on countless community-based clinical partners that include Indian Health, tribal partners, home health and hospice agencies, behavioral health facilities, community health agencies, and K-12 schools that have allowed us to expand where students are learning."

As more and more care inevitably moves away from the hospital into the community in the future, the challenge for nursing education will be to change along with it.

"I just think there is a real disruption in healthcare delivery," Hoff said. "It's still fragmented, and access is still an issue."

Along with that will be an emphasis on flexibility for a healthcare system that isn't known for quick change.

"We don't have to worry about our students being flexible because they are raised in generations of constant change," Hoff said. "We are seeing systems test new models that support the flexibility, well-being, professional growth, and positive organizational culture nurses seek. This can be challenging for healthcare systems as they are big, complex organizations that are challenged to balance financial sustainability while maintaining quality care and improving access."

That means a wealth of opportunities for today's nursing students to become tomorrow's leaders.

Hoff said OU is seeing undergraduate and graduate enrollment levels increase.

In recent years, the College of Nursing has increased its effort to reach more students by guaranteeing acceptance to qualified applicants and partnerships with other entities.

Last year, OU announced partnerships with Murray State and the University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma to offer a guaranteed admission opportunity to six qualified undergraduate students majoring in nursing to pursue their Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree at the OU College of Nursing's educational sites at Cameron University in Lawton and Duncan Regional Hospital.

Since coming to OU in January 2020, Hoff said she has felt a tremendous surge of support in impacting nursing education.

"I think the commitment of the University on down to the faculty and staff in the College is very notable including the legislature's commitment and recognition," Hoff said. "The College's commitment to seamless academic commitment is meeting people where they are to get them to where they want to be as a nurse. The mission of the OU College of Nursing is to lead the state in nursing workforce at all levels and advance the health of Oklahomans through education, by education, scientific discovery, translating evidence into practice, and driving innovation." As Dean, I believe it is my responsibility to realize the power of nurses and promise of nursing for Oklahoma and beyond.

For more information about the University of Oklahoma Fran and Earl Ziegler College of Nursing visit <https://nursing.ouhsc.edu>.

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Balancing Compassion and Leadership: A Nurse's Role as Executive Director in Retirement Care

story and photo by
Vickie Jenkins, Staff Writer

Discover the warmth, elegance, and countless opportunities at Town Village Retirement Community, a premier independent living retirement community nestled in the heart of OKC. Dedicated to providing a welcoming, stress-free environment, Town Village offers residents the perfect balance of luxury and an active, fulfilling lifestyle.

Danna Johnson, LPN, is the Executive Director of Town Village, bringing 36 years of experience to the community. Born and raised in Dodge City, Kansas, Danna originally aspired to become a teacher, but life took her in a different direction. "I always wanted to do something that would help others," she shared. While in school, she worked in a long-term skilled nursing facility, sparking her passion for healthcare.

Danna pursued a two-year college nursing program and worked as a nurse for 20 years. Her passion for learning and a desire to grow led her back to school, where she earned her bachelors's degree. Since then she has served as an Executive Director in several facilities. "I wanted to become an Executive Director so I could make meaningful changes that would improve the lives of residents," she explained. "My goal has always been to create a better, happier experience for them."

"When we were kids, I dreamed of becoming a teacher, and my sister wanted to be a nurse. Funny enough, we ended up switching paths; I became the nurse and she became a teacher. I think it was meant to be because we both absolutely love what we do."

When asked what qualities makes a good nurse, Danna replied, "I believe a nurse needs to have a lot of passion and must be a truly compassionate person." She emphasized that her strongest quality is being

a dedicated advocate for her residents. "The most rewarding part of being a nurse is knowing that I can make a real difference in a resident's life. Even on the roughest days, if I can help just one resident feel better or bring a smile to their face, it gives me the strength to keep going. Staying positive for both myself and for the residents, is what keeps me motivated."

Asking Danna what advice she would give to someone considering a career in the medical field, she replied, "I would tell them that its not going to be easy, and there will be stressful days and challenging moments, but the rewards far outweigh the hardships. There's nothing more fulfilling than knowing you're making a real difference in someone else's life."

"There are 185 apartments here, independent living and assisted living. With 33 assisted living residents, we always have a nurse, CMA, or care staff available 24/7," Danna said. "There are two dining areas for the residents, entertainment with special events, and activities they can enjoy. Our residents are happy and as one resident said, 'I feel like I'm living in a mansion, with my own bedroom.' "That was a great compliment for me. I feel blessed to be a part of both worlds."

"The residents are dear to my heart. The beauty of this field is that it allows one to grow and evolve," Danna commented. "Whatever speciality calls to you, follow it with passion and commitment. Healthcare is more than a career, it's a calling. The impact you can have on peoples lives is a journey that will shape not only your professional life, but who you are as a person," Danna said with a smile.

Although Danna initially aspired to be a teacher, she chose a career in nursing. However, she feels her role as a nurse, and now, as an



Danna Johnson, LPN, Executive Director at Town Village Retirement Community

Executive Director, still allows her to fulfill that original passion for teaching. "In many ways, nursing and teaching go hand-in-hand," she said. "As an Executive Director, I find myself in a position where I can guide and mentor the nursing staff, helping them not only develop the skills but to understand the deeper responsibilities that come with patient care."

By combining her passion for teaching with her experience in nursing, Danna ensures that her team is not only competent

but also compassionate, making a lasting impact on both the staff and the residents they serve.

Danna brings 36 years of nursing experience to Town Village Retirement Community, along with a deep sense of compassion, dedication, knowledge, professionalism, and respect. Her commitment to both her work and the residents is steadfast. It's her genuine love for the residents that keeps her motivated and smiling every day.

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