

Oklahoma's Nursing Times

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SAVING LIVES IN THE ER

Read Julie's story on page 2



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Compassion in Action

SAVING LIVES IN THE ER

by Vickie Jenkins, staff writer

For Julie Hitchings, RN, the nursing profession has been more than just a career, it has been a calling shaped by family, faith, and a steadfast dedication to helping others over the years into her nursing journey. Julie has seen the challenges, joys and rewards that come with caring for patients in some of their most vulnerable moments.

Julie grew up in Edmond, where childhood dreams were far different from the life she lives now. She laughs when she recalls that as a little girl. She wanted to be a farmer, even though to this day, she has never been on a farm. She also wanted to drive a big dually truck, another dream she can't quite explain. While farming and truck driving never became her reality, Julie found her real purpose in nursing, a career deeply rooted in her family's medical background.

After high school, Julie played basketball in Edmond before finishing her senior year at Washington High School. That's when Julie followed in the footsteps of her relatives in healthcare. "My brother is a physician, my uncle is an orthopedic surgeon, and two of my sister-in-laws are also nurses," she commented. Surrounded by strong medical role models, she pursued her nursing degree and began her career at the University of Oklahoma, spending her first three years working in labor and delivery.

Those early years gave her a foundation in caring for mothers and newborns, but soon she felt the pull towards the fast-paced, unpredictable environment of the emergency room. Over the years, Julie has worked in ERs at several different hospitals thriving in the adrenaline-charged atmosphere. "I love

the 'unexpected situations' and the strong teamwork of my coworkers," she said. "We're such a tight-knit family and the ER is a team effort. That makes the hard days so much easier." For Julie, the closeness of her team is an important key in the ER.

When asked what qualities make a good nurse, Julie doesn't hesitate. "Organization, teamwork and empathy," she replied. For her, empathy is the cornerstone of nursing, the ability to truly feel with patients and families, who are frightened, hurting or uncertain. She holds herself to those standards daily, while also being recognized for her strongest personal qualities; dependable, honest and helpful.

In reflecting on how nursing has changed since she first started, "There just seems to be more diseases or complications than when I started out," she explained. Yet, she embraces the challenge, meeting each patient with the same determination to provide excellent care.

The greatest reward for Julie is knowing that her work makes a difference. "At the end of the day, patients always leave better off than when they come in," she said. "It's rewarding to know you've played a role in saving lives and helping people feel better."

Julie's motivation doesn't just come from the ER, it comes from home. She is the proud mother of two children, ages five and fifteen, who inspire her to keep going even on the toughest days. Family is at the center of her life, and her husband and children share traditions that keep them close. Every

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Julie Hitchings, RN can be found working in the ER at Integris Health. Her dedication to the fast-paced world keeps her going strong as she continues to save lives.

Christmas, they take a family vacation together and summers often find them at their house lake in Michigan.

Travel is a passion for Julie, whether it’s with her family or in her role as a nurse when she goes along with the students on field trips, ensuring their health and safety while also sharing in their excitement for new experiences. Outside of work, Julie’s active lifestyle keeps her balanced. She still enjoys playing basketball and is an enthusiastic pickleball player. Fitness is her favorite hobby, and working out is a regular part of her routine. She also loves the companionship of her three dogs, who add joy and energy to her days.

Through it all, Julie remains deeply committed to her profession, though nursing is not always easy; long shifts, emotional moments, and unexpected emergencies. Her story reflects not just the life of one nurse but the spirit of a profession built on compassion and care.

From the little girl in Edmond with dreams of farming and driving a big dually truck, to the skilled ER nurse who saves lives daily, Julie Hitchings’ journey is a testament to dedication and perseverance. For her patients, coworkers, and family, she is not only a nurse, but a source of strength, honesty, and hope.



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OMRF Taking applications for summer research programs

The Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation is now accepting applications for two summer internship programs.

Both programs are paid, eight-week biomedical research internships. Participants earn at least \$5,000, plus free housing for those who otherwise would travel at least 40 miles to OMRF.

The Sir Alexander Fleming Scholars Program is open to current Oklahoma high school seniors and to college students from Oklahoma who are currently in their freshman through junior years. It was founded in 1956 and named for the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who discovered penicillin and dedicated OMRF's first building.

Since its inception, more than 650 Oklahoma students have trained as Fleming Scholars alongside world-class OMRF scientists. Former Fleming Scholars include Judith James, M.D., Ph.D., OMRF's executive vice president and chief medical officer, and OMRF scientist Heather Rice, Ph.D.

Separately, the Langston Biomedical Research Scholars Program is open to students at Langston University who are currently in their freshman through junior years. OMRF scientist Valerie Lewis, Ph.D., who's also a current Langston instructor, helped initiate the program in 2021.

Following their internship, students in both programs often continue to work in OMRF's labs during the school year.

"these internships give students real, hands-on experience in the lab, working on research that's all about helping people live longer, healthier lives," said Ashley Cheyney, Ph.D., OMRF's assistant director of training programs and outreach. "Many former interns tell us their summer at OMRF gave them clarity about what they want to do next."

The application period for both programs runs until Feb. 1, 2026. Interested students and parents can learn more about both programs during a virtual information session set for 6-7 p.m. Oct. 23.

To register for the virtual session or to apply for either program, visit www.omrf.org/SummerScholars.



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DRIVEN TO MAKE POSITIVE CHANGE

RN seizes the moment

By James Coburn, staff writer

One thing that makes an emergency nursing career “cool” is being able to make changes in the moment, said Holly Emegano, RN, Oklahoma ER & Hospital. Today, she loves being a nurse for the simple fact of meeting people. She’s a talker.

“Every day is awesome. Every day I have a story of something that happened that’s cool,” Emegano said.

The Oklahoma City hospital has been the pinnacle of attracting nurses, she added.

“Everybody wants to come work here. I don’t know if it’s because it’s smaller and it’s just more one-on-one with patients,” Emegano said.

A friend working there told her about an opening at Oklahoma ER & Hospital. She interviewed and was hired in 2023.

“It was amazing. The second I walked in it felt like home, and I thought this is where I want to be,” she said. “It’s kind of like a dream come true in the nursing world. I’ve been through 11 different hospitals through travel nursing, and it is phenomenal.”

At Oklahoma ER & Hospital, Emegano has seen a gamut of patients enter with snake bites, injury from motor vehicle collisions, broken bones, and gunshot wounds. Listening to patients is a priority for easing fears. She explains the immediate aspects of the ER team’s medical response. She lets them know they’re understood.

“I like to sit next to them — somebody just taking the time to be with them as well,” she continued.

The staff uses the same cutting-edge equipment and technology, including bedside ultrasound, digital radiology, CT scan, MRI, and a comprehensive clinical laboratory. They treat and diagnose quickly with 85 percent of lab work done at the facility.

Resilience is the No. 1 word she uses to describe Oklahoma ER & Hospital’s nursing staff. The second they walk through the door, their focus changes from their own daily challenges to patient centered care.

“It is that patient at that time. It is their worst day. They put them first and it’s really cool to work with a whole team of people that are all battling different things. And then to watch them, their resilience in their job to make sure they’re giving their best to that patient when there’s crisis,” she said.

She would learn about a brewing global crisis soon after completing the Associate of Nursing degree program at Oklahoma State University—Oklahoma City. Right before the COVID-19 hit, she began her career at INTEGRIS Southwest Medical Center.

“I was an emergency nurse but then the world shut down,” she said. “And I had to completely change how to take care of COVID patients and that’s the only patients we had. I knew going into the ER I would see death, but I didn’t know I would see that to that extreme.”

COVID was scary for Emegano, but she also learned a lot. Her critical thinking accelerated quickly. The hardest part for Emegano was maintaining the separation of family members from entering the ER.

“I could have gotten into big trouble. We weren’t supposed to use our phones or anything, and this patient was actively dying, and they wanted to say bye,” Emegano continued. “So, I got my cell phone and face-timed with them. The



Holly Emegano, RN, Oklahoma ER & Hospital, employs her toolbox of skills for emergency care.

hospital wasn’t mad at me. They knew these were unprecedented times and we didn’t know what to do.”

A couple of months later, the patient’s family members came by INTEGRIS, sought Emegano out to thank her for her kindness during the passing of their loved one.

She understands grief. Emegano’s best friend died in a car crash at the age of 19. Years later, her friend’s mother came to her and said she would not have endured the experience without the nurses in the ER helping her through that.

“That’s the one thing she remembered — the nurses,” Emegano said. “I obviously became a nurse later in life. So, that’s one of my driving factors. Every time I’m in the ER I remember that.”

Emegano is also a sexual assault forensic nurse examiner for YWCA. She has been taught not to become too personal with victims of a traumatic incident. But sometimes, there are those times when she feels there is that need to make a victim feel comfortable after what might be the hardest experience of a lifetime.

“I’m able to take those trauma-informed moments to both jobs and it’s really awesome,” she said.

She tells others interested in becoming an ER nurse the importance of trusting themselves. Emegano has friends who have said they don’t know how she endures the ER. Strength comes from the heart and trusting yourself, Emegano said.

She doesn’t have a lot of leisure time now that she’s studying to become a nurse practitioner with a certificate in forensics at the University of South Alabama. But she and her husband, a soccer coach, enjoy their three dogs.

“I like to read. I’m a true crime junkie, so true crime documentaries are my thing. I love Disney. I’m a Disney adult,” she said.

OKNT

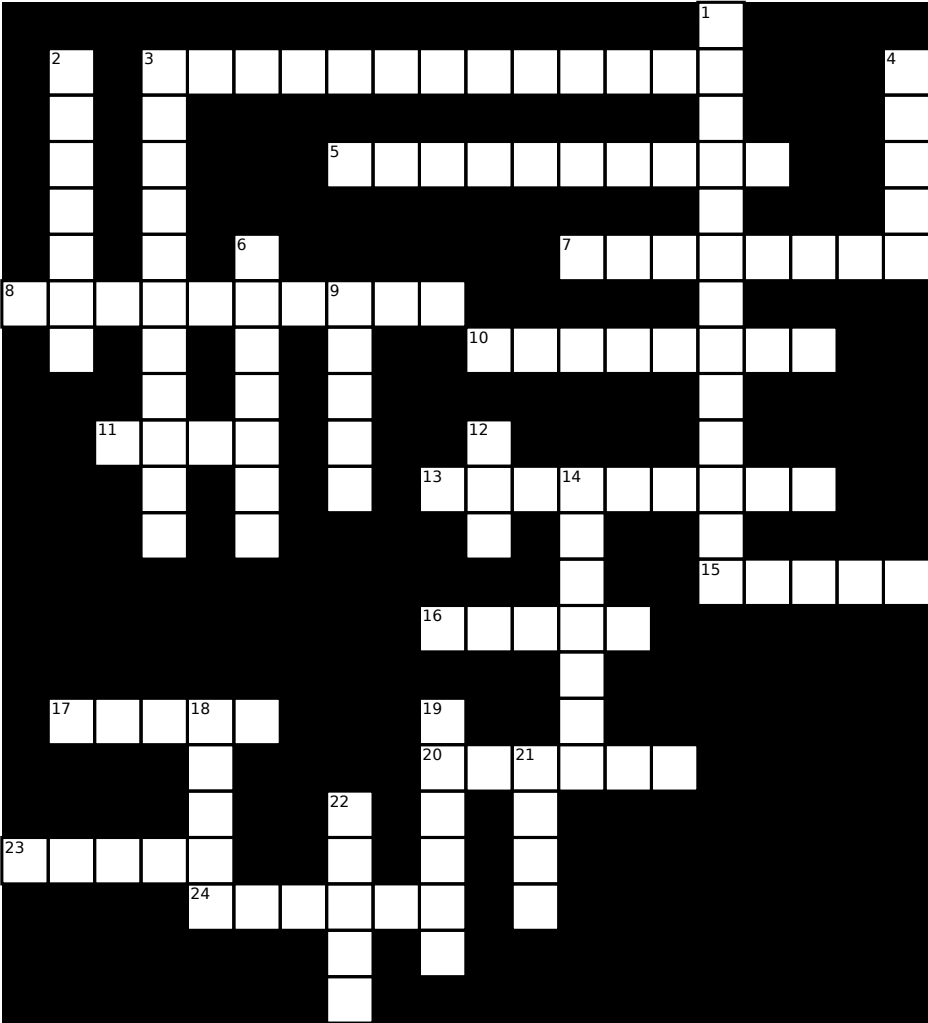
CROSSWORD: HAND HYGIENE

Across

- 3.Wearing gloves does not provide complete protection against hand _____.
5. side-effect of washing your hands too much.
- 7 .We should encourage _____ to remind health-care workers to decontaminate their hands.
8. The “father” of hand hygiene
10. Reproduces slowly on the hands after a surgical scrub with alcohol.
11. Health-care workers who wear gloves are less likely to do this to their hands
13. This is an important factor for improvement with hand-hygiene practices.
15. The natural rubber that gloves are made from.
16. wash your hands when they are visibly _____.
17. You can save this by implementing an effective hand-hygiene program.
20. In the late 1800s, this doctor promoted using carbolic acid for hand antisepsis. He is named after a mouth wash.
23. If you have an allergy to latex, you can wear _____ gloves.
24. Used as an effective antiseptic since the 1800’s but discolors the skin.

Down

1. soap that contains an antiseptic agent
2. You should wash your hands for this many seconds.
3. Healthcare workers can do this to their hands simply by touching an environmental surface.
4. Healthcare workers who wear these on their hands can carry gram negative organisms for several months.
6. the main ingredient in hand rubs.
9. Nurses in pediatric wards wash their hands this many times.
12. This agency regulates the agents used in health-care antisepsis.
14. Decontaminate your hands before having direct patient _____.
18. organism most frequently the cause of urinary tract infections.
19. The CDC recommends that health-care workers wear these to reduce the risk of acquiring infections from patients.
21. If this is located too far away, you may not wash your hands.
22. when these are artificial, they harbor gram-negative pathogens.



Answers on page 11

16TH ANNUAL

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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:

<https://www.swosu.edu/nursing>.



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Breast Cancer Survivor Story: Trust Your Gut



September is always a busy month for Sara Chairez; there’s her birthday, her daughter’s birthday, her wedding anniversary. But in September 2024, there was also her diagnosis.

“It was last September when I felt the lump,” she remembers. “I was just scratching when I felt it on my left breast. It was such a busy month that I put it off for a bit, but something kept telling me to go get it checked out – so I did.”

The Diagnosis

Sara scheduled a mammogram that revealed a small mass. A biopsy later confirmed the diagnosis: Stage 1 invasive ductal carcinoma. “This is the most common type of breast cancer,” says Bashar Alasad, M.D., a medical oncologist at the INTEGRIS Health Cancer Institute at INTEGRIS Health Southwest Medical Center. “It actually accounts for about 80% of all breast cancers. It begins in a milk duct and invades surrounding breast tissue with the potential to spread to other parts of the body.”

The Blame Game

At just 36 years old, Sara was completely caught off guard. “I was so young. Noone in my family had breast cancer. Noone in my family had any type of cancer. I was beating myself up that maybe I did something wrong to cause this.”

Alasad reassured her that she was not to blame. “Many times, women with breast implants wonder if that led to their diagnosis. Breast implants don’t cause breast cancer. They don’t raise your chances of breast cancer, either.” He adds, “There is one very rare exception, breast implant-associated anaplastic large cell lymphoma, but that is not the type of cancer Sara had.”

The Treatment

Sara underwent a lumpectomy, a biopsy of the lymph nodes and four weeks

of radiation. Lucius Doh, M.D., is a radiation oncologist at the INTEGRIS Health Cancer Institute. “Radiation therapy plays a vital role in breast cancer treatment, not only in destroying cancer cells but also in giving patients peace of mind as they move forward in recovery. Our goal is to deliver highly targeted care that maximizes effectiveness while minimizing side effects, so patients can focus on healing and returning to their daily lives.”

Sara’s cancer was hormone driven, so she opted to have a full hysterectomy to proactively battle her disease. Understanding some of the hormone blockers she is now on can lead to uterine cancer, she made the decision to have the surgery.

The Message

Today, Sara is in remission. She will have a follow-up mammogram and ultrasound every six months to monitor her progress. But she hopes other women will heed her warning. “I tell all of my friends and family members to conduct monthly self-breast exams and to stay on top of their annual mammograms. I was lucky. I caught my cancer early. I don’t like to think about what could have happened if I wouldn’t have been proactive and would have delayed getting checked out.”

To schedule your mammogram, call 855-MY-MAMMO (855-696-2666) or talk with your doctor for more information.

INTEGRIS Health Medical Group Welcomes New OB/GYN

Courtney Ketch, M.D., is an experienced, board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist specializing in women’s health at INTEGRIS Health Canadian Valley Hospital in Yukon.

She earned her medical degree from the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine and completed her residency training at the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

Her areas of interest include contraception and sterilization, adolescent patients, abnormal uterine bleeding, menopause care and hormone replacement therapy, routine and high-risk prenatal care, assisting with birth plans and robotic surgery. She is dedicated to providing her absolute best to the women of Oklahoma.



Courtney Ketch, M.D.

“I became an OB/GYN because I love caring for women. A woman’s quality of life is significantly influenced by her gynecological and reproductive health. It is a privilege to assist anyone in need of care in these areas. I firmly believe that women deserve the best care possible, and I strive to help provide that,” Ketch says.

Her office is located at INTEGRIS Health Medical Group Women’s Canadian Valley, 1205 Health Center Parkway, Suite 240A in Yukon. For more information or to make an appointment, call 405-717-5496.

NURSE

TALK

**You are
a crayon.
Which color
describes you
and your
personality?**



N. Portland

"I would choose black. In emergencies, I am emotionally stable, and I have handled trauma over the last 20 years. "



Jill Chester, RN

"I would be blue. I am calm and blue is my favorite color. "



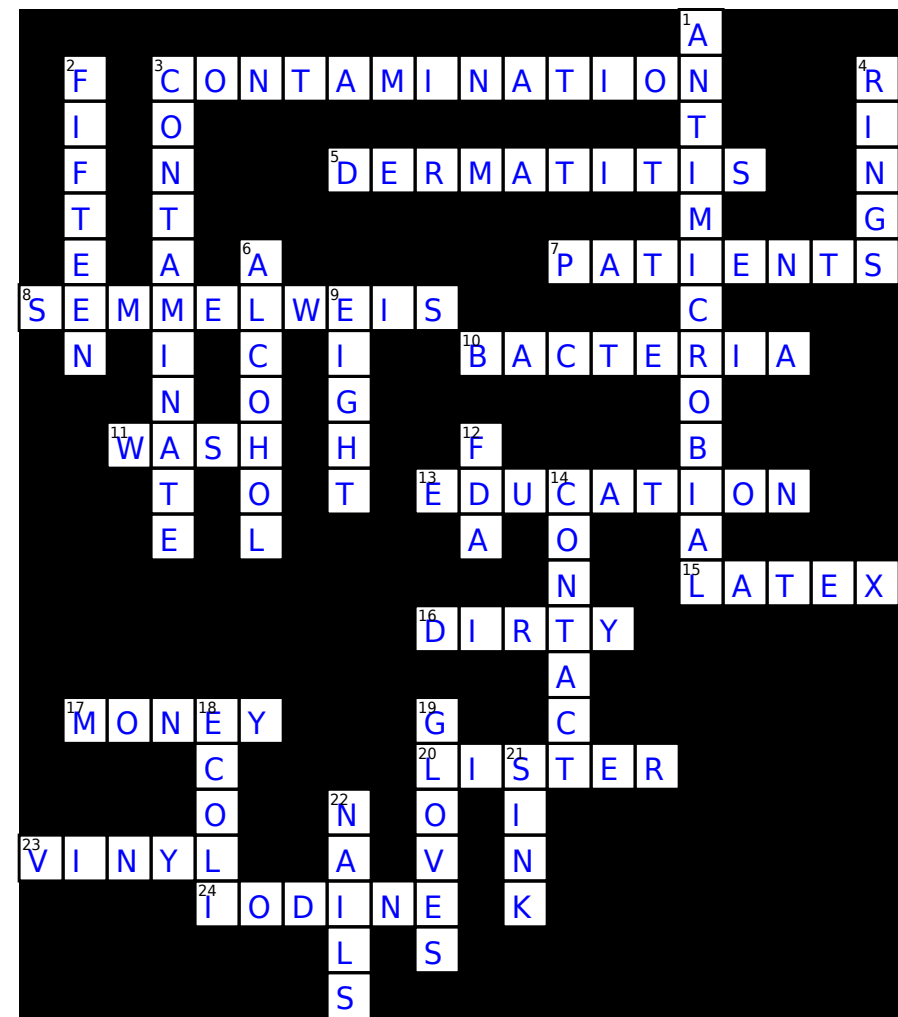
Ashley Farris, RN

"Green, because it is calm and a time for renewal, like the spring. "



Matt O., RN

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Oklahoma Wesleyan University to Host 2026 Implementation Science Symposium: “Leading with Service”

“Oklahoma Wesleyan University (OKWU), in collaboration with Hillcrest South, is proud to announce an upcoming continuing education event designed to empower and inspire nursing professionals across the region. The 2026 Implementation Science Symposium is scheduled for January 9, 2026 on the OKWU campus in Bartlesville.

This one-day symposium will feature expert-led sessions, keynote presentations, and engaging presentations highlighting this year’s theme of “Leading with Service.” Whether you are providing hands-on care in clinical settings, leading healthcare teams, educating future nurses, or driving innovation through research, this event welcomes all nursing professionals committed to advancing the field. Through collaborative discussion, networking, and engaging with presentations, this symposium is designed to bridge the gap between research and real-world applications.

The Implementation Science Symposium is approved for 6 continuing nursing education hours (one contact hour = 60 minutes) by Hillcrest South, an accredited provider of the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC).

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Jim Woodard, Chief Nursing Officer and Chief Operating Officer of TRU Community Care, brings over 15 years of senior leadership experience in inpatient and ambulatory care. His work in healthcare innovation includes developing Colorado’s first Transient Ischemic Attack Outpatient Clinic, assisting in designing a staffing to patient risk model, and using telemedicine technology to support hospice and palliative care patients. Dr. Woodward earned his Doctor of Nursing Practice in Executive Leadership from OKWU

and presented his DNP project supporting disaster preparedness in the community at the state and national level conferences.

Topics Include:

- Level-Up Nursing: An Innovative Nursing Career Advancement Program
- Healing Leadership: A Trauma-Informed Approach for Nurse Leaders and Educators
- Booster Training for the Resuscitation of Postoperative CABG Patients in the ICU: A Quality Improvement Project
- Bridging Gaps in Rural Obstetric Triage: A Protocol Implementation Project
- Expanding the Next Generation of Nurses through Academic-Practice Partnerships
- The Pivotal Role of Registered Nurses in a Changing Clinical Research Landscape

Registration: Registration is open until December 1, 2025. To register and view the full agenda please go to <https://www.okwu.edu/nursing-symposium>

Contact: For inquiries or additional information, please contact OKWU Department of Nursing, 918-335-6856, schoolofnursing@okwu.edu

OKWU is a Christ-centered institution located in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, dedicated to academic excellence and spiritual formation. With a commitment to developing servant leaders through a biblical worldview, OKWU offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs across disciplines including nursing, business, education, and ministry. The university fosters a vibrant learning community where students are equipped to impact the world with integrity, compassion, and purpose. Join us in transforming knowledge into action.

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Saint Ann

ASSISTED & INDEPENDENT LIVING

A MINISTRY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF OKLAHOMA CITY

Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living is a ministry owned and operated by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City.

People of all faiths love living there and say it is one of the nation's top senior living communities.

Concierge services enhance the fun and friendly culture and the home's focus on providing top-notch amenities and lifestyle.

Jessica Ledford manages the Concierge department at Saint Ann.

Do you ever wish you had a personal assistant or someone on hand for certain situations? Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living provides a 24-hour Concierge for residents' convenience. Concierge Director, Jessica Ledford, embodies the heart of Saint Ann's mission to ease and enrich residents' lives. Deeply committed to providing exemplary service, Jessica loves being there for people. Whether it's a postage stamp, a finicky phone, or something more serious, Jessica is quick to offer help with a smile and a hug. As well as being a devoted wife, mother, and avid gardener, Jessica is a bona fide sports fanatic. She gets everyone fired up for game days. Her competitive spirit keeps things amusing as she arranges trivia contests, sports brackets, and contests for everyone to enjoy.

The Concierge desk is open around the clock to assist people in a myriad of ways. It functions as an information hub and is staffed by people who go the extra mile to simplify residents' lives. From notary services and making copies, to opening jars or helping navigate online portals, Saint Ann's Concierge is devoted to making residents' lives easier. The Concierge department coordinates transportation to doctor appointments two days per week. It also manages daily deliveries from all types of stores, florists, pharmacies, and other vendors. The Concierge orders room service meals and reserves guest apartments and event areas for private parties. At its core, having a Concierge available day and night helps give residents peace of mind because they know someone is a phone call or short walk away. In assisted living, staff are also available to assist residents with personal care, medication administration, and individualized services.

Jessica Ledford manages the Concierge department. Trained as a massage therapist, Jessica says that, "Human touch is so important.

Feeling a gentle hand on the shoulder or the warmth of a hug can be so comforting. Such a simple gesture lets residents know they are cared for." Jessica is a true confidant—a sympathetic ear and a comforting shoulder, willing to take time to offer reassurance, kind conversations, or a heartfelt prayer. Jessica builds a personal relationship with residents as well as their families. Clarita, an independent living resident said, "Jessica is such a delight! Everyone in my family knows her, including my brother in Germany!"

After normal business hours, the Concierge staff also help with maintenance and housekeeping tasks like trash collection, replacing batteries, and resetting TV's. Thanks to the Concierge, aromas of fresh coffee and cappuccino fill the "Beverage Bar" daily where people linger to laugh and chat.

At times, the Concierge Department is on the frontline in identifying potential health issues with independent living residents. Daily interaction with residents sometimes leads to noticing a change in cognition, mobility, hygiene, or behavior. If something seems off, the Concierge can help alert families. This heads-up often expedites the medical attention, medication adjustment, or in-home care that residents need. The Concierge makes "wellness checks" on independent living resident when requested by others or it is noticed they are conspicuously absent from events or dining. If a resident is unwell, the Concierge will order a complimentary room service meal delivered to their apartment.

Families say knowing the Concierge is on-site and available for their loved one is a tremendous comfort and asset. The Concierge department

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conducts security checks of the building, monitors cameras, and tracks weather events. They are trained in emergency preparedness protocols like putting out first floor hallway seating during tornado watches.

Saint Ann Assisted and Independent Living has an outstanding life-enrichment program with numerous activities, entertainers, and things to do. Thanks to the evening and weekend Concierge, residents enjoy even more socials such as Thunder watch parties, weekend chair-volleyball practice, movies, Monday night hymn sing, and Friday night bingo.

Independent living resident, Michelle Tuttle, said, "Living at Saint Ann is like living on a cruise ship! With housekeeping, maintenance, dining, and the Concierge on call, I don't need to worry about anything. I can just relax and have fun." Residents agree, Saint Ann's Concierge Department is a blessing and a mainstay to Oklahoma City's premier Senior Living Community.



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OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

NEWS RELEASE

Former OSU President Hargis honored at ribbon cutting for Hargis Leadership Institute *President emeritus holds book signing for the recently released “One Lucky Cowboy: The Life of Burns Hargis”*



Oklahoma State University’s Hargis Leadership Institute will continue to mentor the leaders of today and tomorrow; now in a newly renovated space.

Nearly four years to the day after its launch, HLI was the site of another ribbon-cutting ceremony. This time, for its revamped home on the second floor of the Student Union.

“The Hargis Leadership Institute empowers our students to lead with character, humility and purpose,” OSU President Jim Hess said. “It’s about learning how to lift others, living the Cowboy Code and making a difference in the world.”

HLI’s mission is to cultivate leadership by using the foundational pillars of identity, relationships and leadership skills. These pillars ensure that students know who they are, develop meaningful connections with others and cultivate the necessary skills to make a positive change in the communities around them.

As part of HLI, students can develop their leadership skills through curricular and co-curricular programming that includes Lead Week — an annual celebration of leadership with opportunities to learn from leaders statewide and build meaningful connections with fellow future leaders; Lead4Success — a 16-hour leadership program aimed at developing four core skills of self-awareness, learning agility, influence and communication; and numerous other mentorship and learning opportunities.

“It is one of the great professional honors of my life to work with Burns Hargis, as part of the Hargis Leadership Institute,” HLI Director Josh Taylor told attendees at the ribbon-cutting event Friday. “I’ve learned a lot about leadership through spending time with Burns — people matter, raise your hand and volunteer, some of the best leaders are the best followers, and that leaders always surround themselves with great people.”

Taylor then implored others to get involved with HLI, citing the impact it can have on student leaders.

“There is no better way to make a difference in the next generation than to invest in the student leaders at Oklahoma State University,” he said. “You can make a difference in the next leaders, next people, next students who will lead universities, cities, states, families, public schools, kindergartens,



classrooms, engineering firms, doctors’ offices, school boards, nonprofits and more.”

The institute’s namesake, President Emeritus Burns Hargis, said at the inaugural ribbon cutting that the overarching vision of the institute was to help students “find the leader within them.” At Friday’s event, he reflected on the time spent as OSU president and a mentor to future leaders.

“It really was one of the most remarkable good fortunes that we’ve had, and we’ve had more than our share over the years, but to get the chance to be president of Oklahoma State University and Ann to be First Cowgirl has just been magical,” Hargis said. “After 14 years ... I just want you all to know how honored and how special and thankful we are that we got to do this job.”

Following the ceremony, Hargis celebrated a milestone of his own. He held a signing event celebrating the recent release of “One Lucky Cowboy: The Life of Burns Hargis.” The book — penned by Bob Burke and Gary Shutt — highlights Hargis’ life, his partnership with Ann, and their commitment to making Oklahoma a better place.

“The Hargis Leadership Institute is a place that honors the leadership style of Burns Hargis,” Dr. Hess said. “When our students walk through those doors, they are walking through doors of opportunity. The opportunity to learn leadership skills, professional skills and what it means to serve others.”

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Caring Through Every Beam: The Heart Behind Proton Therapy

by Vickie Jenkins, staff writer

For sixteen years, Sarah Goebel, RN, has been part of something extraordinary at the Oklahoma Proton Center in Oklahoma City. In fact, she was there before the doors officially opened. She was hired three months in advance to help prepare for what would become one of the most advanced cancer treatments in the region.

“It’s been amazing to watch this place grow,” Sarah said. “When I started proton therapy, it was still new to Oklahoma. Now, we’ve helped thousands of patients from all over the country. I feel fortunate to have been here since the beginning.”

The Proton Center specializes in radiation oncology, offering state-of-the-art proton therapy, a treatment known for its precision in targeting cancer cells while sparing surrounding healthy tissue. Sarah has worked in several hospitals during her 26 years as a nurse, but she says the Proton Center feels like home. “It’s smaller, more personal and very unique,” she explained. “You really get to know your patients and their families. The relationships we form here are special and lasting.”

Sarah’s journey into nursing began at Oklahoma City Community College (OCCC), where she earned her degree. Growing up in Oklahoma City, she never imagined she’d end up in oncology care. “When I was little, I wanted to be a professional wrestler or a mermaid,” she said with a laugh. “Things didn’t quite work out that way, but nursing turned out to be the perfect fit.”

Today she and her family live in Mustang, Oklahoma, where life is built with laughter, pets and purpose. Her two daughters, ages 17 and 21 have both inherited her caring spirit. “My oldest wants to work with children and my youngest has already said she wants to be a nurse,” Sarah said proudly. “I think they’ve seen how rewarding this career can be.”

At the Proton Center, days are busy and full of meaning. Patients come from near and far, some as young as four months old, others well into their 90’s. “Each story is different,” she said thoughtfully, but the one thing they all have in common is courage. Our patients are amazing, and they inspire me every day. Working in a smaller, highly specialized facility requires a unique set of skills, and you have to be able to multitask and stay calm,” Sarah said. “You definitely need a good sense of humor. Sometimes, laughter really is the best medicine.”

Sarah also believes in constant learning and growth. “Medicine is always changing,” she added. “That’s one of the things I love most about nursing. There’s always something new to learn. I enjoy the challenge.”

The Proton Center operates Monday through Friday from 7:30 AM to 5:00 PM. Sarah and her team care for patients who arrive uncertain and often anxious, but soon find comfort in the center’s calm and caring atmosphere. “We have two receptionists, Tessa and Cheryl, they’re just the sweetest people,” she said. “They’re the first faces our patients see, and their kindness sets the tone for the entire visit.”

One of the most emotional moments at the Proton Center is when a patient completes treatment. “We still ring the bell,” Sarah said with a smile. “It never gets old. You can see the joy on their faces. It’s a powerful moment for all of us.”

Outside of work, Sarah enjoys reading, traveling, and spending time with her dog, Riley, a 120-pound bluetick hound. “Riley is like an old lady dog,”



For nurse, Sarah Goebel, caring goes far beyond the treatment room. After 16 years at the Oklahoma Proton Center, she’s found purpose, laughter, and lifelong connections in helping patients heal, one beam at a time.

she joked. “He’s slow, he snores, and he’s a little stubborn, but he’s my buddy.”

After more than two decades in nursing, Sarah says the career still challenges and inspires her every day. “The science behind proton therapy is fascinating, but what really matters are the people,” she reflected. “You see patients walk in scared and you get to walk beside them through something that changes their life. That’s what nursing is all about, being there when it matters most.”

For Sarah, nursing isn’t just a profession, it’s a calling, rooted in compassion and connection. “A nurse never stops learning, and they never stop caring,” she said. “Every patient teaches us something new about medicine, about strength, and about hope.”

As she reflects on her years at the Oklahoma Proton Center, her gratitude is unmistakable. “I’ve seen patients improve, families grow closer, and fear turn into faith,” Sarah said. “It’s a privilege to be part of that journey.” At the end of each day, Sarah Goebel, RN, leaves, knowing she’s made a difference one patient, one smile, one ringing bell at a time.

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