

# Oklahoma's Nursing Times

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## RELIABLE LEADER

Macy Gingham, RN  
INTEGRIS Canadian Valley

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# A Reliable Leader in Med/Surg at Integris Canadian Valley Hospital

By Vickie Jenkins, staff writer

In nursing, dependability is more than a good quality, it is a lifeline. When patients are scared, families are overwhelmed, and the unit is moving at full speed, the nurse who can be counted on makes all the difference. For Macy Gingham, RN, reliability is not just something she strives for. It is the foundation of who she is as a nurse and as a leader at Integris Canadian Valley Hospital in Yukon.

Macy serves as the Med/Surg Supervisor, a role that requires steady decision-making, clear communication, and a strong understanding of what patients and staff need most. She is married and has two stepdaughters, and she brings the same caring spirit from home into the hospital. Outside of work, she enjoys reading and crafting, hobbies that reflect her thoughtful personality and her attention to detail.

When asked to describe the qualities that make a strong nurse, Macy didn't hesitate. She said a nurse must be a companion, someone patients can trust when they feel vulnerable and uncertain. "Everyone depends on you," she said. "You have to be dependable, because people are counting on you."

Macy shared that her strongest quality is her reliability. "I think my strongest quality is being reliable," she said. "I want my coworkers and my patients to know they can trust me." She works hard to stay consistent and steady, even on the busiest days.

Nursing can be unpredictable, and Med/ Surg is often a fast-paced environment where things can change in a moment. But Macy is the type of nurse who stays calm, focuses on the next right step, and helps guide the team forward. She understands that in healthcare, patients and coworkers need someone who will follow through and remain steady.

She also values being a resource for others. Over time, her coworkers have come to see her as someone they can go to when they need direction or encouragement. Whether it's helping solve a problem, answering a question, or simply offering reassurance during a stressful shift, Macy is known for giving practical advice and supporting her team with patience and kindness.

One of the reasons she enjoys working at Integris Canadian Valley Hospital is the atmosphere created by her coworkers. She described the staff as feeling like family and said she appreciates the teamwork that comes from working closely together. "My coworkers feel like family," she said. "It's a good team, and we really support each other."

She also likes the size of the hospital, noting that it is smaller than many others. For her, that smaller setting creates a close-knit environment where staff members truly know each other, work side-by-side, and share the same goal of providing excellent patient care. "I like that it's a smaller hospital," she said. "It feels more close-knit, and you get to know everyone."

In her supervisory role, Macy helps keep the unit running smoothly while making sure the team has what it needs to deliver safe, high-quality care. Leadership in nursing is not always about being in the spotlight. Sometimes it is about being the steady person behind the scenes, supporting others and helping them succeed. Macy embraces that kind of leadership with understanding and purpose, and she understands that the best leaders are often the ones who listen first.

When asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, Macy said she always pictured herself in some kind of leadership role. "I always wanted to be in leadership," she said.

That desire has stayed with her throughout her career, and it continues to motivate her today.

She enjoys learning and expanding her knowledge, and she believes growth is essential in nursing. The field is always changing, and she wants to stay prepared and informed so she can lead with confidence and care. "I like to learn," she said. "I'm always trying to learn more so I can do better." Macy's love of learning also benefits her team. A leader who is willing to keep growing sets an example for others. She encourages those around her to keep improving, to ask questions, and to stay curious. Her goal is not only to do her job well, but to help create a positive unit

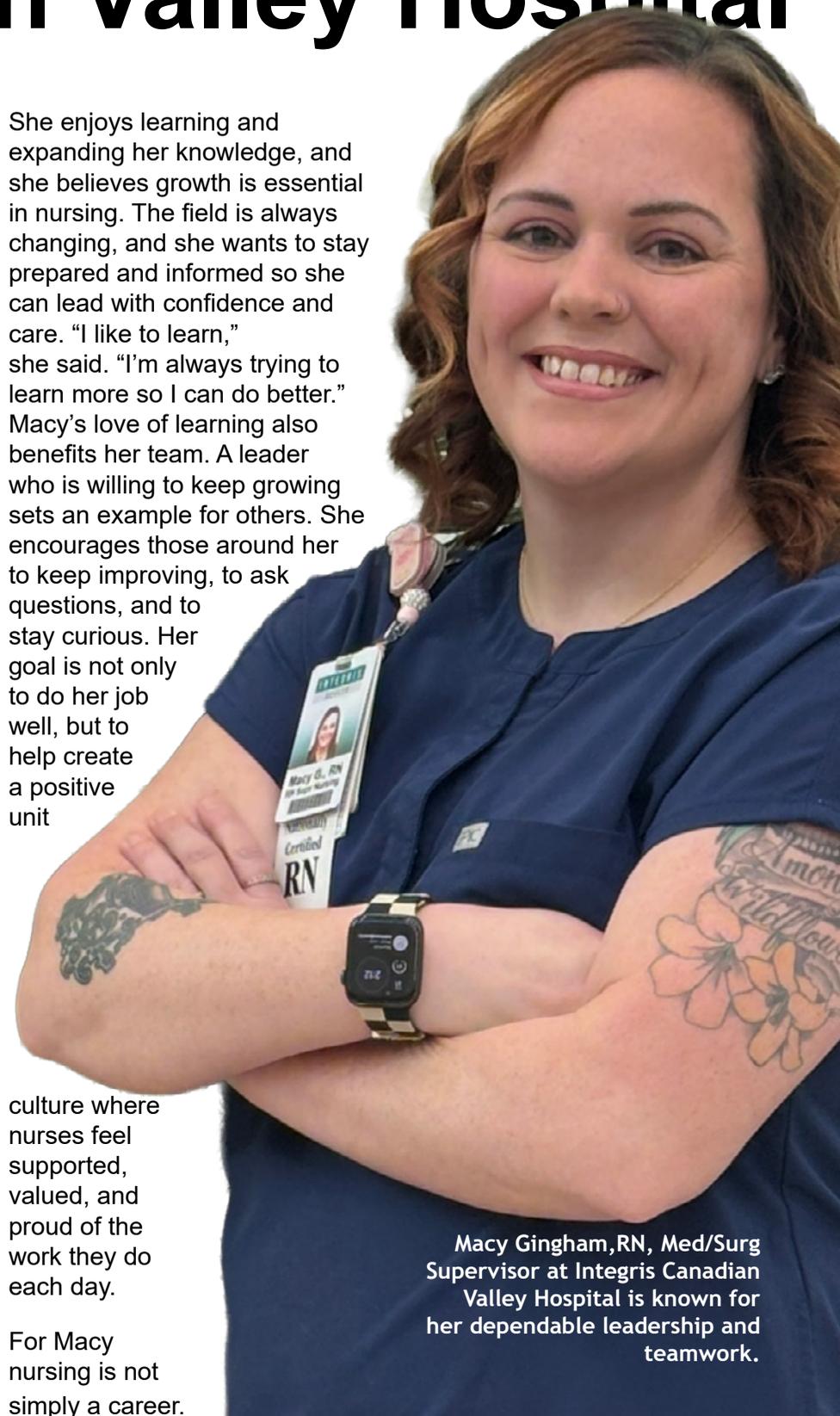
culture where nurses feel supported, valued, and proud of the work they do each day.

For Macy nursing is not simply a career.

It is a commitment to people. It is showing up every day ready to serve, ready to work hard, and ready to be the person others can count on. Patients may not remember every detail of their hospital stay, but they remember how they were treated.

They remember the nurse who listened, the nurse who followed through, and the nurse who made them feel safe during a difficult time.

As a Med/Surg Supervisor at Integris Canadian Valley Hospital, Macy Gingham continues to build a reputation for steady leadership, compassion, and reliability. Her coworkers trust her, her patients benefit from her calm presence, and her team is stronger because of her commitment. In a profession where every moment matters, her dependable heart is exactly what nursing needs — and the kind of leadership that makes a lasting difference.



Macy Gingham, RN, Med/Surg Supervisor at Integris Canadian Valley Hospital is known for her dependable leadership and teamwork.



# Seasonal Affective Disorder Can Significantly Impact Mental Health of Older Adults

As daylight hours decrease during the fall and winter months, many older adults experience noticeable changes in mood, energy, and motivation. For some, these changes may be signs of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a form of depression linked to reduced exposure to sunlight.

Seasonal Affective Disorder occurs most often during the colder months and can interfere with sleep patterns, daily routines, and emotional well-being. While SAD can affect people of all ages, older adults may be particularly impacted due to a combination of factors, including chronic health conditions, limited mobility, retirement-related lifestyle changes, and reduced social interaction during winter.

Shorter days and colder weather can naturally limit time spent outdoors and opportunities for social connection. For older adults, these changes can intensify feelings of sadness, fatigue, and isolation, which may be mistakenly dismissed as a normal part of aging.

Common signs of Seasonal Affective Disorder in older adults include persistent low mood, loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, low energy levels, changes in sleep or appetite, and difficulty concentrating. Because these symptoms can overlap with

medical conditions or age-related changes, seasonal depression is often overlooked or left untreated in this population.

Mental health professionals emphasize that depression is not a normal or inevitable part of aging. Seasonal Affective Disorder is a recognized and treatable condition, and early attention can significantly improve quality of life. Increasing exposure to natural light, maintaining consistent daily routines, staying physically active when possible, and fostering social connection can all support emotional well-being during the winter months. Healthcare providers can also help assess symptoms and recommend appropriate treatment options.

Family members, friends, and caregivers are encouraged to check in regularly with older adults during seasonal changes and to take mood or behavior changes seriously. Open conversations about mental health can help reduce stigma and ensure that older adults receive the support they need.

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# Local Woman Receives Double Lung Transplant

At 72 years old, Nola Harrison received a double lung transplant and a new lease on life.

"I can finally breathe again thanks to the care team at INTEGRIS Health," Nola says.

This New Year, you can probably find Nola courtside cheering on her favorite team, the Oklahoma City Thunder. After all, she even attended game 7 of the Thunder's championship clinching victory in 2024.

But at the time, Nola's lung condition had drastically deteriorated and she wondered whether she might be around to see the Thunder try to repeat their magical season this year.

## How it started

After years of managing asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, pulmonary hypertension and worsening lung disease, Nola's lungs had swollen and nearly doubled in size.

Each breath constricted her airways and restricted her daily life. She described the pain feeling like a strap tightening around her lungs, sitting heavy in her chest. Drawing a full breath became impossible.

Nola, a fiercely independent woman who has worked as a licensed clinical social worker for over 25 years, now found herself unable to walk to the mailbox. Getting in and out of bed or the shower became an exhausting chore. Her condition worsened until she ended up hospitalized and put on a full flow of oxygen. At 72 years old, Nola thought there were limited options available to her.

"I didn't think at my age that a transplant was an option, but I was ready to find a solution," Nola says. "No one at INTEGRIS Health blinked an eye at my age. Instead, my pulmonologists and surgeons provided support and encouragement."

## A life-saving transplant at any age

For Nola's care team, age was not a factor. That includes pulmonologists Arslan Ahmad, M.D., Mark Rolfe, M.D., and cardiothoracic surgeons Daniel Freno, M.D., and Jeffery Chad Johnson,

Right: Nola Harrison

Below: Transplant team, left to right: Stephanie McGee, Dr. Mark Rolfe, Mary Phillips, Ami Perry, Dr. Arslan Ahmad



M.D. who performed the transplant.

"To be considered for lung transplant, patients have to meet a number of criteria to ensure the patient's safety and that the operation will be a success," says Ahmad. "Strictly speaking, advanced age alone should not be the reason to deny someone a lifesaving procedure. At Nola's late stage of lung disease, her life was very much at risk if we did not perform the double lung transplant."

Nola received a double lung transplant in August 2025. Her surgery and recovery have been a complete success. She's breathing on her own with no complications and is back to walking one to two miles at least four days a week.

Since the first lung transplant in 1990, INTEGRIS Health has successfully performed more than 500 transplants. INTEGRIS Health Heart Hospital offers Oklahoma's only lung transplant program, serving patients of all ages across the region.

"We have transplanted several older patients, including a 75-year-old and a 78-year-old," Ahmad says. "It's not a number like your age that matters as much as how physically strong you are, how mobile and active you are, because that will dictate how well a patient will take to surgery and be able to recover. In fact, we are among the few centers who have such a huge experience in transplanting people in their 70s and above like Nola."

## Paying it forward

Now on the other side of surgery, Nola isn't taking her new lungs for granted. She provides education groups speaking with children and teens about the dangers of smoking and vaping, and the steps they can take to prevent chronic lung diseases. She participates in monthly support groups with other transplant patients. And she plans to celebrate

her 73rd birthday this January in style, cheering on her favorite team with hope for a repeat.

"What a blessing!" Nola says. "What a blessing to have this great care team advocate for my double transplant. I've been blessed with a care team that has made navigating treatment, rehabilitation and recovery as seamless as possible. I'm so grateful for them and for God guiding me on this path."





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# MOTIVATING FORCE

## Compassion drives RN's career

By James Coburn, staff writer

Being a service-oriented nurse has always been a motivating force for Jodi Stanley, RN, Community Hospital North. The hospital takes care of its patients, she said.

Being a compassionate person has enriched Stanley as a nurse and in her personal life, she said. She is grateful for comforting patients' fears.

"It gives you a feel-good about your choices in a profession," Stanley said. "We see six to eight patients a day. It's normal for us, but the patients are scared. A compassionate person makes a big difference."

She entered the nursing field 23 years ago after earning her Associate degree in Nursing at Rose State College in Midwest City. Her early years were with INTEGRIS Baptist Medical Center. Now in her tenth year with Community, Stanley serves in the post anesthesia recovery unit where she gently awakens patients, sees that their pain is controlled, and their vital signs are good.

At first, she worked on the med/surg floor where patients spent a night or two. From there she became a resource nurse assisting patients being discharged. She then entered the realm of the PACU unit. Stanley compliments the nursing staff for their consistency.

"I would say that we have a very strong camaraderie. We work good together, we're a good team. If there's nurses that are having some challenges with a patient, everybody goes over to help. You're never by yourself. You have a strong relationship with all the nurses that you work with. So, I like that."

The longevity of the nursing staff speaks well of an atmosphere of shared governance where nurses' opinions matter. Nurses bring their learned experiences to the forefront of building their careers.

The nursing staff is updated on best practices by having quarterly staff meetings. These staff meetings occur sooner when necessary. Nurses learn of impending changes.

Community Hospital is a specialty hospital with two locations, one on the North side of the city at 9800 Broadway Extension and the other on the South side of OKC off SW 89th Street.

BlueCross Blue Shield recognizes Community Hospital as a Blue Distinction Center for knee and hip replacements, as well as spine surgery. These centers have lower complication rates and fewer hospital readmissions.

"Every patient and situations are different. You can never (base a decision) of one scenario. You always must read the patient, how they're doing and what's going on with them. I think you learn that as the years go by," Stanley explained.

She has gotten to know most of her previous patients when working in other units. But most of her patients in the post anesthesia recovery unit will not remember her because of the anesthesia, she said. However, patients remember Community Hospital, and often return there for different surgeries.



Jodi Stanley, RN, is seasoned with wisdom as a PACU nurse at Community Hospital North, located in Oklahoma City.

At times she misses seeing her med/surg patients when they improve enough to return home. But Stanley will always be grateful for being the friendly face they wake-up to.

"They're always full of gratitude and are thankful you're there with them," Stanley added.

She will not only spend time assisting patients but will answer questions from nursing students coming through the hospital during clinicals. She reminds them of the importance of love and patience.

"Be in the moment. Be there during that vulnerability that they're going through," Stanley says.

*“We see six to eight patients a day. It’s normal for us, but the patients are scared. A compassionate person makes a big difference.”*

Jodi Stanley, RN

Students enter a myriad of worlds within hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes and hospice. Stanley tells them to absorb every experience and follow their passion.

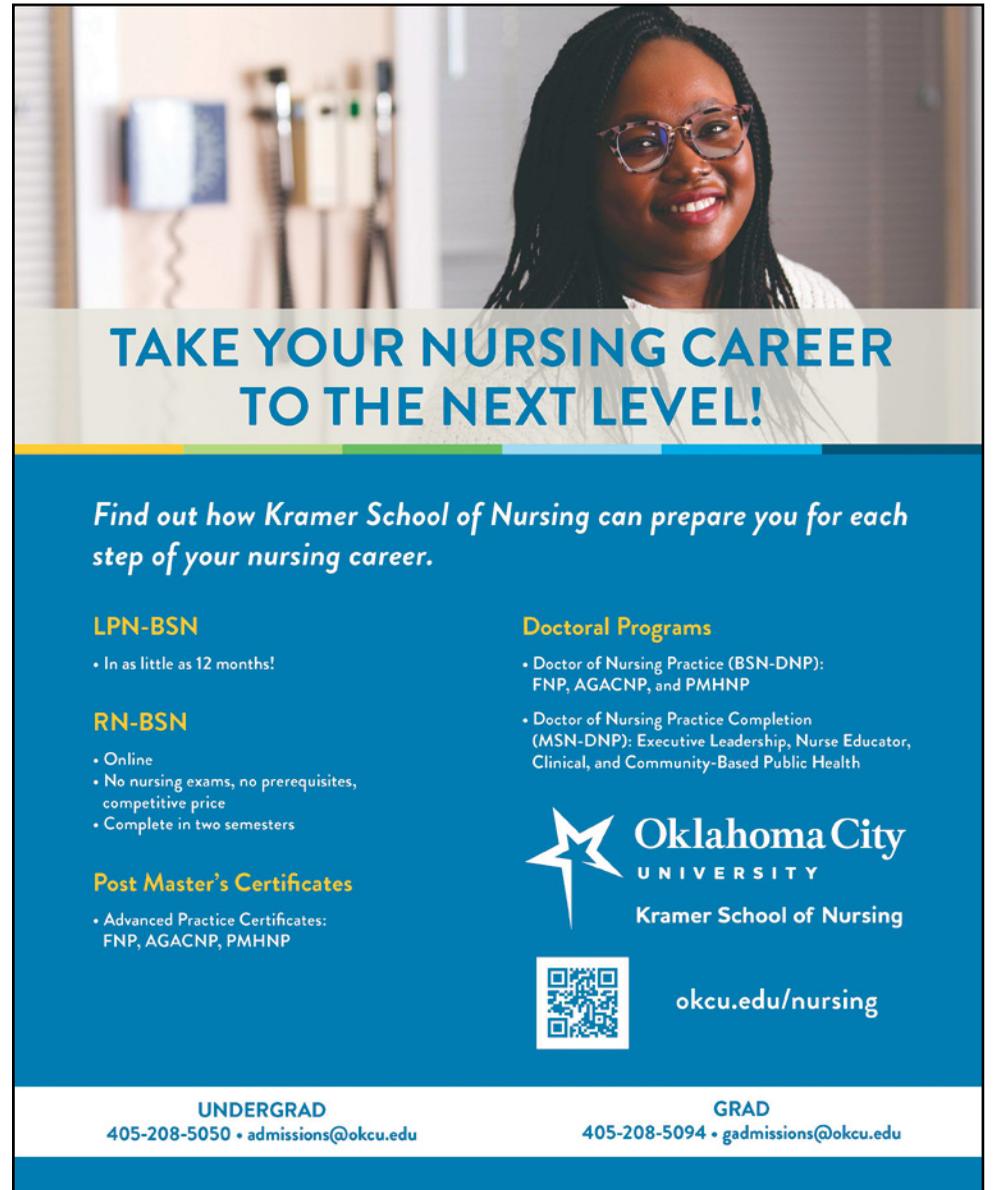
“I tell nursing students a lot that starting in med/surg is good instead of going straight into a specialty because you see a wide-range of patients,” she said. “Later it kind of helps you with your critical thinking when you see something that’s not right. When you go into a specialty, I think it helps nurses later on.”

Nursing requires a lot of energy and is often physically demanding. A lot of nurses keep track of their steps, finding they easily walk 10,000 steps a day, Stanley said.

Stanley also takes walks on she and her husband’s 10 acres. Occasionally she will see a few critters there, too.

“My husband doesn’t tell me if there’s snakes because I would want to move,” she said.

They have cattle and when their kids were living at home, they had other animals. She and her husband like being grandparents. They have three adult children and four dogs. The family enjoys traveling and spending time outdoors at the lake.



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# OU Children's Health Introduces Innovative Radiation-Free Ultrasound for Pediatric Urinary Diagnosis

*New contrast-enhanced ultrasound improves safety and comfort for children needing urinary tract evaluation*



## Oklahoma Children's OU Health Ultrasound Team

Oklahoma Children's OU Health has performed an innovative new pediatric contrast-enhanced voiding urosonography (ceVUS) procedure, marking a milestone in the hospital's expanded contrast-enhanced ultrasound (CEUS) program that increases access to safe, radiation-free imaging for children.

Unlike traditional methods, ceVUS uses ultrasound technology and a special contrast agent to produce detailed images without radiation exposure. The procedure is commonly used to diagnose vesicoureteral reflux (VUR), where urine flows backward from the bladder to the kidneys.

VUR is one of the most common urinary tract abnormalities in children, affecting up to 1–2% of all kids and as many as 30–40% of those who experience urinary tract infections. Because untreated VUR can lead to kidney damage and repeated infections, accurate and safe diagnosis is critical — and ceVUS offers that without exposing children to radiation.

Oklahoma Children's is the only pediatric facility in Oklahoma offering this specialized, radiation-free diagnostic option.

Few pediatric radiologists nationwide are trained to perform the procedure. Dr. Sandeep Prabhu, M.D., MBBS, and Dr. Adam Rensing, M.D., FACS, both pediatric urologists at Oklahoma Children's, are launching a prospective research study on ceVUS that has garnered interest from leading institutions, including Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

"This is a game-changer for our pediatric patients and their families," said Prabhu, who also serves as assistant professor and chief of the Section of Pediatric Radiology at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine. "Children can now undergo this important diagnostic procedure in a more natural, comfortable position without any exposure to radiation."

The introduction of ceVUS reflects Oklahoma Children's commitment to expanding pediatric CeVUS as a diagnostic tool for multiple conditions. Through OU Health's strategic partnership with Siemens Healthineers —

focused on enhancing equipment, modernizing technology and improving the patient experience — Oklahoma Children's is bringing innovative, patient-friendly imaging options to families across Oklahoma.

"We're not just introducing one new procedure, we're transforming how we approach pediatric imaging," said Prabhu. "Oklahoma children are more sensitive to radiation than adults, so having these radiation-free alternatives is incredibly important for their long-term health."

Compared to the traditional imaging method (voiding cystourethrogram or VCUG), ceVUS offers several advantages:

### **No radiation exposure**

Child can stay near a parent or caregiver  
Smaller, less intimidating equipment

### **Allows upright voiding**

Research shows that ceVUS detects more cases of urinary reflux — and at higher grades — than traditional imaging.

"We look forward to further use and evaluation of this innovative technology for the benefit of our patients here in Oklahoma," said Rensing, who also serves as an associate professor in the Department of Urology at OU College of Medicine. "It is important as the only tertiary, standalone children's hospital in the state to continually evaluate new technology and its potential benefits for our pediatric patients."

The technique can also be used during surgery. When surgeons perform minimally invasive procedures to correct urinary reflux, ceVUS provides real-time feedback to confirm success and make immediate adjustments, improving surgical outcomes and reducing the need for follow-up procedures.

Oklahoma's first ceVUS procedure followed months of preparation, including specialized staff training and an observational site visit to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia to learn best practices from experts.



# A DAUGHTER'S TRIBUTE

Her Father Passed Away  
in Hospice Care on His 70th Birthday

When Taylor talks about her dad, Gary, her voice becomes both tender and bright, as if she's reliving a thousand small memories all at once. He was a lifelong mechanic, a NASCAR-loving, snack-stocking, joke-making Oklahoma loyalist who never missed a day of work until cancer forced him to stop.

He worked with his hands, loved big with his heart and rarely asked for anything in return. When the end of his life came faster than anyone expected, his family had only one hope left: that he would be able to leave this world with dignity, peace and love—just as he had lived. That hope brought them to INTEGRIS Health Hospice House.

## INTEGRIS Health Hospice House

Gary was the kind of dad who showed love by showing up. So, when lung cancer came—20 years after he'd quit smoking—his family did what he always did for them: they showed up. For chemo. For pneumonia scares. For late-night ER trips. For physical therapy. For the moment a doctor quietly mentioned hospice. Taylor recalls one place stood out immediately: INTEGRIS Health Hospice House. "The way they talked about it, we just knew," said Taylor. "If it had to be anywhere, I'm glad it was there."

On the day he arrived, the staff spoke gently, moved quickly and treated every detail as sacred—not clinical. They bathed him, made sure he was comfortable, even shaved his face, knowing he always preferred it clean.

Gary wasn't a "case" or "patient." He was a man with a favorite donut, a family full of storytellers and an upcoming birthday they were determined to help him reach. He turned 70 surrounded by laughter, chocolate icing and the voices of people who loved him.

## The Final Moments

Gary passed peacefully that very day. Taylor recalls the moment with a softness that still anchors her. She noticed a change in his breathing and whispered, "I think he just took his last breath." A nurse came immediately, placed a hand gently on his chest and said, "Did you go to heaven, my friend?" That sentence, Taylor says, will stay with her forever.

The nurse didn't rush. She didn't whisper clinical terms. She spoke like someone who understood that death is holy ground—something to be handled with honor. And even after Gary's body was taken to the funeral home, the nurse stayed outside, hugging Taylor's nieces as they watched the car pull away. "That level of love," Taylor said, "you don't forget."

## Why Hospice Matters

Hospice is not giving up. "Hospice is love," says Taylor. "You're trusting them with the person you love most. You're trusting that they will care for them when you can't. And they do—because they truly love what they do."

Hospice allowed Gary to pass without pain. It allowed his family to stop being medical managers and start being present. It allowed his grandchildren to sleep in the waiting room and not be shushed. It allowed laughter and grief to coexist. But most of all, it allowed a family to experience beauty in the middle of loss.

INTEGRIS Health Hospice cares for families like Taylor's every single day. That care is made possible not just by nurses and chaplains, but by donors—people who believe that no one should die alone, afraid or in pain. [Click here](#) and select Hospice Care to make your gift today and keep the light of love glowing for Oklahoma families.

# ~Lula Simmons – Creating Smiles~

By Richard Stephens, Jr. staff writer

Lula Simmons of Midwest City loves being a Dental Hygienist. She continues in her profession 47 years after graduating Oscar Rose Junior College (renamed Rose State College) with a Dental Hygiene Associate in Applied Science degree in 1979 – the first black person to do so. At age 73, she isn't done yet.

## Career Trajectory

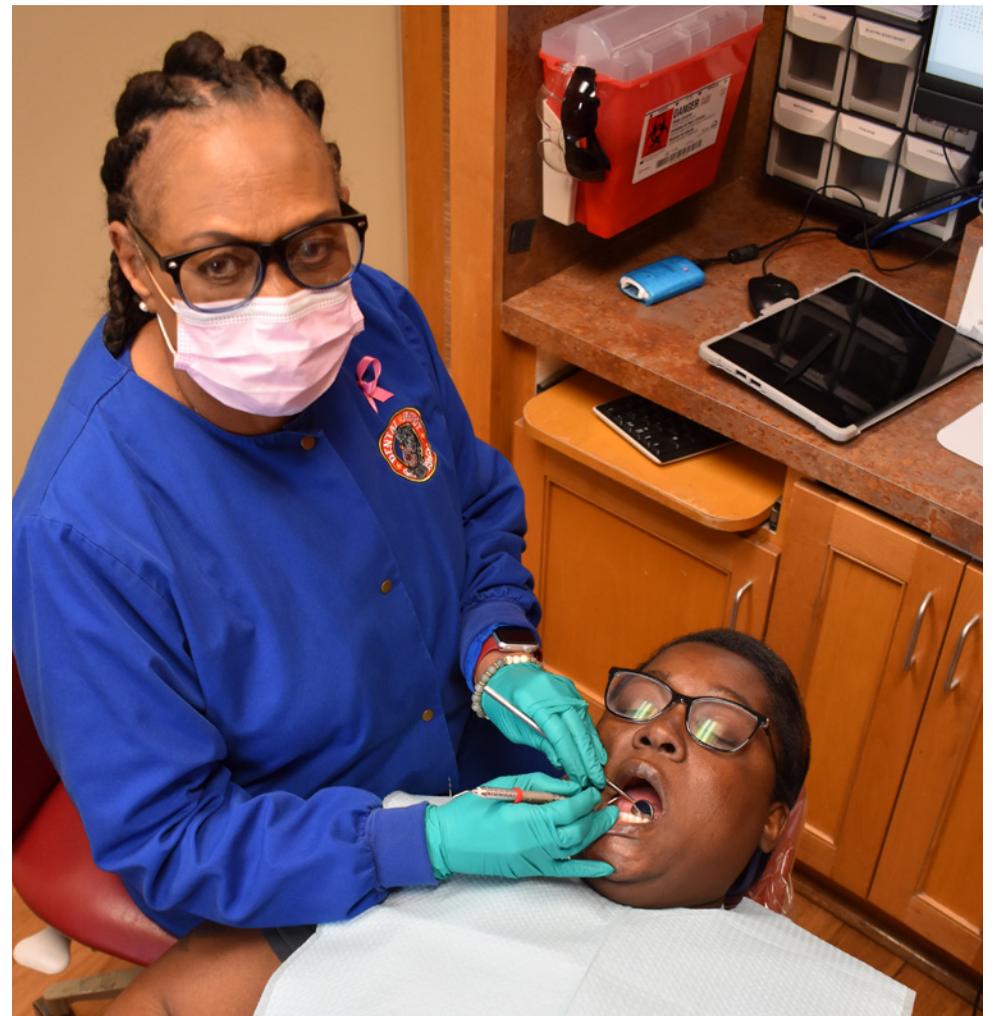
May 11, 1979. Graduation day. Since then, Mrs. Simmons has worked continuously. Full-time work at five dental offices, including St. Anthony Hospital, OKC, for 17 years and Dental Depot for 11 years. She supported four doctors on weekends too, including Dr. Sandra Windsor, OKC, 10 years, and Dr. Robert Warren, OKC, 13 years. Somehow, Mrs. Simmons also earned a Bachelor of Science in Education degree from the University of Central Oklahoma.

## Customer Care

Her oral hygiene and customer service skills are in constant demand as a full-time employee at Midwest City's Dental Depot. Jonathan Jones, Office Manager, relies on those, her work ethic, and ability to mentor and motivate the staff.

## Demanding Profession

Every technician sees an average of 14 patients a day (every 30 minutes); the office serves 300 patients a month. Earning a Registered Dental Hygienist license in Oklahoma takes study and will power. Currently, students must attend an accredited Dental Hygiene School, take two



Dental Hygienist Lula Simmons checks Dede Mason's teeth at Dental Depot in Midwest City.

lengthy exams and submit a licensing application with three letters of recommendation. Top that off with 20 hours of continuing education every two years.

## Mentoring and Molding Staff

When he was new to Dental Depot, Jones benefited from Mrs. Simmons' mentorship. "Ms. Lula...took me under her wings and showed me how to do things...she was very patient with me; showed me the difference in procedures and the importance of patient care."

Mrs. Simmons trains dental hygiene students from OU and Rose State. Jones said, "They'll work as her assistant under her. She can train in that manner...it's more like making sure she has everything, seeing what she does, how she does it."

Hygiene Assistant Dede Mason said, "If I'm having a hard day, she reassures me it's going to be okay. She calms me down. She is the one who everyone goes to for reassurance."

## Family Life

Born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1952, Mrs. Simmons graduated from Caruthersville High School, Missouri, in 1971. She married Kenneth in 1973 and they transferred to Tinker AFB in 1975. "I chose Rose State because my husband was stationed here."

After completing one year of basic college classes, Mrs. Simmons entered Oscar Rose's Dental Hygiene Program. She studied human physiology, anatomy, dental hygiene, radiography, periodontics and more.

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# NURSE



# TALK

***If you were a crayon, what color would you be?***



INTEGRIS  
Canadian Valley Hospital  
Yukon

“Red, because it is my favorite color!”



Sarah Ager, RN Clinical Manager

“I like the color yellow! It’s the color of the sun and I love sunshine!”



Kristy McPeak, RN

“Blue is the color of the beautiful sky and that’s why I like blue.”



Aly Massey, RN

## OKNT CROSSWORD: MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY

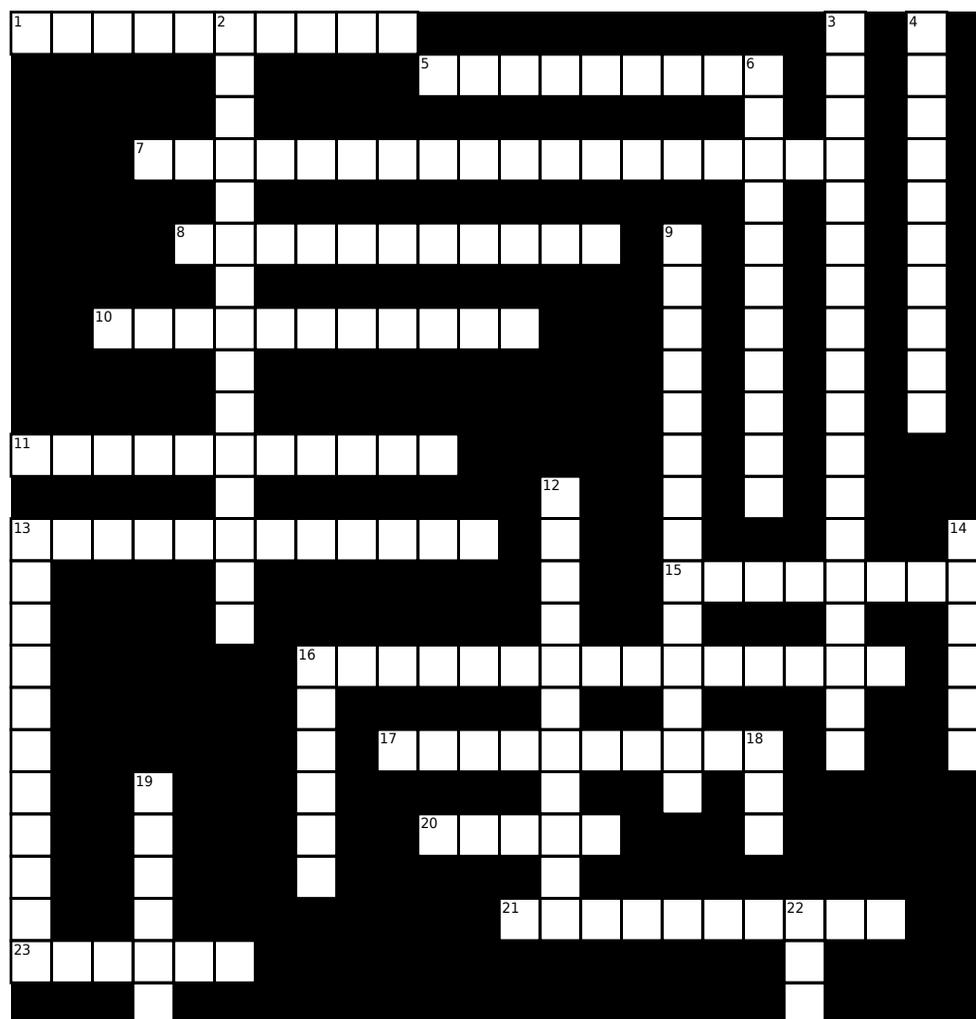
**Across**

- 1. the change in the type of adult cells in a tissue to a form that is not normal for the tissue
- 5. pertaining to the ileum and cecum
- 7. excessiva amt of cholestrol in blood
- 8. the part of the pharynx that lies above the level of the soft plate
- 10. abnormal multiplication or increase in the number of normal cells in normal arrangement in a tissue
- 11. formation of white spots or patches on the mucous membrane of the tongue or cheek
- 13. unable to control excretory functions
- 15. local and temporary deficiency of blood supply caused by obstruction of the blood flow to the part
- 16. pertaining to or compromising the skeleton and the muscles
- 17. formation of an area of coagulation necroses in a tissue caused by local ischemia
- 20. a transparent slightly yellow liquid of alkaline reaction, found in the lymphatic vessel and derived for the tissue fluid

- 21. pertaining to the myocardium
- 23. irrigation or washing out of an organ such as the stomach or bowel

**Down**

- 2. disease of the lymph nodes
- 3. enlargement of the liver and spleen
- 4. pertaining to the neurology or the nervouse system
- 6. excision of the posterior arch of a vertebra
- 9. elevated concentration of any or all of the lipids in the plasma
- 12. roentgenography of the mammary gland
- 13. situated between the ribs
- 14. gliding
- 16. a mucous membrane
- 18. no known allergies
- 19. pertaining to loins
- 22. Intravenous pyelogram







# ANA Responds to Death of Alex Pretti, RN

The American Nurses Association (ANA) is deeply disturbed and saddened to learn of the death of Alex Pretti, a registered nurse, in Minneapolis earlier today. We extend our condolences to Alex's loved ones, colleagues, and the community at large.

ANA condemns violence in our communities. The seriousness of this incident and others demand transparency and accountability. ANA calls for a full, unencumbered investigation, and urges that findings be shared promptly and clearly so Alex's loved ones and the public have answers.

One in four nurses already experience workplace violence. As incidents with federal law enforcement continue to rise across the country, we are deeply concerned for the safety of nurses, both on the job and in the communities they serve.

Nurses are advocates for the safety and well-being of their communities. They enter this profession to heal, to protect human life, and to show up for people in their most vulnerable moments.

ANA remains committed to preventing violence in the workplace and in our communities, and to advancing meaningful protections that safeguard healthcare workers and the public.

## About the American Nurses Association

As the oldest organization representing more than 5 million registered nurses, the American Nurses Association stands at the forefront of advancing nursing excellence. The association harnesses The Power of Nurses™ to champion the profession and drive transformation in healthcare. Through legislative and political advocacy, comprehensive educational services, and the profession's leading Code of Ethics and Scope and Standards, the association empowers nurses across every specialty and practice setting. The association is committed to ensuring healthy work environments, shaping pioneering policies, and cultivating partnerships that enhance both the nursing profession and the broader healthcare experience.

## THE POWER OF NURSES: Remaining #1 for Nearly Quarter of a Century

### *Nurses Remain America's Most Trusted For Nearly a Quarter of a Century*

American Nurses Association celebrates Gallup Poll results reaffirming nurses' national leadership and public trust. This recognition is very much deserved and highly valued at a time when nurses are facing severe workplace issues and are demanding all of their concerns to be heard and headed. Nurses are the heartbeat of healthcare, and they have rightfully earned America's trust.

Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, President of the American Nurses Association:

"The results remind us why it's so critical that we continue to advocate for safer workplaces, sustainable staffing, and policies that support nurses, so they can provide the high-quality care patients deserve across the country." Read full statement: <https://www.nursingworld.org/news/news-releases/2025/nurses-ranked-most-trusted-profession-for-24th-consecutive-year/>

ANA will continue to advocate for, support and work on behalf of all nurses across this nation. Throughout ANA's landmark 130th anniversary year, we are also celebrating the undeniable Power of Nurses™ to ignite transformative change, advance standards of excellence and innovate healthcare delivery.

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ONA focuses on practice, educational, political, and professional issues that impact registered nurses in Oklahoma. ONA does this for you by focusing on YOU!



# PRESENTS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

The Oklahoma Hospital Association (OHA) recently honored five member hospitals with its 2025 Excellence in Clinical Quality & Safety Awards during the Association's annual conference.

These prestigious awards recognize organizations demonstrating outstanding progress in clinical quality performance, advancing practices, strengthening capabilities, and achieving measurable improvements in patient outcomes. This distinction represents the highest level of professional acknowledgment from both the OHA board of directors and the OHA council on quality & patient safety. This year, 19 hospitals submitted applications, which were evaluated by quality leaders from hospital associations across the country.

Each submission was scored on several criteria: identifying a project tied to a specific organizational need, implementing innovative and evidence-based interventions, demonstrating quantifiable results, sustaining or expanding the improvement, and contributing to statewide learning and best-practice sharing.

Awards were presented across four categories based on hospital size, including a designated category for specialty hospitals. "The goals of the awards are to recognize hospital improvements in care, create a platform for best practice sharing, and foster innovation across Oklahoma," said Emily Coppock, OHA vice president of clinical excellence.

2025 Excellence in Clinical Quality and Safety Awardees are:

#### Less than 25 beds:

Rural Wellness Anadarko  
Project Title: **Project NØ CLABS!**  
Submitted by: Kayleigh Roath, Quality

#### 26–100 beds:

Bailey Medical Center, Owasso  
Project Title: **Cleaning Hands Saves Lives**  
Submitted by: Ashley Bellinger, Infection Prevention

#### More than 300 beds:

INTEGRIS Health Southwest Medical Center, Oklahoma City  
Project Title: **Surgical Excellence: Driving Down Infections Through Optimization and Collaboration**  
Submitted by: Tami Inman, Infection Prevention

#### More than 300 beds:

OU Health University of Oklahoma Medical Center, Oklahoma City  
Project Title: **Sepsis Process Improvement**  
Submitted by: Laurie Hensley-Wojcieszyn, Quality

#### Specialty hospital:

INTEGRIS Mental Health Spencer  
Project Title: **Agitation to Action: Restraint Workflow Standardization**  
Submitted by: Shari McCalip, Quality



OHA 25 Quality Award Integris Spencer



OHA 25 Quality Award Integris SW



OHA 25 Quality Award OU Health



# Nursing Associate Dean of Research Prioritizes Living Bold, Saving Lives

By Libby Maness

Dr. Tonychris Nnaka's journey to a career in nursing is one inspired by tragedy and fueled by his desire to live courageously.

At just 10 years old, Nnaka and his immediate older sister, then age 12, both came down with the same condition – a waterborne illness. Nnaka recovered, but his sister lost her life to this preventable illness.

At the hospital, there was nothing anyone could do.

"Limited resources, delayed care and systemic barriers cost her life," Nnaka said. "In that moment, I made a promise to myself — one that would guide every decision that followed: Whatever I do, it has to be about saving lives."

Nnaka is now doing just that as an associate professor and the founding associate dean of research in UNT Health Fort Worth's College of Nursing.

## Changing his perspective

But before making his decision to pursue nursing, Nnaka thought he would become a physician like one of his other sisters. However, when he immigrated to the U.S. from Nigeria, his perspective shifted. He realized he didn't want to be the person issuing orders from a distance. He wanted to be present — to stand with people in their most vulnerable moments.

"Nurses are the constant in healthcare," Nnaka said. "They are the ones who remain at the bedside, witness the full arc of suffering, healing and humanity. Nursing offered me not just care, but connection — and that changed everything."

## A trajectory for success

Nnaka earned his Bachelor of Science in Nursing at the University of Texas at Arlington. As part of the Honors College, he was paired with the research dean and was the only undergraduate research assistant in his program. This gave him the opportunity to present at conferences and publish research as an undergraduate. He discovered the scientific arm of the nursing profession and quickly realized the profession's vast potential. Nursing is not a career with limitations; it's a career with endless potential – one that can lead to clinical practice, policy, research, innovation and system-level change.

After completing his bachelor's degree, Nnaka pursued a Master of Public Health with a dual concentration in epidemiology and environmental & occupational health sciences at UNT Health. While at the academic medical center, he found himself exposed to even more opportunities.

He was selected as Gerry C. Gunnin Public Health fellow by Texas Health Resources headquarters, working alongside executive leadership and contributing to the 2019 system needs assessment. He then was selected as an administrative fellow at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Region 6 Headquarters. There, he witnessed firsthand how nurses extend far beyond bedside care to influence population health, emergency response and public policy.

"That experience once again reshaped my understanding of what nursing could be," Nnaka said.

## Back to bedside

Despite his growing knowledge at the system level, Nnaka ultimately decided to return to bedside nursing with a job in critical care and trauma ICU at Parkland Health and Hospital System in Dallas, after completing his master's degree. At the same time, he pursued his doctorate at The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing.

Then, in March 2020, everything changed. At a time when little was known about COVID-19 and the first ICU-level COVID patients arrived at Parkland, Nnaka was among the very few nurses who volunteered to care for these critically ill patients.

"It felt like an opportunity to step forward – a moment to step forward with courage instead of fear," Nnaka said.

And step forward with courage he did. Nnaka became one of the first nurses at Parkland to care for COVID-19 patients. Because of Nnaka's exposure, he could not go home to his family.

As the pandemic continued to escalate, his background in epidemiology and emergency response positioned him to be a natural leader in his department. Nnaka unofficially became a leader and a sense of calmness for his unit. He helped interpret the rapidly changing information the hospital was receiving about COVID-19 and formulated response strategies – all things that wouldn't have been possible without his master's and experience at Texas Health and the Department of Health and Human Services.

When Parkland decided to create an official COVID unit, Nnaka received a well-earned promotion to critical care manager. This is a role that typically takes a decade to achieve, but he earned it in less than two years.

## A natural leader

It should come as no surprise that Nnaka's leadership experience quickly extended beyond hospital walls. During the pandemic, he also transitioned and served as a health policy advisor to the Dallas mayor's office, working in the ninth-largest city in the country during a critical moment in public health history.

"I was often the only nurse in the room and helped shape COVID vaccine distribution strategies, ensuring vaccines reached the communities that needed them most," Nnaka said. "One of the highlights of my service was taking vaccines directly into homes in South Dallas – bringing care to people, mostly older adults, who might otherwise have been left behind."

Another thing he is most proud of is his decision to publicly receive the COVID vaccine during a time of widespread vaccine hesitancy in the Black community.

"It was a moment of skepticism in minority communities about the vaccine," Nnaka said. "I was reached out to receive the vaccine on national television. I decided to do so. My hope was that if they saw someone who looked like them step forward and get the vaccine, they would too."

## All roads lead back to Fort Worth

Eventually, Nnaka's career brought him back to UNT Health in September 2023 but this time in a very different capacity. The university had recently announced the launch of a nursing college – something he had previously inquired about as a student at UNT Health. He was now back to help build a new legacy.

When approached about the opportunity to return home and help create the college, he knew he was exactly where he needed to be.

"At the College of Nursing, I found bold colleagues, visionary leadership and a shared commitment to innovation," Nnaka said. "Together, we built one-of-a-kind nursing practice programs that attract students and employers alike."

"I see myself not as a traditional professor but as a coach — someone who pushes my students beyond comfort and prepares them for the future of healthcare. My classes are demanding by design, grounded in clinical judgment and decisive leadership, because advancing nursing practice and science requires the ability to act decisively in moments where hesitation can cost lives."

## Building his legacy

While Nnaka has already established quite a legacy for himself, he's not finished yet. His purpose is clear. He wants to transform nursing and the next generation for whatever comes next. He wants the nurses he trains to be bold enough to step forward, confident enough to lead, and willing to learn in real time.

"For me, nursing is no longer just a profession," Nnaka said. "It is a vehicle for change, a platform for justice and a promise kept — to my dear sister lost too soon and to every life that still can be saved."

## It's In Our DNA

At UNT Health Fort Worth, our students are destined to shape the future of health care, research and public health, and our faculty and staff are here to guide them every step of the way. Whether it's teaching safe patient care, advancing groundbreaking research or improving community health, it's all second nature. We were born to live out our mission to create solutions for a healthier community. Why? Because it's in our DNA. To view more stories, visit our newsroom and select the It's in our DNA category in the drop down menu.

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