

Oklahoma's Nursing Times

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NURSES DAY AT THE CAPITAL

STORY ON PAGE 2

Stephanie Keese-Pipkin,
MSN, APRN,
Board-Certified
Nurse Practitioner

Co-Chair of
Advanced Practice Nurses
Oklahoma



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APRNs Celebrate New Rule

Story and photo by Darl DeVault, contributing editor

This year, 300 registered nurses, nurse practitioners, educators, student nurses and healthcare advocates came together in the morning on March 3 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum. They were part of an Oklahoma Nurses Association (ONA) Nurses Day at the Capitol community interacting to hear about crucial legislation and listening to speakers advocating for the positive transformation of their profession.

After the meeting, the dedicated professionals traveled to the Oklahoma Capitol in the afternoon to lobby for new legislation on key topics, including protecting nurses from surgical smoke amid evolving challenges in their work environment. This year, key topics included advocating for workplace violence prevention, safe staffing levels, and patient safety.

The nursing professionals and healthcare partners also celebrated major achievements in legislative victories, such as the successful veto override of House Bill 2298, fostering pride and confidence in their collective impact.

Last year's bill sent to the Governor granted qualified Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) independent prescriptive authority, enabling them to prescribe medications without a mandatory physician supervision agreement, which directly enhances their ability to provide comprehensive care.

Governor Kevin Stitt vetoed the bill in early 2025, citing concerns over patient safety and the difference in training hours between physicians and nurse practitioners.

Oklahoma ranks 49th nationally in provider availability, particularly among prescribers such as primary care physicians and nurse practitioners, underscoring the critical need for continued advocacy and progress.

For Nurse Practitioners who often fill primary care gaps, Oklahoma ranks 4th lowest, with only about 84.66 NPs per 100,000 people as of late 2025. Long-time lobbyist Vickie White-Rankin led the ONA's advocacy efforts, coordinating with hundreds of nurses who went to the Capitol last year, making them feel appreciated and motivated by their vital role in expanding healthcare access.

On the final day of the 2025 legislative session, both the House and the Senate voted to override the veto, thereby making the bill law, effective November 1, 2025.

When the new law took effect in November 2025, APRNs were encouraged to submit their qualifications to the Oklahoma Nurse Portal to apply for Independent Prescriptive Authority Recognition. One of the morning's speakers and, over the last few years, the most vocal in pushing the agenda was the first to upload her qualifications to the Portal, taking a significant step forward.

"While seeing patients, I received a call from the Oklahoma Board of Nursing. Most calls like that can make your heart stop — but this one was different," MSN, APRN-CNP, Co-Chair of Advanced Practice Nurses Oklahoma – ONA Chapter Stephanie Keese-Pipkin said. "They were calling to congratulate me on being the first APRN in Oklahoma to receive full scope of practice. I'm honored, humbled, and excited for what this means for patients, providers, and the future of healthcare in our state."

She became the first Oklahoma APRN to earn the designation of having "Independent Prescriptive Authority" under new state regulations. Also, Keese emphasized how nurses were newly important as world-class healthcare providers during COVID-19 at the clinic she and her team opened in 2018.



At our Corner Clinic in Holdenville, our staff of six was doing everything we could to help our patients who had mild to moderate COVID-19 infections. They were at grave risk for progressing to severe COVID-19, facing hospitalization and death," Keese said.

The Nurses Day at the Capitol was about their nursing association's progressive approach to disseminating important, cutting-edge information and therapies. The ONA takes great pride in keeping everyone up to date, a hallmark of delivering world-class medical care.

Keynote Speaker Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond outlined several bold legal and regulatory actions he has taken in the medical sector.

The AG has sued since 2024 to curb "needless" price increases and unfair practices by Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs). His securing large financial settlements centers on holding these middlemen accountable for inflating drug costs through deceptive pricing schemes and predatory reimbursement practices that threaten local pharmacies.

The first of four major lawsuits was the Insulin Pricing Lawsuit in May of 2024, in which Drummond sued major PBMs and insulin manufacturers for an alleged "unfair and deceptive pricing scheme". The lawsuit claims these entities coordinated to artificially inflate insulin prices by more than 1,000% while production costs declined.

Several attendees remarked that the ONA's Strategic Goals, which include advancing the profession to improve health through advocacy, philanthropy, practice, and innovation, are not just a roadmap for the future but also a source of inspiration. They aim to champion nursing's value and increase its positive impact on health and society, inspiring all nurses to strive for excellence in their practice.

The association members are advocating for the passage of these key bills under review:

HB 3793 (Oklahoma Nursing Modernization Act of 2026): This bill aims to modernize nursing regulations and standards across the state, with an effective date set for November 1, 2026.

HB 4431 (APRN Malpractice Insurance): This legislation clarifies malpractice insurance requirements for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs), specifying minimum coverage of \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$3,000,000 in annual aggregate.

SB 1567 (Nursing Supervision Fees): This bill modifies restrictions on supervision fees for APRNs and prohibits certain requirements previously mandated by the Oklahoma Board of Nursing.



Stephanie Keese-Pipkin has been running The Corner Clinic, which she founded in 2018, drawing on her 16 years of experience as an MSN, APRN, and Board-Certified Nurse Practitioner.

HB 2298 (Implementation Follow-up): Following its passage, this bill remains a focus as it allows eligible APRNs to apply for independent prescriptive authority starting in late 2025 and moving into 2026.

HB 4462 (Prior Authorization): This measure addresses the health insurance prior authorization process, which often impacts nurse-led patient care and administrative workloads.

They are also championing broad advocacy initiatives. Beyond specific bill numbers, the ONA is prioritizing long-term solutions for the Oklahoma nursing shortage.

Rural Health Reform: Supporting the Oklahoma Rural Health Reform Act of 2026 (HB 3562) to improve healthcare access in underserved areas.

Mental Health: Tracking the Oklahoma Mental Health Reform Act of 2026 (HB 4444) to enhance behavioral health support.

Nurse Engagement: Encouraging participation in the Nurse of the Day Program, which allows nurses to meet directly with legislators at the Capitol.

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Enduring Legacy

OINA praises late educator's accomplishments

By James Coburn, staff writer

Oklahoma's nursing community is mourning the loss of an original board member, leader and advocate who helped to create the Oklahoma Indigenous Nurses Association.

Dr. Diana Mashburn, PhD, RN, was a dedicated educator, and a powerful voice for Indigenous nurses and students. Mashburn served as OINA treasurer.

She passed away peacefully on February 11, 2026, in Oklahoma City. She was born on May 14, 1965.

Mashburn was an associate professor at the Anna Vaughn School of Nursing – Oral Roberts University. She considered this her supreme professional accomplishment, coming full circle as a faculty member. Her undergraduate experience began at ORU as a pre-med student.

She earned an Associate of Arts degree from Bacone College, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree from Northeastern State University, and a Master of Science in Nursing degree from the University of Oklahoma.

Mashburn earned her Ph.D. in Nursing from the University of Minnesota in 2012, becoming a member of an elite group.

“At that time, Dr. Mashburn became one of fewer than 15 Native American nurses in the United States holding this doctoral credential,” said Jane Nelson, CEO of the Oklahoma Nurses Association.

Her altruistic-based research focused on Cherokee citizens living with Type 2 diabetes with emphasis on self-care, self-efficacy, and culturally informed health practices.

Mashburn's leadership roles included being Director of Nursing at Northeastern State University and Director of Nursing and Allied Health at Connors State College.

“She was very proud of her Cherokee heritage, and I feel that is where her heart was — serve the people and serve the land in a good way,” said Sonya Frazier RN, president of OINA and member of ONA. “And that's exactly what she did through her profession of nursing.”

She was always coming up with new ideas.

Her legacy of educational opportunities encourages Native nurses. She taught at every level — from CNA and LPN to BSN, MSN, and doctoral education.

Mashburn was a tireless mentor. She not only served in leadership within the ONA, OINA, Sigma Theta Tau, and as a Peer Evaluator for ACEN. Her influence touched communities across Oklahoma.

Her impact on Indigenous health will impact generations. Mashburn's legacy is defined by excellence, compassion, and transformational impact.

“Oklahoma's nursing community mourns her loss and celebrates the extraordinary contributions she made throughout her life,” OINA expressed.

Mashburn served as a peer evaluator for the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing. Her leadership shined in the Zeta Delta Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau. And in 2018, Mashburn was selected by Northeastern State University to travel to Beijing to meet with nursing educators and students. They compared notes and offered her professional advice on programs.

“Sharing her story with the rest of us is what touches other people,” Frazier said.



The late Dr. Diana Mashburn, Ph.D., RN, devoted her career as an educator to enhance health research for Native Americans.

Also, Mashburn regularly volunteered at Muskogee's Baptist Free Health Clinic.

She belonged to Muskogee Hope Chapter No. 401 Order of the Eastern Star. She served the Oklahoma Grand Chapter as Grand Lecturer in 2017. She was a member of the Muskogee-Indian Territory Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Auxiliary, Post 474 Muskogee and the Clement A. Evans Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Tulsa.

Diana and Greg Mashburn worshipped at Grandview Baptist Church in Muskogee. The couple loved their “fuzzy love puppy,” Usdi.

Board-certified as a medical-surgical nurse and certified nurse educator, she taught nursing at nearly every level, from CNA to doctoral levels. She filled the role of director of nursing at Northeastern State University and director of nursing and Allied Health for Connors State College.

“She was very proud of her Cherokee heritage, and I feel that is where her heart is — serve the people and serve the land in a good way,” Frazier said. “And that's exactly what she did through her profession of nursing.”

“She was very supportive of any ideas or suggestions that we had,” Frazier said. “She was just very encouraging. Sometimes as a Native nurse, it's good to see other Native nurses in these academia roles and supportive roles, especially, encouraging people to go on and further their own education, or even in research because there's not a lot of research for Native Americans in health, especially. That is something she did to encourage us to do as well.”

Sharing her story is what touches people's lives, Frazier said

Diana worshipped at Grandview Baptist Church in Muskogee with her husband, Greg Mashburn. The couple had no children but shared a love for their “fuzzy love puppy,” Usdi. And on special occasions, Mashburn was proud to wear her Cherokee Tear Dress.

“We would like to honor and remember our esteemed friend, colleague, and relative, Dr. Diana Mashburn. As one of the original founders of the Oklahoma Indigenous Nurses Association, Dr. Mashburn's legacy continues to inspire and guide our work,” Frazier said.



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Health Welcomes Record Number of Ukrainian Surgeons in Ongoing Humanitarian Surgical Training Program

OU Health, the University of Oklahoma's academic health system, continues its ongoing commitment to global surgical education by welcoming 17 Ukrainian surgeons for a month-long immersive training program through Operation Ukraine, which began March 22. This cohort is the largest in the program's history, highlighting the initiative's growing international impact since its launch in 2023.

OU Health's program is the only U.S. initiative offering international surgeons hands-on surgical privileges, translating knowledge into action. This spring, it has expanded to six surgical specialties, each led by nationally recognized physician leaders. The continued growth reflects OU Health's dedication to advancing surgical expertise worldwide while supporting a vital humanitarian mission.

Surgical Specialties and Faculty:

Head & Neck Surgery: Mark Mims, M.D. – OU Health facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon; Assistant Professor, Otolaryngology and Plastic Surgery, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine

Neurosurgery: Andrew Bauer, M.D. – OU Health neurosurgeon; Assistant Professor of Neurosurgery, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine

Trauma Surgery: Alisa Cross, M.D., FACS – OU Health Level I Trauma Center Director; Associate Professor of Trauma Surgery, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, Emily Switzer, M.D. – OU Health trauma surgeon; Associate Professor of Trauma Surgery, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine

Oculoplastics: Jeremy F. Tan, M.D. – OU Health ophthalmologist; Clinical Associate Professor of Ophthalmology, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, Thai Do, M.D. – OU Health ophthalmologist, Clinical Assistant Professor of Ophthalmology, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine

Orthopedic Surgery: William Ertl, M.D. – OU Health orthopedic surgeon; Professor of Orthopedic Surgery & Rehabilitation, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine

Vascular Surgery: Benjamin Chou, D.O. – OU Health vascular and endovascular surgeon; Assistant Professor of Vascular & Endovascular Surgery, University of Oklahoma College of Medicine

Preparing Surgeons for Frontline Care

The spring 2026 cohort represents military medical centers and civilian hospitals from across Ukraine, including physicians serving in key regions such as Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa, Kharkiv, and Lviv. Many participants serve near active combat zones and will return home equipped to treat battlefield injuries, train future surgeons, and strengthen Ukraine's surgical capacity. During their time in Oklahoma City, physicians will also engage with local communities, fostering cultural exchange alongside clinical training.

"Every cohort is a continuation of a larger mission," said Dr. Mark Mims, M.D., OU Health facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon and assistant professor at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine. "This program is not just a month of training — it's a sustained effort to equip Ukrainian surgeons with the skills to save lives under the most challenging circumstances. OU Health is proud to continue this work year after year, building a model of international surgical education that endures beyond the immediate conflict." The exchange is made possible through an ongoing collaboration with Razom for Ukraine, a U.S.-based nonprofit that provides funding for travel, stipends, and coordination of the program through its Co-Pilot Project.

"What sets Operation Ukraine apart is the model itself," said Daniel Solchanyk, Razom Health Program Director. "Ukrainian surgeons are credentialed, granted surgical privileges, and treated as colleagues in the operating room. That is a fundamentally different approach from standard international observerships. OU Health's faculty provide world-class subspecialty training, and in return, they gain firsthand exposure to the clinical realities of wartime surgery. Under Dr. Mims's leadership, this program has expanded to six surgical specialties and its largest cohort to date. Every surgeon who completes this rotation returns to Ukraine with advanced skills, professional relationships, and the ability to train others. That multiplier effect is how you rebuild a health system during a war."

A Continuing Commitment to Global Surgical Education

Operation Ukraine began in 2022, when Dr. Mims witnessed American and Ukrainian surgeons collaborating on complex procedures during a humanitarian trip organized by Face to Face, the humanitarian arm of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons. Recognizing the need for sustained, hands-on training, he partnered with Razom for Ukraine to launch the observership program in Oklahoma.

Since May 2023, OU Health has trained 32 Ukrainian surgeons through Operation Ukraine. In recognition of its impact, the program was awarded the Order of St. Panteleimon, one of Ukraine's highest honors for humanitarian service in health care.

"To stand in the operating room alongside surgeons who go home to work under air raid sirens and in the shadow of war is a profound privilege. OU Health is building something here that will outlast this conflict, a model of international surgical education rooted in compassion and clinical excellence."

For more information or to support Operation Ukraine, please visit the OU Health website and the Razom for Ukraine website.

OUHealth.com / razomforukraine.org

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Rep. Bice Visits OU Health

Congresswoman Stephanie Bice, who represents Oklahoma's 5th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives, visited Oklahoma Children's OU Health to receive an update on major security initiatives underway at the hospital and a briefing on OKNeuroNet, a telemedicine program that connects rural Oklahomans with academic neurologists.

Her visit reflects growing federal attention to strengthening health system safety and expanding access to complex care in rural hospitals. Bice recently secured nearly \$5 million in federal funding to support these security enhancements and the continued expansion of OKNeuroNet across Oklahoma's academic health system.

OU Health Leaders Emphasize Urgency of Protecting Healthcare Workers

"Healthcare workers save lives every day. Ensuring their safety is not merely a workplace issue — it is a public health imperative and a moral obligation," said Richard P. Lofgren, M.D., MPH, president and CEO of OU Health. "We commend Congresswoman Bice for her continued engagement on this critical matter and call on federal, state, and institutional leaders to invest in the people who make our healthcare system possible."

OU Health's security enhancements include increased on-site security presence, upgraded infrastructure, and strengthened coordination with the University of Oklahoma Police Department. These efforts come as hospitals nationwide face a sharp rise in violence against healthcare workers, a trend that threatens both workforce safety and the quality of patient care.

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Diana Denise (Downing) Mashburn passed peacefully from this life to the next on February 11, 2026 in Oklahoma City. She was born on May 14, 1965, to Charles and Mary Downing of Muskogee, Oklahoma. She graduated from Muskogee High School in 1983.

Diana was an Associate Professor of the Anna Vaughn School of Nursing at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa. She considered this her supreme professional accomplishment: Coming full circle to be a faculty member since her undergraduate college experience began at ORU as a pre-med student.

After changing her major to Nursing, she earned an Associate of Arts from Bacone College, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Northeastern State University, and a Master's of Science in Nursing from the University of Oklahoma.

Diana completed a Ph.D. in Nursing from the University of Minnesota in 2012, becoming a member of an elite group. At that time, Dr. Mashburn became one of fewer than 15 Native American nurses in the United States holding this doctoral credential.

Board-certified as a Medical-Surgical Nurse and Certified Nurse Educator, she taught nursing at nearly every level, from Certified Nurse Assistant to doctoral levels. She filled the role of Director of Nursing at Northeastern State University and Director of Nursing and Allied Health for Connors State College.

She has served as a Peer Evaluator for the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing. Diana held leadership positions in the Oklahoma Nurses Association, the Oklahoma Indigenous Nurses Association, and the Zeta Delta Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau. In July of 2018, Diana was selected by Northeastern State University to travel to Beijing, China to meet with nursing educators and students to compare notes and offer her professional advice on these programs. She was also a regular volunteer at Muskogee's Baptist Free Health Clinic.

Diana belonged to Muskogee Hope Chapter No. 401 Order of the Eastern Star. She served the Oklahoma Grand Chapter as Grand Lecturer in 2017. Diana was a member of the Muskogee-Indian Territory Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Auxiliary, Post 474 Muskogee and the Clement A. Evans Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Tulsa.

Diana worshipped at Grandview Baptist Church in Muskogee alongside her husband, Greg Mashburn. The couple had no children but shared a love for their "fuzzy love puppy", Usdi.

Diana was preceded in death by her father, Charles Downing and her grandmother, Willie Jestice. She is survived by her husband Greg; mother, Mary (McLain) Downing; sister, DaRhonda (Downing) Clabaugh; brother-in-law, Seth Clabaugh; nephew, Matthew Clabaugh and his wife Morgan (Beal) Clabaugh; and niece, Mary Dawn Clabaugh.



Cornerstone Funeral Home

Celebrating The Life Of



Diana Denise Downing Mashburn

1965 - 2026



Pictured left is Heather Gregg, NRCMA/NRCPT who serves as the Clinic's Certified Medical Assistant, Dr. Merrill, center and Sabrina Stinnett, Certified Medical Assistant.

By Van Mitchell, staff writer

After nearly three decades with INTEGRIS Health, April Merrill, APRN-CNS, DNP, decided it was time for a new chapter—one that would provide greater flexibility and allow her to lead her own practice.

Last fall, Merrill opened Oklahoma Sleep & Wellness Clinic, located at 5350 S. Western Ave., Suite 200 in Oklahoma City.

"I wanted more flexibility with my schedule," Merrill said. "My family had been encouraging me to take this step for quite some time. With recent changes in state law allowing advanced practice nurses to practice independently without a supervising physician, it became much easier to open my own clinic."

Merrill has received approval from the Oklahoma Board of Nursing for Independent Practice. Although the clinic has been open only a few months, it has already earned certification as an Oklahoma Women-Owned Business.

Merrill is a board-certified Advanced Practice Registered Nurse specializing in sleep medicine. She earned both her Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Science in Nursing from the University of Oklahoma and later completed her Doctor of Nursing Practice at Texas Christian University. Throughout her career, she has served as a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma College of Nursing and as a member of the Oklahoma Board of Nursing.

With a strong commitment to patient-centered care, Merrill is passionate about educating patients and developing personalized treatment plans that improve sleep and overall health. She treats adults aged 18 and older.

At Oklahoma Sleep & Wellness Clinic, Merrill specializes in diagnosing and treating sleep disorders through comprehensive sleep consultations, FDA-approved home sleep testing, and advanced therapy options.

"Our clinic offers CPAP, BiPAP, ASV devices, as well as Inspire therapy to treat conditions such as sleep apnea, chronic snoring, and other sleep-related breathing disorders—all right here in Oklahoma City," Merrill said. "Whether someone is experiencing daytime fatigue, disrupted sleep, or suspects they may have obstructive sleep apnea, we provide convenient, patient-centered solutions to help them sleep better and live healthier lives."

Merrill has focused primarily on sleep medicine for the past 12 years.

"My earlier background was in diabetes and endocrinology," she said. "In recent years, most insurance companies have moved toward home sleep testing as the first line of diagnosis rather than in-lab testing. It makes sense—home testing is less expensive, faster, and most patients tend to sleep better in their own beds."

Today, several types of home sleep testing equipment are available.

"Historically, patients had to check out equipment from a sleep center, take it home, use it overnight, and return it the next day," Merrill said. "That process could delay diagnosis. Now, newer recyclable home sleep testing devices allow for quicker and more convenient testing. I can offer one of these options to select patients, while others may be referred to facilities that provide different equipment."

While many patients benefit from home sleep testing, Merrill notes that

in-lab sleep studies are still essential for more complex cases. She continues to collaborate with area sleep centers, including those operated by INTEGRIS Health, where she remains an INTEGRIS partner.

“Those facilities offer overnight, in-lab sleep studies, and I still make referrals for those when appropriate,” she said. “They’re particularly helpful for patients who require more advanced or complex testing.”

One technology used by Merrill’s clinic is the NightOwl device, produced by ResMed, a leading manufacturer of CPAP equipment.

“It’s a small device worn on the finger that transmits data through a smartphone app to a secure cloud server,” Merrill explained. “Once enough data is collected, the results are reviewed and interpreted by a collaborating physician, Dr. Whitson, who provides the final interpretation.”

If the study confirms sleep apnea and the patient agrees to treatment, Merrill coordinates therapy with medical equipment providers.

“We can send an order to a durable medical equipment company to initiate CPAP therapy or auto-adjusting PAP therapy,” she said. “After a few weeks of treatment, patients return for follow-up so we can evaluate their progress and make any necessary adjustments.”

Untreated sleep apnea can contribute to several serious health conditions.

“The biggest concerns are heart disease and stroke,” Merrill said. “When breathing decreases during sleep, oxygen levels drop and the body releases stress hormones like cortisol to wake the person up so they can breathe again. Elevated cortisol can lead to weight gain, high blood pressure, and elevated blood sugar, all of which place additional stress on the body.”

Patients are referred to the clinic by primary care providers, but some seek evaluation after recognizing symptoms themselves.

“We use screening tools such as the Epworth Sleepiness Scale and the Insomnia Severity Index during the initial visit,” Merrill said. “We repeat those assessments after patients begin therapy, and it’s very rewarding to see those scores improve. Even more rewarding is seeing patients come back feeling better, sleeping better, and enjoying improved quality of life.”

For more information about Oklahoma Sleep & Wellness Clinic, call (405) 777-2727 or visit www.oksleepwell.com.



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Memory Care

LPN gives a lot of love

By James Coburn

Michaela Palmer's quest to become a nurse sparked as a child.

"I grew up in a church. I've always had close ties to the elderly. I've always been very helpful, so I knew I wanted to be in healthcare where I could be around that age," said Palmer, LPN and charge nurse in memory care at Timbers Skilled Nursing and Therapy, located in Edmond.

After high school she put her plan in action. Palmer said she had a good experience working at her own pace to earn her LPN license at Platt College in 2017. She plans to work toward her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree in the spring of 2027. Bridges Health has a program to support employees to further their education.

She has been with Bridges Health since September. Her career has brought her a wealth of experience in acute care, long-term care, skilled, med/surg, and traveling. This is the first time she has served in memory care. And it's awesome, Palmer said.

She connects with all age groups, she added.

"It touches my heart because you get to meet a totally different new person," Palmer said. "But you get to know them as a person, learning new experiences together. Reteaching things — it's a lot of love and care that you give. I especially love the loving part. They're lovable back there. They like to be loved and reassured, That's the best part of it. I get to love on them all day. And they have no filter, they say whatever they want."

She acknowledges what they say when they speak of a departed loved one as if they are present. Palmer might say, 'Hey, mom may be gone,' or entertain where they are in that moment to avoid upsetting them.

It can be hard for somebody living with Alzheimer's disease to reason. It makes them comfortable to think about their mom that day. So, she has learned to roll with it, Palmer said.

"Life is full of circles. Being a nurse has taught me that we go from the stage of needing to be taken care of as babies. And we end at the stage of needing to be taken care of as elderly," she said. "It's a beautiful cycle you get to see. And when you have someone dependent on you, it gives you confidence and motivation to give your best every day because you're their lifeline."

Music is one thing that residents living with dementia don't forget, Palmer said, especially songs they heard when growing up. Many of the residents remember church songs.

They may forget their children; they may forget their spouse. But they can still sing Elvis and Tina Turner.

Memory care residents at Timbers Skilled Nursing and Therapy come from diverse backgrounds and ages. They include individuals 20-30 years younger than typical residents but live with the same issues as someone much older.

Palmer works during the day, a time for her to keep a steady routine flowing for her residents. This activity will help them to sleep at night and not to wander.



Michaela Palmer, LPN and charge nurse in memory care at Timbers Skilled Nursing and Therapy gives a lot of love to her residents as well as husband and their six daughters.

"Each day is different, but I try to keep it consistent and busy with activities, music, jokes, whatever we can do for them, dance for them. We're pretty upbeat for them during the day," Palmer continued.

New memory care residents are greeted in a manner based on their personality, Palmer said. Some people like to be left alone. Others want to be 'bombarded' with extra love. Palmer said some new residents want to go with the flow.

A lot of their histories come from their families. When families are unavailable nurses get to know them every day by observing their patients.

"Some are a little bit easier going than others. Someone who has a harder time, I try to sit and talk to them during admissions and try to get a feel for what they're upset about, what their concerns are, if they're angry. And depending on their response, I'll address it accordingly," she explained.

When a new memory care resident is angry, she may ask them if they'd like somebody to sit with them. Whenever necessary, she will explain the same things to them every day.

But if they're easy going and laid-back, I introduce them to everybody in the unit," Palmer said. "I tell them, 'Hey guys, we've got a new family member.' I may put on a welcome sign for them, give them extra hugs. When I come in, I tell them good morning. When I leave, I tell them goodnight — something that tells them that we love them, we're going to take care of you, and you're going to be safe."

Nursing has taught Palmer quite a bit about being grateful for life.

"The blessings that we have — our legs, our lungs, our arms. It makes you appreciate what you have," she said.

NURSE



TALK

What is important for someone to know before entering your profession?



Timbers Skilled Nursing and Therapy

“This job is mainly common sense. It’s treating residents how you would like to be treated with dignity and respect.”



Olivia Harvey, CNA

“I think you need to know your structure and making sure you have love and compassion for you residents.”



Chaun'kuise Kernal, CNA

“It takes a special person, it takes training, it takes patience. It takes multiple people to deal with dementia.”



Michaela Palmer, LPN

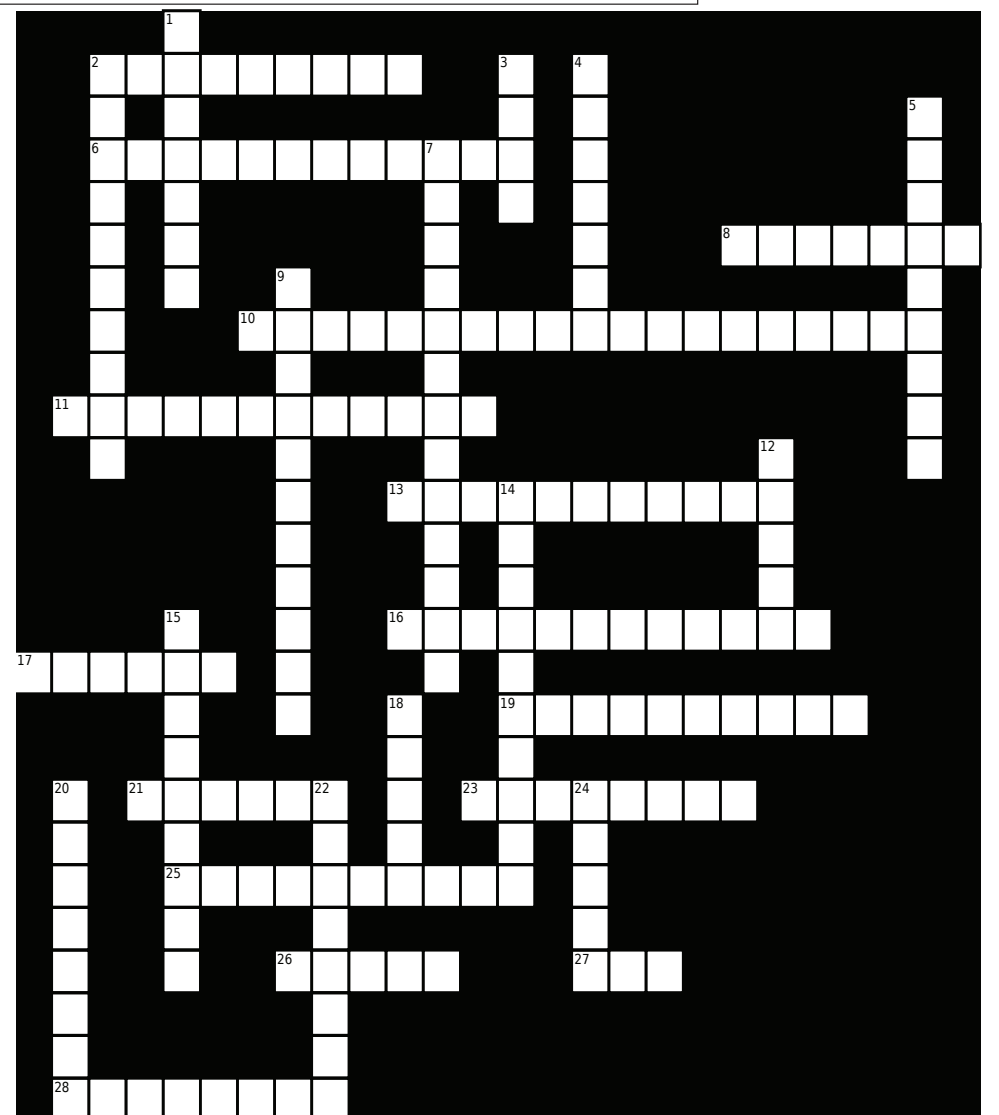
OKNT CROSSWORD: INFECTION PREVENTION

ACROSS

- 2. TYPE OF MASK USED FOR DROPLET PRECAUTIONS
- 6. VRE IS THE ABBREVIATION FOR VANCOMYCIN-RESISTANT
- 8. ANTIVIRAL USED TO TREAT INFLUENZA ILLNESS OR EXPOSURE
- 10. RESPIRATORY PROTECTION REQUIRED FOR ENTRY IN AIRBORNE ISOLATION ROOMS (5 WORDS)
- 11. USE THIS HAND HYGIENE METHOD FOR C DIFF
- 13. AN EXAMPLE OF HIGH-TOUCH SURFACE IN PATIENT'S ENVIRONMENT
- 16. _____ HEALTHCARE WORKERS CAN SPREAD THE FLU TO COWORKERS AND PATIENTS
- 17. C DIFF _____ ARE KNOWN TO SURVIVE AT LEAST 90 DAYS IN THE ENVIRONMENT
- 19. PANDEMIC FLU IS CAUSED BY THIS TYPE OF INFLUENZA VIRUS
- 21. CONTACT PRECAUTIONS REQUIRE _____ UPON ENTERING THE PATIENT'S ROOM
- 23. PRECAUTIONS USED FOR KNOWN/ SUSPECTED TB
- 25. PREFERRED SPECIMEN FOR DETECTING VRE COLONIZATION
- 26. THIS INFECTION CAUSES DIARRHEA
- 27. WHEN DECONTAMINATING HANDS USING A WATERLESS ALCOHOL PRODUCT, HANDS SHOULD BE RUBBED TOGETHER UNTIL THEY FEEL _____
- 28. TYPE OF PRECAUTIONS WHICH ASSUMES EVERYONE IS INFECTED

DOWN

- 1. PRECAUTIONS USED FOR C DIFF
- 2. VACCINATION, HAND HYGIENE, PPE USE, AND SAFE HANDLING OF SOILED LINEN AND SHARPS ARE _____ MEASURES
- 3. METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPH AUREUS ABBREV
- 4. YOU SHOULD WASH YOUR HANDS FOR AT LEAST THIS MANY SECONDS
- 5. AN INFECTION THAT REQUIRES DROPLET PRECAUTIONS
- 7. SKIN PREP AGENT FOR LINE INSERTION
- 9. MOST EFFECTIVE MEASURE TO PREVENT SPREAD OF INFECTION
- 12. NUMBER OF NEGATIVE SPECIMENS REQUIRED TO D/C AIRBORNE PRECAUTIONS
- 14. HEALTHCARE WORKERS SHOULD RECEIVE THIS SERIES OF VACCINES
- 15. HEPATITIS A AND C DIFF ARE SPREAD BY THIS ROUTE
- 18. MOST COMMON SITE OF MRSA COLONIZATION
- 20. TAMIFLU MUST BE STARTED WITHIN 48 HOURS OF FLU _____ TO BE EFFECTIVE
- 22. A PATIENT WITH SALMONELLA GASTROENTERITIS REQUIRES THIS TYPE OF PRECAUTIONS
- 24. HEPATITIS B & C, AND HIV ARE SPREAD BY THIS



Bartlesville and accepted by Phillips 66 Women’s Network members Candace Hanson and Kelly McCracken. The award honors a business or organization that has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting breastfeeding employees in the workplace. This includes implementing comprehensive lactation support policies, providing safe and accessible spaces for milk expression, fostering a culture of support for working parents, and going above and beyond to ensure employees can successfully balance work and infant feeding goals. Phillips 66 of Bartlesville was recognized for its leadership in creating a workplace environment that prioritizes the health and well-being of families.

“Each of our awardees represents the heart of COBA’s mission,” said Alexis Boryca, Executive Director of COBA. “Their leadership and dedication are

helping create a more supportive environment where all Oklahoma families have the resources and encouragement they need to meet their infant feeding goals.”

The award presentation brought together advocates, healthcare professionals, community partners, and policymakers to celebrate progress and highlight the continued need for strong maternal and infant health initiatives across the state. The event also provided an opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations around current legislation and collaborative advocacy efforts.

Through these awards, COBA aims to shine a spotlight on those who are leading the charge in removing barriers and ensuring that every family in Oklahoma has the support they need on their breastfeeding journey.



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(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2026 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

Oklahoma Wesleyan University Serves Nursing Professionals

While the national job market remains sluggish, nursing continues to grow as one of the nation's most essential professions, and Oklahoma Wesleyan University (OKWU) is dedicated to equipping nurses who sustain healthcare. As healthcare rapidly evolves, continuing education remains critical to the nursing profession.

With this in mind, OKWU partnered with Hillcrest South, an accredited provider of the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), to host the 2026 Implementation Science Symposium. The symposium provided six ANCC-approved continuing education hours to attendees. With a focus on Leading with Service, the event offered meaningful and engaging sessions centered on enhancing nursing excellence through evidence-based practice. While the symposium drew nurses from across Oklahoma and several neighboring states, this was not the first time OKWU has served the nursing community.

For more than 30 years, OKWU has provided higher education opportunities for nursing professionals. OKWU's 100% online RN-BSN Completion Program, Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) in Executive Leadership are designed specifically for working adults. By offering a one-course-at-a-time format, OKWU supports a healthy balance between work, school, and life.

All OKWU nursing programs are accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and are competitively priced. Many students utilize employer tuition reimbursement to support their academic journey. While coursework is delivered online, OKWU prioritizes meaningful connection by providing dedicated support through qualified instructors and regular online check-ins with the program director.

Setting it apart from many programs, OKWU offers an inclusive pathway by admitting registered nurses with a bachelor's or master's degree in a different field into its MSN and DNP programs, respectively. Jim Woodard (DNP '24), Chief Clinical and Innovation Officer at Tru Care Community in Colorado, shared that finding a program which accepted his MBA was a significant factor in choosing OKWU. Additionally, OKWU has enhanced its curriculum to award academic credit for nurse residency programs or specialty certifications, allowing nursing professionals to build upon prior work and experience.

OKWU graduates consistently express satisfaction with their educational experience and often return to pursue advanced degrees. Karen Hays (ADN 1998, BSN 2019, MSN 2023) was recently recognized at the symposium as a long-standing alumna, having graduated from three OKWU nursing programs. After working as an associate degree nurse (ADN) for nearly twenty years, Hays had never considered returning to school until someone highlighted the expanded career opportunities available with a BSN.

Hays shared that she faced many unknowns and initially doubted her ability to balance academics with full-time work. She was also apprehensive, as academics had never come easily for her. Through perseverance, Hays proved to herself that she could succeed and considers earning straight A's a personal achievement. However, the most impactful benefit of her OKWU education was deeply personal. "The program allowed me to know God is working for our good in all things we do," she shared, noting that the spiritual life reflections played a pivotal role in her walk with Christ.

Her advice to nurses considering returning to school is simple: "Don't

Alumna, Karen Hays was recognized at the symposium after graduating from three OKWU nursing programs.

discount yourself. You should do it. Don't walk-run to do it." Hays reflected that returning to OKWU for multiple degrees "was like coming back to family." She now serves as a Nursing Assistant Instructor at Tri County Tech in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

OKWU nursing graduates are finding strong career success, with a 100% employment rate across all programs. Both Hays and Woodard attribute their professional achievements, in part, to the education they received at OKWU.

In a rapidly changing healthcare landscape, staying ahead matters. OKWU provides online programs, personalized support, and recognition of prior experience to help nursing professionals thrive. Apply today and lead the way in your nursing career.

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

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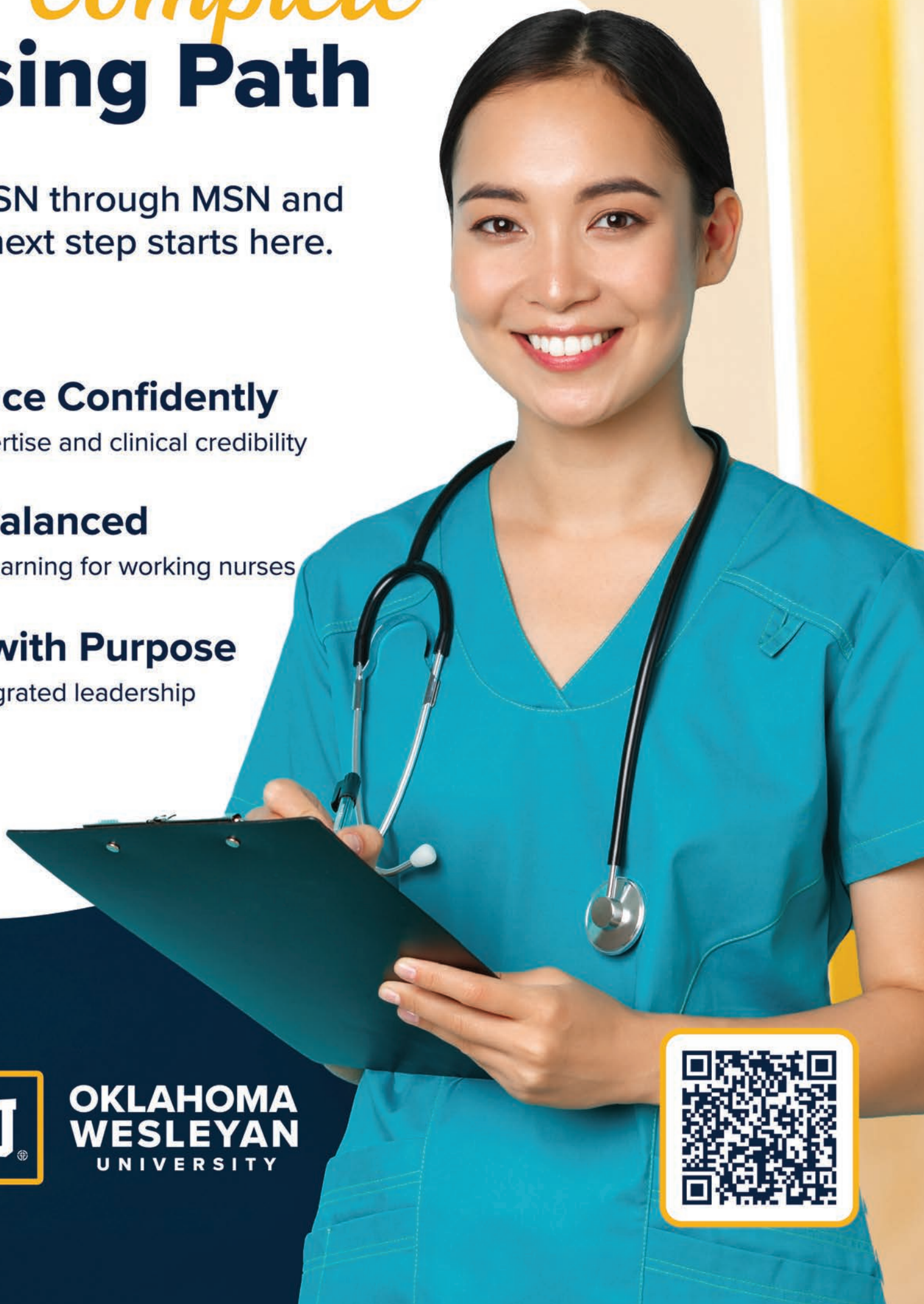
(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2026 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

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Emergency Triplet Delivery Leads to Life-Saving Care and Cancer

What began as a highly anticipated delivery quickly became a fight for survival when Evilin and her husband, Bill, welcomed their three daughters nine weeks early at INTEGRIS Health Baptist Medical Center. Complications during the C-section led to severe blood loss, emergency surgery and an unexpected cancer diagnosis, turning one of life's happiest moments into an unimaginable medical crisis.

Evilin had been receiving prenatal care from Sumeeta Nanda, M.D., and was admitted to the hospital for bed rest after developing preeclampsia. The plan was to closely monitor her condition until her expected delivery date. However, when Evilin's blood pressure continued to rise and it became clear it was no longer safe to wait, physicians made the urgent decision to deliver the babies early.

Hoda Maarouf, M.D., delivered the triplets and immediately led the rapid, life-saving response when Evilin began experiencing severe internal bleeding. Multiple blood transfusions were started, made possible by blood donors in the community, as the medical team worked to stabilize her. During surgery, they discovered a large mass and made the decision to remove it and send it for testing.

During cases like Evilin's, access to a stable blood supply is critical. Our Blood Institute provides blood to all INTEGRIS Health hospitals across Oklahoma, ensuring patients have the blood they need in emergencies, during complex deliveries and throughout cancer treatment.

Evilin spent several days in a medically induced coma and received more than a dozen blood transfusions while her care team worked to save her life, each one playing an integral role in her survival. "It was terrifying," Bill said. "There were moments I truly thought I might lose my wife. But every doctor and nurse showed up for us with such calm, compassion and support."

While Evilin fought for her life, the couple's three daughters, Ani, Isabella and Xochitl, were cared for in the neonatal intensive care unit at INTEGRIS Health Children's at Baptist Medical Center. Born prematurely but stable, they remained there for approximately one month before going home one by one.

Days later, pathology results confirmed Evilin had stage 2 dysgerminoma, a rare form of ovarian cancer. "In a way, our girls saved my life," Evilin said.



"The type of cancer I have doesn't show up on typical markers, and without everything that happened during delivery, we likely wouldn't have known until it was too late."

One of the most emotional moments came four days after delivery, when an ICU nurse helped wheel Evilin to the NICU to meet her daughters for the first time. "As she reached into the isolette and touched each of them, I knew she truly felt like a mom," Bill shared. "In that moment, I felt immeasurably blessed that she had survived."

Now five months old, the triplets are thriving, each developing their own personalities. Their parents say the girls brought joy and comfort during Evilin's ongoing cancer treatment and recovery. "I am so proud of Evilin's strength and will to be the best mom she can be, even on the worst of days," Bill said. "Few people endure the trials she has faced in the last year. Delivering triplets in itself is a feat, but she has stood tall through the surgeries and chemotherapy."

The family credits the INTEGRIS Health Baptist Medical Center physicians, ICU nurses, NICU caregivers and support staff for saving Evilin's life and caring for their daughters with compassion. "I wish I could remember all the names of the nurses and doctors involved in her care at INTEGRIS Health, but I'm grateful for them and will forever remember their faces," Bill shared. "The NICU and ICU nurses were particularly kind and supportive."

Evilin has since been declared cancer-free, and she and her family are embracing this new chapter with gratitude. They remain thankful for the coordinated care that carried them through the most crucial moments. This story is a powerful reminder that rapid medical response, multidisciplinary teamwork and early detection can make all the difference, especially when facing complex and unexpected diagnoses.

Blood donors also play a vital role in stories like Evilin's. To help ensure patients have the blood they need when it matters most, schedule a donation.

Mercy Kingfisher and Watonga Named Top Critical Access Hospitals

Mercy Hospital Kingfisher has once again been named one of rural America's best hospitals.

The Chartis Center for Rural Health named the hospital to its annual list of the 100 top performing critical access hospitals across the U.S.

"Critical access hospitals have such a deep connection to the people in the communities we serve," said Dustin Yowell, Mercy Hospital Kingfisher administrator. "When you're in our care, you're in the care of your neighbors and you're close to your friends and family. It's an honor to be caregivers to our neighbors, and being on the Chartis list is a reflection of how seriously we take our compassionate care."

Rural hospitals deliver essential, often lifesaving care to communities that would otherwise face long travel times, limited access to specialists and significant health disparities.

Mercy Hospital Watonga also made the list, along with Mercy Hospital Berryville and Mercy Hospital Paris in Arkansas. Mercy Hospital Ardmore, and Mercy Hospital Washington in Missouri, made the Chartis list for the 100 top performing rural hospitals.

A critical access hospital is a small rural facility designated by Medicare to improve access to care, capped at 25 inpatient beds and required to maintain 24/7 emergency services, while a community hospital provides a broad range of general medical services to the local population. Each hospital on Chartis' Top 100 lists has demonstrated consistently strong patient outcomes, high operational efficiency and resilience in the face of unique geographic and economic challenges.

"The delivery of care within rural communities is more complex today than at any point in recent memory," said Michael Topchik, executive director of The Chartis Center for Rural Health. "This year's Top 100 Critical Access Hospitals and Top 100 Rural & Community Hospitals have emerged as true leaders who are committed to their mission through a powerful combination of resilience, dedication and innovation. We're delighted to recognize this year's winners and celebrate their Top 100 status."

The Chartis awards are based on the results of the Chartis Rural Hospital Performance INDEX, which recognizes outstanding performance among the nation's rural hospitals. Now in its 16th year, the INDEX is the industry's most comprehensive and objective assessment of rural hospital performance. Leveraging a methodology that uses publicly available data, the INDEX is used nationwide by rural hospitals, health systems with rural affiliates, hospital associations, and state offices of rural health to measure and monitor performance across a variety of areas impacting hospital operations, quality, patient perspective and finance.

Mercy Hospital Kingfisher is a 25-bed hospital, offering swing beds, an intensive care unit and other critical health care services to local patients. Read more about it on the Mercy Hospital Kingfisher website on mercy.net.

Mercy Hospital Watonga is a 25-bed hospital, offering swing beds, therapy and other critical health care services to local patients. Read more about it on the Mercy Hospital Watonga website on mercy.net.

Mercy OKC Named to World's Best Hospitals List

Mercy is the only Oklahoma City hospital on Newsweek's list.

In a win for consumers who expect the highest quality of health care close to home, Mercy Hospital Oklahoma City has earned international recognition for excellence.

Newsweek magazine named Mercy the only facility in Oklahoma City to rank among the World's Best Hospitals, recognizing it for its ongoing commitment to high-quality care, patient experience and clinical excellence among top-tier hospitals worldwide.

Mercy Hospital Oklahoma City was one of only four Oklahoma hospitals to make the list, and this year is its third consecutive time to be recognized in the global rankings.

"The compassionate care patients receive from our caregivers is what makes Mercy special and why they trust us with their lives," said Bennett Geister, president of Mercy Oklahoma City Communities. "The recognition that comes with being on this list is a direct result of how our caregivers go about their work. I'm so proud to see them recognized on a global scale." Newsweek partners with Statista to analyze four types of data sources to select and rank the best hospitals in 32 countries with comparable data. The methodology included recommendations from medical experts; patient satisfaction surveys; hospital quality metrics on quality of care, hygiene, patient safety and waiting times; and an optional Statista patient-reported outcome measures survey.

The World's Best Hospitals 2026 ranking includes hospitals from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States. The countries were selected based on multiple comparability factors, such as standard of living/life expectancy, population size, number of hospitals and data availability.

Newsweek also named three other Mercy hospitals among the World's Best Hospitals, including Northwest Arkansas, St. Louis and Springfield.

The World's Best Hospitals 2026 rankings are available on newsweek.com. In addition to the Newsweek ranking, the award-winning Mercy Hospital Oklahoma City has been recognized by Forbes as one of America's Top Hospitals, and it received an A grade for safety from The Leapfrog Group. Mercy Hospital Oklahoma City has been named one of the World's Best Hospitals for three straight years.



(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2026 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

Excellence Recognized: Four Stillwater Medical Nurses Named Finalists

Four nurses from Stillwater Medical were named finalists for the 2025 March of Dimes Nurse of the Year, a statewide recognition that honors peer-nominated nurses for excellence in care, compassion, and professionalism.

The nominations reflect a collaborative nursing environment in which high standards are reinforced through teamwork, mutual respect, and strong professional relationships.

Across departments and roles, nurses at Stillwater Medical work closely together, and many cite the support of their colleagues as a meaningful part of their day-to-day practice.

This year's finalists include Kyla Davis, RN, Same Day Surgery; Jessica Kennedy, APRN, Stillwater Pediatrics; Tammy Parr, LPN and case manager for Stillwater Medical Blackwell and Perry; and Sarah Schram, RN, resource nurse at Stillwater Medical Center. For Davis and Parr, the peer-nominated recognition was described as both humbling and affirming of the work they do onside their teams.

For Davis, nursing runs deep. Her mother first encouraged her to pursue the profession, and throughout nursing school, she helped her study, grow, and build confidence in her calling. "I have always loved being able to help others," Davis said. "Nursing allows me to care for people while constantly learning and challenging myself."

Davis began her journey at Stillwater Medical in 2017 working as an emergency room tech before earning her nursing degree. Although she briefly moved away, she returned to Stillwater Medical's intensive care unit in 2020 and joined same day surgery this past April. Through it all, she says the heart of her work has remained the same: the patients.

"At the end of the day, the most fulfilling part of my job is the interactions with the patients I get to care for," she said. "The conversations, the laughs we share-I hope I'm able to brighten their day and ease their anxiety in a place where people are often scared of hurting."

Davis is proud to work in a hospital environment where high-quality, compassionate care is a shared standard. Being nominated for the March of Dimes award, she says, reflects not just her own work but the collective effort of Stillwater Medical's nursing staff.

"We have so many talented nurses here who work incredibly hard for our patients," she said. "I am honored just to be part of a team that puts patient care first."

For fellow finalist, Parr, the path to nursing began at 17, when she took a job as a nursing home aide. Although she once imagined becoming an attorney, she soon realized nursing allowed her to combine her love of advocacy with the hands-on ability to help people.

Over the last decade, Parr has served as an LPN and case manager for Stillwater Medical Blackwell and Stillwater Medical Perry-two rural communities with unique challenges. Limited transportation, financial barriers, and access to care often impact her patients in ways many urban areas never see. Parr meets those challenges head-on with compassion, creativity, and a deep sense of responsibility.

"It's not always direct bedside care," she said. "But everything behind the scenes makes a difference, too."

Her work includes helping patients find transportation, securing medication assistance, and navigating complex insurance needs. In 2018, Parr co-founded the Blackwell Outreach program, which provides funds-donated by employees-to help patients pay for prescriptions.



Kyla Davis, RN was among finalists for the 2025 March of Dimes Nurse of the Year.

helping parents travel to be with sick children and assisting vulnerable patients with safe transitions home.

Parr's nomination was what she describes as deeply meaningful. "I was humbled and honored," she said. "To know that who I am and what I do matters-that means so much."

Stillwater Medical has been named one of the Best Places to Work by Modern Healthcare, a news organization that identifies and recognizes outstanding employers in the healthcare industry nationwide. They are the only organization in the state to receive this distinction for 14 years in a row.

Brad Horst, vice president of human resources, says one of the organization's keys to success is the shared commitment of staff to creating a culture of excellence.

"These peer nominations really line up with what our employee surveys tell us," said Horst. "Two of our highest-scoring statements are 'I enjoy my coworkers' and 'I find purpose in my work.' When nurses recognize one another in this way, it speaks to the strong relationships they have with their teams and the meaning they find in the work they do every day."



(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2026 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)



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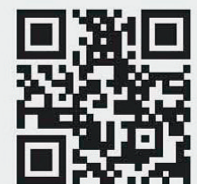
COMPLETED

- + NICU (Level II) (2025)
- + Women's Health Center (2024)
- + Stillwater Surgery Center Expansion (2023)
- + MR-Linac (2023)
- + Heart & Vascular Institute (2019)
- + Stillwater Cancer Center (2017)

Stillwater Medical

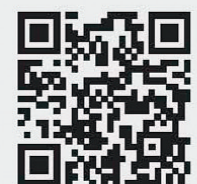
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