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Through science and compassion



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Julie Bryant, RN, BSN, SCRNP, combines over 32 years of nursing experience with a passion for improving stroke care as program manager at the Comprehensive Stroke Center at Mercy Meinders Neuroscience Institute where she helps lead nationally recognized stroke care for patients across Oklahoma.

By Vickie Jenkins, staff writer

At Mercy Meinders Neuroscience Institute, patients experiencing life-threatening strokes receive some of the most advanced care available. Mercy Hospital Oklahoma City is Joint Commission-certified as a Comprehensive Stroke Center, the highest level of stroke certification, providing patients with the right stroke care at the right time. Nationally recognized for advanced stroke care, the Comprehensive Stroke Center brings together highly skilled physicians, nurses and specialists who are committed to giving every patient the best possible opportunity for recovery.

Helping lead those efforts is Julie Bryant, RN, BSN, SCRNP, program manager for Mercy Meinders Neuroscience Institute's Comprehensive Stroke Center. For more than 32 years, Julie has devoted her nursing career to serving others

while combining a love of science with genuine compassion. She has spent the past 25 years at Mercy, where her leadership and experience continue to make a difference for patients and their families every day.

Julie's nursing career began in the Emergency Department at Mercy Hospital, where she learned to think quickly while caring for patients with a wide variety of illnesses and injuries. Those early years provided a strong foundation that would eventually lead her to stroke care, where every second counts and teamwork is essential.

When asked why she became a nurse, Julie replied, "I like science, I like taking care of people, and I think nursing is very interesting."

Although nursing became her life's work, it was not her first career goal. "I actually wanted to be a doctor," Julie said. "But I struggled with chemistry in high school."

After considering business and marketing, an important conversation with her aunt changed everything. Her aunt, who was a nurse, the only person in Julie's family who worked in the medical field, encouraged her to consider nursing while she was in college. She shared advice about the profession, answered questions and helped Julie see the many opportunities nursing could provide. The more Julie thought about it, the more she realized nursing combined the two things she loved most, science and helping people.

Looking back even further, Julie realizes her interest in nursing actually began much earlier. She recalls a kindergarten visit from an ambulance crew to her school. The girls proudly wore paper nurse caps while the boys wore paper bands around their heads, looking like a doctor. Although it was a simple classroom activity, it sparked something that stayed with her. "I've actually always been interested in nursing," she said.

Julie was born in Arkansas but moved to Edmond, OK with her family when she was five years old. She later attended the University of Central Oklahoma, where she earned her nursing education and began preparing for the profession she still loves today.

Over the past three decades, Julie has witnessed tremendous advances in healthcare, particularly in stroke treatment. Working in a comprehensive stroke center requires specialized knowledge, excellent communication and the ability to respond quickly when patients arrive needing immediate care. Every member of the team plays an important role in helping patients achieve the best possible outcomes. Despite the fast-paced environment, Julie says her greatest motivation remains in the people she serves. "Our patients motivate me every day. We try to do the very best thing we can do for them," she said. "I also enjoy the people I work with. My coworkers are great!"

Julie believes nursing is a profession that requires both knowledge and flexibility. Medicine continues to evolve, and successful nurses never stop learning. Her advice to those

See **BRYANT** on page 4



Meet Dave Stadler

Tulsa based registered nurse and veterans' advocate

Dave Stadler shows off his love of motorcycles.

Story and photos by Jill Stephenson, staff writer

Growing up surrounded by veterans and medical professionals, Stadler's life has been shaped by a deep family legacy of military service and medicine. His grandfather worked as a doctor at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota and later studied how nutrition affected cardiac patients at the Cleveland Clinic. He also spent time as a research doctor in infectious disease work connected to Johnson Pharmaceuticals. Dave's father served in the Navy during Vietnam, was active in a Vietnam veteran motorcycle club, and counted a Green Beret among his closest friends. This environment instilled in Dave a lifelong reverence for those who serve.

Nursing also runs deep in his family: his mother and grandmother were both RNs Dave and both of his sisters followed in their footsteps. Sadly, one of his sisters passed away two years ago at the age of 57.

When Stadler was twenty-one, tragedy struck his family when his older brother, who had served two enlistments in the Navy, died unexpectedly. Although he was denied entry into military service for medical reasons, Stadler has dedicated much of his life to giving back to veterans through the American Legion and its riding community.

He became a registered nurse in 2004 and spent 16 years as a trauma nurse in the ICU at St. Francis Hospital in Tulsa. He found

deep fulfillment in helping people through the worst moments of their lives and later getting to see them return for visits after their recovery. He has also worked with Oklahoma's Organ Procurement Organization witnessing firsthand the good that can come from tragedy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Stadler served as a crisis nurse, spending 7.5 months as a FEMA contractor in San Antonio at Methodist Stone Oak Hospital, then returning to work as a COVID nurse at OU. He later served in Lufkin, Texas, in the same capacity.

In 2017, he transitioned from trauma nursing to peri-anesthesia care, a shift he made simply to change pace after years in high-intensity trauma work. In this role, he cares for patients waking from anesthesia, ensuring their safety and stability before they move on in their recovery. He has worked at St. Francis Hospital in this capacity for the last 2.5 years. He describes nursing as, in some ways, a selfish calling — one that gives deep meaning to his own life while allowing him to make a real difference in the lives of others'.

Stadler is heavily involved with the American Legion Riders (ALR), serving as Director of Riders for Post 308 (Mohawk Post) in Tulsa and as 2nd Vice Director of the Department of ALR for the state of Oklahoma. He began his involvement at Post 141 in Claremore in 2022 and recently served as road captain for the 2026 in-state Legacy Run.

See **STADLER** page 11

BRYANT con't. from page 2

considering a career in healthcare reflects the lessons she has learned throughout her career. “You must enjoy helping people,” she said. “Be flexible, learn everything you can and don’t be afraid to ask questions.”

She believes experienced nurses are valuable resources and encourages new nurses to seek guidance whenever they need it. “Every moment,” she says, “is another opportunity to learn and grow.”

Outside of work, Julie enjoys spending time with her family. She and her husband have been married for 30 years and are the proud parents of two sons, ages 27 and 25.

When she isn’t at Mercy, she enjoys reading, traveling and making memories with family. She also loves spending time with Josie, her 11-year-old Goldendoodle, who keeps life entertaining at home.

Looking back over her career, Julie has no regrets about choosing nursing. What began with encouragement from a caring aunt and a love of science has grown into more than three decades of serving others with skill, compassion and dedication.

Today, she continues to help lead one of Oklahoma’s premier stroke programs, ensuring patients receive the highest level of care when every minute matters. It seems only fitting that one of her earliest memories was proudly wearing a paper nurse’s cap during that kindergarten visit from an ambulance crew. Even then, nursing had captured her imagination. Decades later, that little girl with the paper cap became a respected nurse leader, still living out the calling that first inspired her all those years ago.

OU CHILDREN’S con't. from page 10

the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine. “These are hearts that could not be used for a full transplant. Being able to give those valves to a child who needs them is an extraordinary thing. We are proud to take part in a national effort to study this approach and to bring it to families in Oklahoma.”

Advancing the Science
Because no formal training exists for this procedure, the Oklahoma Children’s surgical team adapted techniques from complex pediatric heart surgeries to guide their approach. Edens is currently participating in a national study group collecting outcomes data on partial heart transplants, contributing to ongoing research, education, and clinical advancement.

The team is also exploring domino transplants, in which valves from a child receiving a full heart transplant may be used to help another child who only needs valve replacement, maximizing the impact of each donated heart.

“This is just the beginning for our program,” Burkhart said. “Children born with complex heart disease deserve every chance at a full life, and their families should be able to find that care here at home in Oklahoma.”

Looking ahead, the Oklahoma Children’s OU Health Presbyterian Health Foundation Heart Center — expected to open to patients in early 2030 — will centralize and expand pediatric cardiac care in Oklahoma, further supporting innovation like these emerging transplant approaches and strengthening care for patients with complex needs.

Learn more about the new Oklahoma Children’s OU Health Presbyterian Health Foundation Heart Center at OklahomaChildrens.org/HeartCenter.



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What Is Your Heart Age?



Heart age is an estimate designed to help people understand how their cardiovascular risk compares with their actual age. While a person may be 45 years old, they could have a heart age that is older if factors such as high blood

pressure, high cholesterol, smoking or diabetes increase their risk for cardiovascular disease.

“Heart age gives patients a simple way to understand their cardiovascular health and the factors that may be increasing their risk,” says Ryan Norris, D.O., a cardiologist at the INTEGRIS Health Heart Hospital. “Knowing the information allows patients to have conversations with their doctor about what steps they can take today to improve their heart health and reduce future risk.”

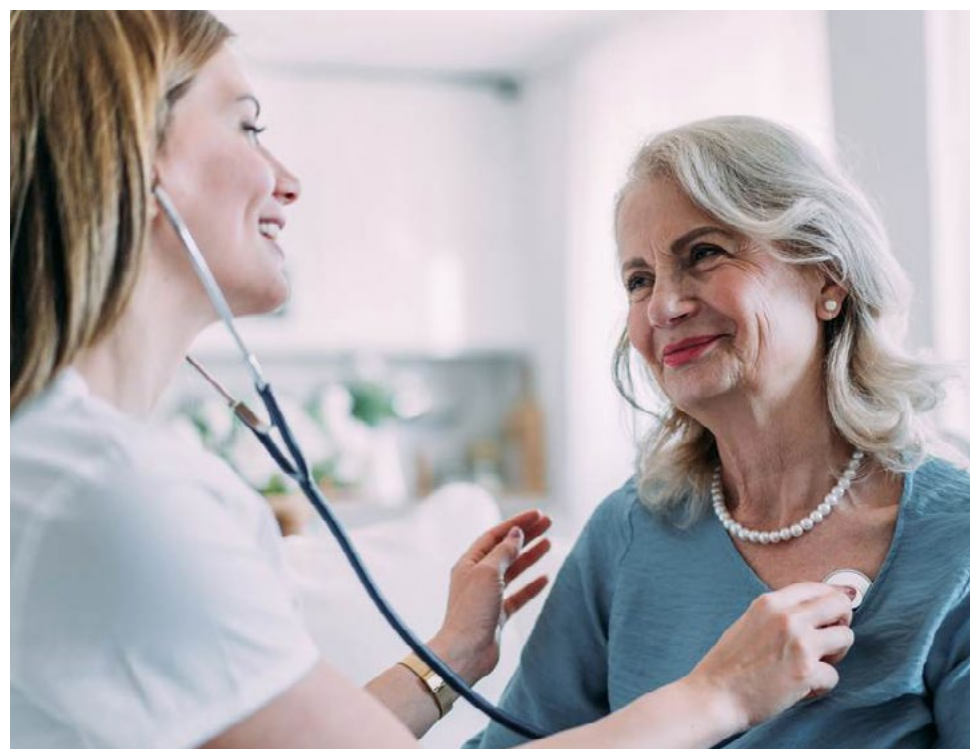
What determines your heart age?

Heart age calculators typically use information associated with a person’s risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

The specific factors included may vary depending on the assessment being used, but commonly considered factors include:

- Age and sex
- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol levels
- Smoking or tobacco use
- Diabetes
- Weight or body mass index
- Whether blood pressure or cholesterol is being treated

Modern cardiovascular risk assessments may also consider kidney function and other metabolic health information. For example, the



American Heart Association’s PREVENT™ calculator incorporates cardiovascular, kidney and metabolic health factors and can translate a person’s estimated cardiovascular risk into a PREVENT-Age.

Heart age is not a diagnosis and does not mean the heart itself is actually aging faster. Instead, it serves as a tool to help people better understand how their current health and lifestyle may affect their future risk of heart attack, stroke and other cardiovascular conditions.

“Blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar can gradually change without causing any symptoms yet can have a significant impact on your risk of heart disease,” states Norris. “When patients know their numbers, they can work with their doctor to set targeted goals, taking steps to protect their heart health for years to come.”

High blood pressure and high cholesterol can develop without noticeable symptoms, making routine screenings important even for people who otherwise feel healthy.

Can you lower your heart age?

Unlike a person’s actual age, an estimated heart age may change as modifiable cardiovascular risk factors improve.

Steps that can support better heart health include:

- Maintaining a healthy blood pressure
- Managing cholesterol and blood sugar
- Avoiding tobacco products
- Participating in regular physical activity
- Eating a heart-healthy diet
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Taking medications as prescribed
- Keeping routine appointments with a healthcare provider

Small, consistent changes can make a meaningful difference over time. However, the right prevention plan will vary based on a person’s age, medical history, family history and existing health conditions.

Know your numbers

Understanding cardiovascular risk begins with knowing important health measurements, including blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar. A primary care physician or cardiologist can help determine how frequently these measurements should be checked and whether additional evaluation is appropriate.

Online heart age and cardiovascular risk calculators can be helpful educational tools, but they should not replace an evaluation by a qualified healthcare professional.

People with symptoms such as chest pain or pressure, shortness of breath, unexplained sweating, nausea, dizziness, weakness or pain that spreads to the arm, back, neck or jaw should seek immediate medical attention.

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A HELPING HAND IN PATIENT CARE

RN reaches for full potential

By James Coburn, staff writer

Gabby Shaffer, RN, has always liked helping people improve to their personal best. At HPI Community Hospital South, she works at a more comfortable pace than what she might experience in a sprawling hospital, she said.

"I get to help them a little bit more. And I like to help them be better from the beginning of their illness to the end. So, it makes it a little bit nicer that way," Shaffer said.

She became a registered nurse after graduating from nursing school at Oklahoma City Community College. Shaffer began her career serving for two years in a Chickasha emergency room and has done med/surg since coming to HPI Community Hospital South in 2025.

She originally wanted to become a teacher but when delving further into education when she was younger, Shaffer recognized they needed something more by teaching people in a different way.

"I had a child having seizures and the way his nurses took care of him really sparked my interests by the way they talked to him. And things like that started my journey of wanting to be in the medical field."

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

Among her patients are those who did not expect they would be admitted to an ER. By the time she receives them from the ER to a comfortable private room, a few patients might feel a higher state of anxiety, worrying about themselves.

"They might be hurting, or they're scared. So, I always try to be confident in myself and my ability to help them," Shaffer explained. "I like knowing I can help people. I come here knowing I can make an impact. I know I can make people smile and that's my goal when I come in here. I know that my patients really appreciate that. It's knowing when I leave today, I have made a difference in someone's life."

Shaffer strives to treat her patients with kindness and welcome them with the comfort she would extend to her own family.

"I feel that it's really important when somebody is scared. I try to make them understand what they're there for and to keep them updated on anything I can, so they're aware of their progress with what's happening," Shaffer added.

It might be that a patient wants to try getting out of bed and increase their walking. Movement is important in recovery. Motivating them to move their legs or raising their arms above their head are stepping stones to recovery.

"I'm with them the whole way for whatever they need," she said.

She might ask what they want to achieve for the rest of the day.

Shaffer learns a lot when patients tell her about their lives, their families and work history. Older patients share what they did before retirement, their younger days and their lifestyles today.

"My patients do make me laugh quite a lot. So that's nice," she continued. "And it's gratifying for her when patients go home feeling better."

Shaffer said it's nice to be listened to in atmosphere of shared governance in the workplace. The nursing staff takes notice of subtle changes the physicians need to know about.

"The doctors really work well with us. They want to know our



Gabby Shaffer, RN, HPI Community Hospital South, empowers her patients through friendly motivation, comfort, and accomplishment.

opinions," Shaffer explained. "Sometimes they come up to us and say, 'What do you think? How are our patients doing today? What are you doing for the rest of the day? They genuinely want to know what we think because we're taking care of patients and they know that. So, they value our opinion.'"

HPI Community Hospital is committed to supporting nurses through comprehensive, ongoing education that fosters professional growth and clinical excellence. Through hands-on skills training, classroom instruction, online learning, and other evidence-based educational programs, nurses have access to a wide range of learning opportunities.

These programs help ensure the nursing team remains confident, competent, and prepared to meet the evolving needs of its patients and community, said Kaelynn Gagliard, Marketing Manager.

It takes a village. Everybody is nice and willing to work as a team. From the management to the janitors, everyone greets their coworkers with a smile. Their actions prove they are happy and committed to make patients feel safe and cared for, Shaffer said.

HPI Community Hospital South is like a hidden secret, Shaffer shared. But the more people learn about the hospital, they will discover it's a great place to work, she added.

NURSE

TALK

What flower
best describes
your life?


Meinders Neuroscience Institute
Comprehensive Stroke Center

"A Russian Sage. I love this plant/
flower due to its color, delicacy,
and whimsical ways, which also
describes me sometimes."



Roni Coffey, RN, Neurology Care
Manager

"I would choose a Hydrangea.
I love the classic style and
southern charm that is exhibited
by the Hydrangea."



Julie Bryant, RN,BSN, SCRN

"Snapdragon. I have loved
snapdragons since childhood. I
love the variety of vibrant colors
and have always been intrigued
by their shape. I am calm but
can be a bit of a 'snapdragon,'
depending on the conditions."



Hilary Janaway, RN, Stroke
Coordinator

OKNT

WORD SEARCH: MENTAL / EMOTIONAL HEALTH

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STIGMA
GRIEF



Answers on page 13



Performs State's First Partial Heart Transplant, Giving Infant Living Valves That Can Grow

Rare procedure may spare children a lifetime of repeated open-heart surgeries



Oklahoma Childrens OU Health Partial Heart Transplant Team

Oklahoma Children's OU Health has performed Oklahoma's first partial heart transplant, replacing an infant's failing heart valves with living valves from a donor heart that can grow with the child.

The surgery, performed by the pediatric heart team at Oklahoma Children's, is the first of its kind among both pediatric and adult transplant programs in the state. Fewer than 50 partial heart transplants have been performed in the United States, placing OU Health, the University of Oklahoma's academic health system, among a highly select group of centers nationwide capable of performing this technique.

Valves That Grow With the Child

A partial heart transplant may be needed when a child is born with or develops severe heart valve disease that cannot be adequately repaired or replaced with traditional options. In these cases, standard valve replacements offer limited success because they do not grow with the child.

As a child grows, fixed-size valves can become too small or stop functioning properly, leading to complications and the need for multiple open-heart surgeries over time. A partial heart transplant offers an alternative by using living donor tissue that has the potential to grow with the patient.

"For a child born with a damaged heart valve, the hardest part has always been that a replacement valve does not grow with them," said OU Health pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon Dr.

Harold Burkhart, M.D., director of the Pediatric Cardiothoracic Surgical Program at Oklahoma Children's and professor and chief of the Division of Cardiac, Thoracic and Vascular Surgery at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine.

"That has meant returning to the operating room again and again over the years. A partial heart transplant changes that. We are placing living valves that grow with this child, and that can spare a family from a lifetime of repeated surgeries."

As the name suggests, in a partial heart transplant, surgeons replace only the damaged heart valves using living tissue from a donor heart rather than replacing the entire organ.

A Gift Made Possible by Organ Donation

Every partial heart transplant begins with the gift of organ donation. The valves come from donor hearts that cannot be transplanted whole, allowing tissue that would otherwise go unused to help save lives. At a time when organ donation rates have declined, this approach underscores the difference a single donor can make.

"Only a small number of children in the country have received a partial heart transplant, and every case depends on a family's decision to donate," said OU Health pediatric cardiologist Dr. R. Erik Edens, M.D., Ph.D., medical director of pediatric Heart Failure and Transplant at Oklahoma Children's and professor at

See **OU CHILDREN'S** on page 4

STADLER from page 3



Dave Stadler on duty at St. Francis Hospital in Tulsa

He has been elected to lead the event again next year. He also works with Ducks Unlimited.

A defining experience came earlier this year in April, when he accompanied his father, a Vietnam-era veteran, on an Honor Flight. Through this experience, he observed that veterans who had a sponsor with them had a far richer, more meaningful experience than those who did not. This inspired the planning of Post 308’s motorcycle Poker Run in October. The event will sponsor the Oklahoma Warriors Honor Flight. The hope is to make the event an annual tradition. For the many veterans who have never seen the Vietnam Veteran Memorial Wall in Washington, DC, Stadler sees this as an opportunity for healing and to witness reverence and appreciation for their service.

Stadler is passionate about Americanism and the importance of instilling regard for those who serve. He worries that younger generations have come to view the pursuit of happiness as an entitlement rather than a privilege earned through sacrifice. He hopes to help restore a sense of American pride and gratitude: values he says were passed down to him by his parents and grandparents.

Dave has been married to his wife Chelle for 28 years. They have two children.

The Poker Run is scheduled for October 3rd. Registration begins at 10:00am at the Carousel Lounge: 4666 S. Mingo Road

For more information contact Dave Stadler: 918-260-5388 or stadler1005@gmail.com

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★ TULSA POST 308 ★

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Metro nurse to appear on Fox TV game show

By Van Mitchell, staff writer

Kourtney Hall Lehman, RN, and mother of five, works as an emergency room nurse at a hospital in the metro Oklahoma City area.

The Portland, Oregon native, was selected to appear as a contestant in the second season of the Fox television game show “99 to Beat,” which premieres on Fox on Wednesday, Sept. 23 at 8 p.m.

Erin Andrews (Fox Sports) and Ken Jeong (The Masked Singer) are set to return as hosts for Season 2.

“While balancing a full-time career in healthcare and raising five children, I had the opportunity to compete on a nationally televised show filmed overseas—an experience that challenged me in ways I never expected,” Lehman said. “I am stepping outside my comfort zone to pursue an unforgettable opportunity.”

Lehman said they filmed the show’s second season in April in Limerick, Ireland.

The premise of the game show is 100 contestants compete in physical and unique challenges where the goal is not to finish first, nor to perform the best, but to not finish last. After each challenge, the player who came in last will be eliminated, which will add \$10,000 to the pot.

The last person standing (after a total of 50 games and 10 episodes, besides the season finale) will walk away with \$1 million.

Each episode has 4 solo games and one team game. In the event of a team game, the team who fails to win any heat or round or comes last will all be eliminated. Some team games feature team captains, which are decided randomly, and have teams drafted via a schoolyard pick. Other games feature multiple heats, with players or teams who come last in each heat put into the elimination heat.

Finally, pair games have the pair who comes in last face off against each other (in the event of a team game, the losing team will be split in half until the required number of contestants to be eliminated is reached).

Lehman did not apply or audition but was asked to appear on the show



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based on prior television work she had done.

“Me and my parents owned a shaved ice truck. And so, there was a show in Portland called “Portlandia,” that was filmed and they had seen our shaved ice truck, and they wanted it to be part of an episode,” she said. “When I met with the casting directors or the producers, one of the women said, ‘Have you ever considered doing body doubling?’ And I was like, ‘No. No, that’s never been on my radar.’ And she goes, ‘Well, we need a body double for “Grimm,” which is another TV show that is filmed there. I had never watched it. I’d never heard of it, but they were paying and I was a poor nursing student. And so, after class I would go and I body doubled the last two seasons of Grimm for the main girl on the show.”

Lehman said she did body double work for two seasons.

“I did that, paid for part of my nursing school and my bills. And then because of that, I have this profile somewhere and I don’t know who has access to it, but randomly I’ll get these people who call me or send me emails and want to cast me for things,” she said.

Lehman said she normally ignores those requests.

“I was at work and I got a call from one of these girls and she said, ‘There’s a show filming. It’s a game show. I think you’d be a good fit for it.’ And I was like, ‘I guess I’ll look into it.’ And I did. And the next thing I knew, I was on a flight to Ireland,” she said.

Lehman said the game shows feature mental and physical challenges, “There were a lot of things that required you to have a steady hand. There was physicality to some of them too. Yeah, a little bit of everything,” she said.

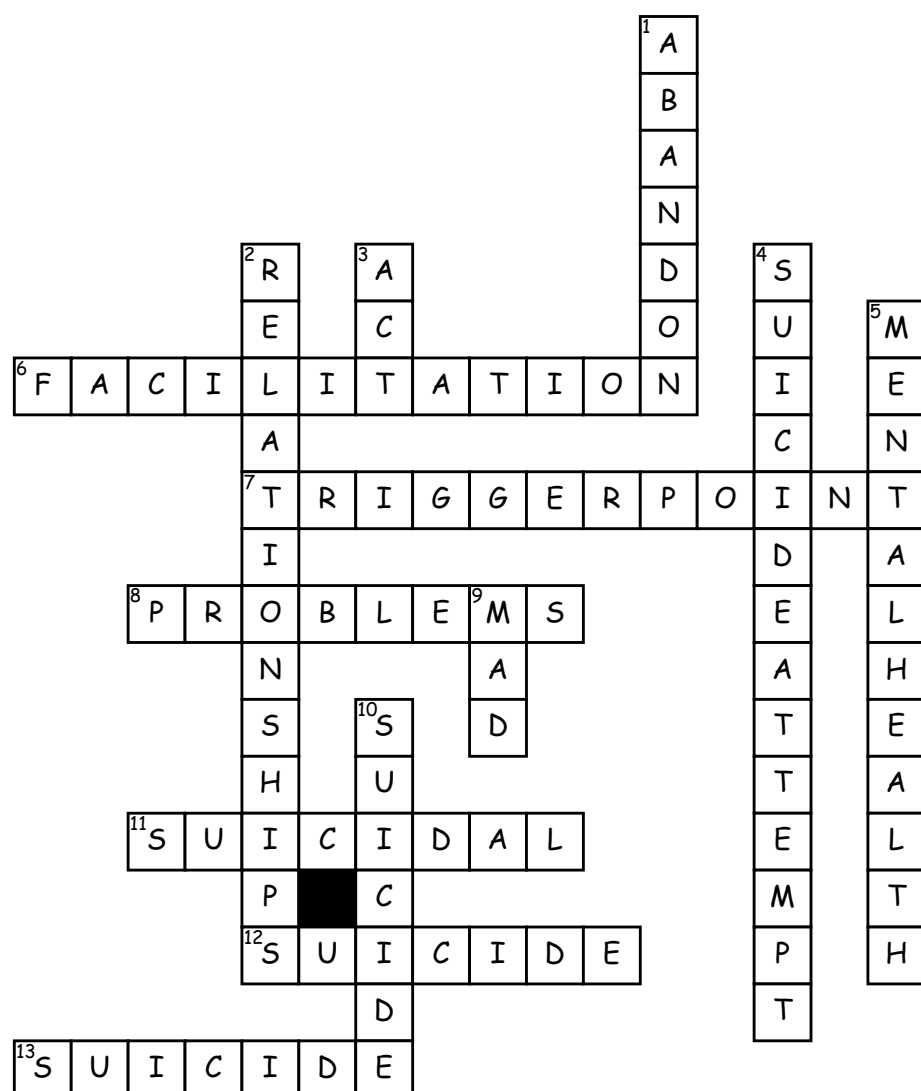
Lehman said her game show experience was interesting.

“It was something I’d never done before,” she said. “I was good at a lot of the stuff, which they will see when people watch it. But I also talk under my breath because I’m quiet, but I’m sarcastic. So, I am hoping they have muted some of the things that were on my mic because the ER nurse showed a little bit there.”

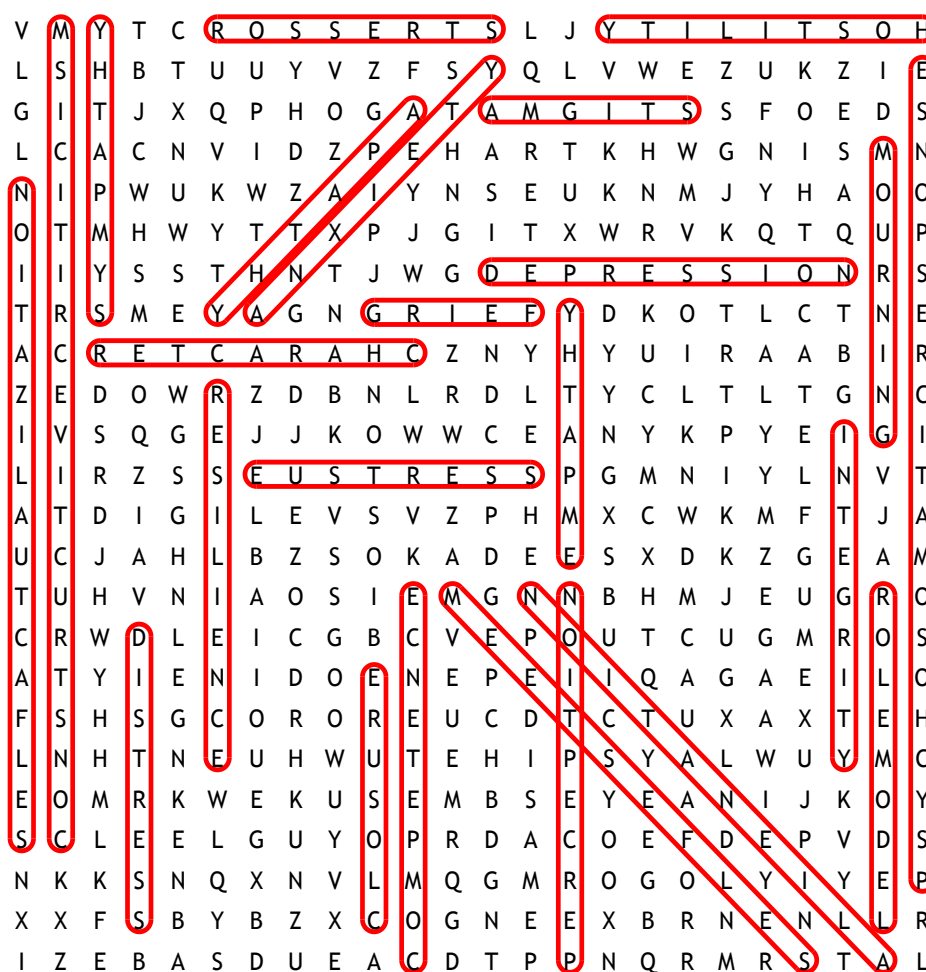
Lehman said it was hard to be away from her husband and children during the filming.

“I felt guilty about doing it. But my husband kept telling me, “This is a once in a lifetime opportunity.” And my kids think it is cool,” she said.

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OCU and SSM Health extend partnership



Joy Warlick-Evans, RN, speaks about the Saints & Stars program.

You can count registered nurse Joy Warlick-Evans as one of the strongest advocates of the Saints & Stars program.

Warlick-Evans was one of the first participants in the program, which allows Oklahoma City University nursing students to work part-time at SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital while they complete their studies.

Now, the OCU grad is a full-time employee at the hospital, with the program creating a smooth transition to her nursing career post-graduation.

“I would highly recommend the Saints & Stars program to other nursing students,” Warlick-Evans said. “It provides valuable clinical experience, professional connections, and opportunities to build confidence before graduation.”

With success stories like Warlick-Evans’ in mind, the university and the health system have decided to keep the partnership going, announcing this week a five-year extension for the Saints & Stars program.

“We are pleased to continue this impactful partnership as we cultivate innovative solutions to address the ongoing nursing shortage,” OCU President Kenneth Evans said. “Saints & Stars is an important initiative that translates to real-world results.”

Warlick-Evans is a prime example of those results. She’s working at St. Anthony Hospital as a registered nurse in the medical-surgical neurological/stroke unit – the same unit where she completed her leadership rotation while still an OCU student.

“Transitioning into a full-time role on a unit I was already familiar with made the move from student to nurse much smoother,” she said. “My experience with the Saints & Stars program was one of the most rewarding parts of my college career.”

The extension of Saints & Stars through 2031 means more students like Warlick-Evans will gain practical, hands-on experience, receive financial support from both OCU and SSM Health, and take advantage of several other program features.

Those include mentorship from an experienced nurse; the ability to complete service-learning opportunities; paid leadership clinical hours; and the chance to participate in a summer nurse extern program.

Warlick-Evans said the extern program was a highlight for her, providing additional hands-on experience and an opportunity for her to choose which departments she wanted to shadow as a student.

Tammy Powell, president of SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital and SSM Health Bone & Joint Hospital at St. Anthony, said the partnership not only benefits students, but also the health system and the local community.

“Saints & Stars allows OCU’s nursing students to gain valuable experience, and it provides SSM Health with a pipeline of well-prepared healthcare professionals,” Powell said. “One of the biggest benefits is that we enhance our ability to provide quality care to our community.”

The university and hospital system originally announced the Saints & Stars partnership in February 2023. To date nearly 60 students have taken part, with several – Warlick-Evans included – now working full-time with SSM Health.

The program is open to students from OCU’s traditional and accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs. Participating students can receive up to \$10,000 in financial assistance from SSM Health. The agreement calls for a two-year work commitment in the SSM Health system for those Saints & Stars scholars who receive financial assistance.

OCU also provides generous merit scholarships to its Bachelor of Science in Nursing students, meaning Saints & Stars scholars have the opportunity to earn their degree at a significantly reduced cost.

Warlick-Evans said the financial support was another key aspect of the Saints & Stars program.

“Receiving scholarship support while gaining real-world experience makes it an incredible opportunity,” she said. “I am grateful for the opportunities the Saints & Stars program provided.”

Full details about the Saints & Stars Program, including application procedures and requirements, are available here. More information about OCU’s Kramer School of Nursing can be found at www.okcu.edu/nursing.



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Awarded \$5 Million to Spearhead AI Training For Rural Nursing Communities

The grant, co-funded by Google.org and Johnson & Johnson Foundation, will support nurse upskilling in AI across the nation.

The American Nurses Enterprise (ANE), encompassing the American Nurses Association (ANA), American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), and American Nurses Foundation (ANF), has received a \$2.5 million grant from the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Foundation and \$2.5 million in funding from Google.org to launch an initiative to strengthen critical artificial intelligence (AI) skills in nursing practice, with a priority focus on reaching and training nurses in rural, remote, and underserved communities.

The initiative, Nurse AI Training in Rural and Underserved Communities, will support nurse upskilling by delivering co-designed education that builds knowledge, skills, and confidence to help nurses understand foundational AI concepts and apply them safely and effectively in real-world clinical environments.

Over the 3-year grant period, ANE will engage nurses nationwide and expand access to AI training and resources, delivering meaningful learning opportunities to support nurses across diverse practice settings, with a focus on rural areas.

We are deeply grateful to these two organizations for their investment in nurses and their recognition of the essential role

nurses must play in shaping the future of AI in healthcare,” said Angela Beddoe, Chief Executive Officer of the American Nurses Enterprise. “This initiative reflects our shared commitment to ensuring nurses, especially those serving rural and underserved communities, have access to practical, trusted education that strengthens confidence, supports safe implementation, and keeps patient care at the center of innovation.”

“AI is already showing up in everyday workflows across healthcare, and nurses must be prepared to lead how these tools are adopted, especially in rural and underserved settings where staffing and infrastructure challenges can be most acute,” said Brad Goettl, DNP, DHA, APRN, FAAN, FACHE, Chief Nursing Officer, American Nurses Enterprise. “This grant will help ensure nurses have practical, trusted, nursing-centered training to build confidence, protect clinical judgment, and improve patient outcomes in the communities that need it most.”

The training will emphasize real-world application and safe implementation, including communication strategies for discussing AI in practice with patients, families, peers, and organizational leadership.

The American Nurses Enterprise champions nurses by harnessing The Power of Nurses® to drive transformation and innovation across the healthcare landscape. As the unifying force behind three foundational pillars—the American Nurses Association, the American Nurses Credentialing Center, and the American Nurses

Foundation—the enterprise sets the professional standards that empower nurse-led innovation, advocacy, and research. By uniting these core organizations, the enterprise advances the nursing profession and shapes a healthier future for communities nationwide and around the globe.



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(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2026 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

Oklahoma Wesleyan University

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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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Christi M. Pendergraft, M.D.



Christi M. Pendergraft, M.D., is a board-certified neurologist at INTEGRIS Health Medical Group Neurology Rivendell. She is committed to helping patients regain their quality of life through compassionate, personalized neurological care.

“My passion in medicine is using the gift of healing God has entrusted to me—whether through diagnosis and treatment, helping to relieve suffering or simply listening with compassion and offering support,” Pendergraft says. “It is a privilege to help improve the lives of those I care for, one patient at a time.”

As a neurologist, Pendergraft’s areas of interest include chronic headaches, migraines and facial pain disorders. And as someone who personally experiences migraines,

she brings a unique level of empathy and understanding to every patient encounter. She believes exceptional care begins with listening, educating and partnering with patients to create individualized treatment plans that help them feel their best.

Pendergraft earned her medical degree from the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, where she also completed her neurology residency. She is an active member of both the American Headache Society and the American Academy of Neurology.

Pendergraft offices at INTEGRIS Health Medical Group Neurology Rivendell located at 2605 S.W. 119th St. in Oklahoma City. She is accepting new patients. To learn more, call 405-727-3030.

Ryan Jones, M.D.

Ryan Jones, M.D., is a board-certified family medicine physician with INTEGRIS Health Medical Cross Timbers in Edmond.

Jones is dedicated to providing compassionate, evidence-based care that helps patients achieve their health goals at every stage of life. He enjoys caring for patients of all ages and building lifelong relationships with individuals and families from welcoming newborns into care to supporting patients through every chapter of adulthood.

He also enjoys caring for Spanish-speaking patients. He is certified through INTEGRIS Health to provide

medical care in Spanish, building on years of language study and immersive experiences in Spain and Guatemala.

His areas of interest include preventive care and health screenings, lifestyle medicine, metabolic health, pediatrics and newborn care, diabetes management and obesity medicine.

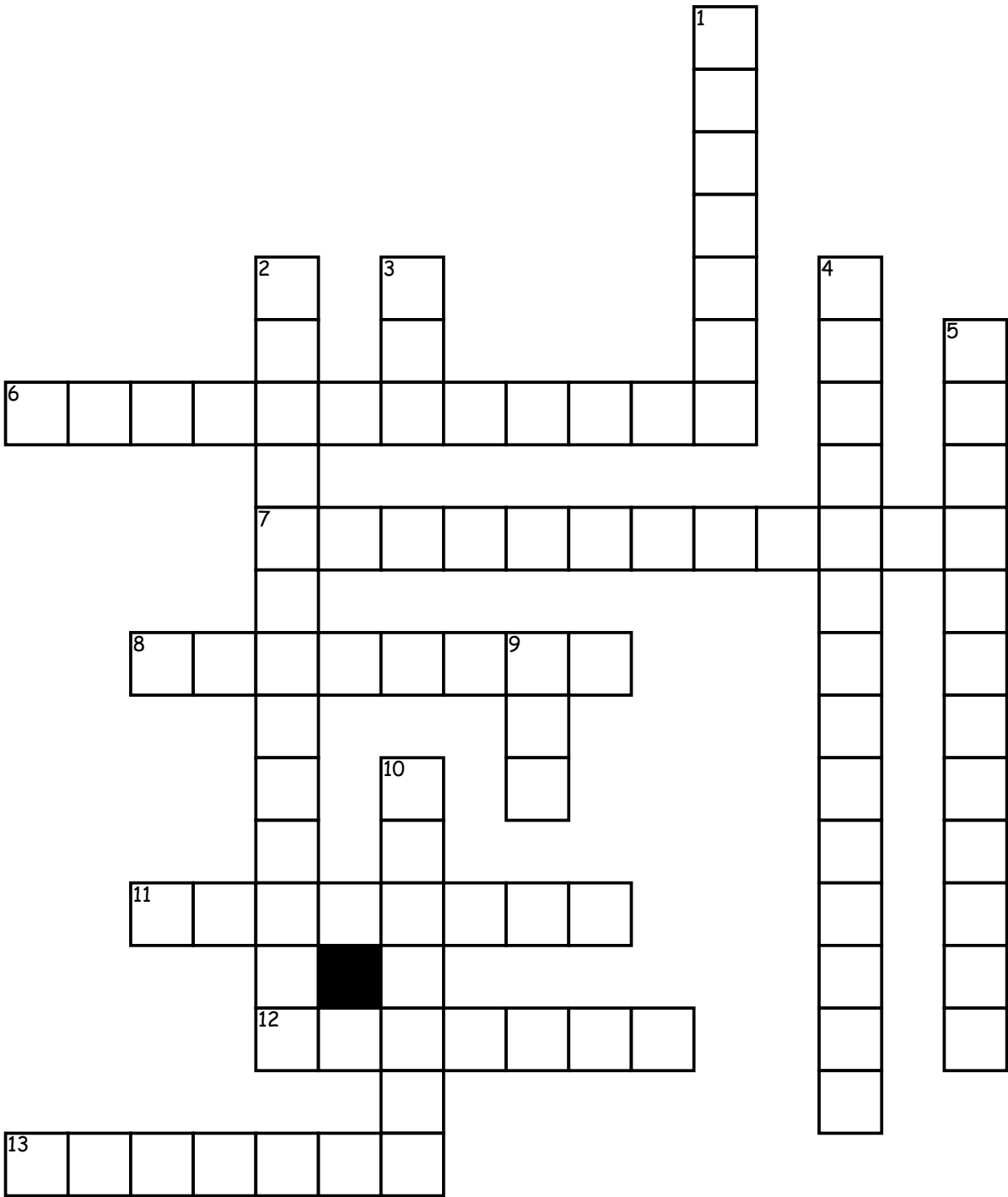
Jones offices at INTEGRIS Health Medical Group Cross Timbers located at 2557 Old Timbers Drive in Edmond. He is now accepting new patients. To learn more, call 405-669-2600.



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6. Acceptance of suicidal behavior
7. If it is strong enough to affect you, change your personality, that is called a _____
8. Ignoring the _____ will affect you career, your loved ones & your life.
11. It's everybody's duty to obtain assistance for others in the event of _____ behaviors.

12. What is the 10th leading cause of death
13. Recognize the warning signs of _____
- Down**
1. Do not _____ a person if you have the ability to help
2. Strengthening _____, strengthens Sailors.
3. Ask, care, treat also know as

4. An intentional act causing self harm
5. Common suicide factors: relationship problems and
9. Miss, avoid, disregard signs of suicide
10. What affects wives, husbands, daughters, sons and shipmates

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(AS PUBLISHED IN THE 2026 EDUCATION GUIDE TO NURSING)

Empowering Futures: Adult Health Programs at Francis Tuttle Technology Center

In the heart of Oklahoma, where the need for a qualified healthcare workforce has never been greater, Francis Tuttle Technology Center stands as a beacon for aspiring healthcare workers seeking to make a meaningful difference. Among its standout offerings are the adult health programs-flexible, affordable pathways designed to launch or advance careers in one of the nation's most vital industries. Francis Tuttle's Flex Health, Practical Nursing (LPN), Respiratory Care, and Surgical Technology programs provide a clear path forward.

Francis Tuttle's Flex Health provides a self-paced alternative to traditional training. These offerings are available in a hybrid format, allowing students to complete their training with a schedule that works best for them. Students can choose from multiple tracks, all culminating with an opportunity to attain industry certifications and join the healthcare industry more quickly.

The Practical Nursing (LPN) program prepares students to provide compassionate, skilled care in hospitals, clinics, and long-term care facilities. Through clinical experience and expert instruction, students learn to make a real impact on patients' lives - and graduate ready to take the NCLEX exam and begin working in a high-demand profession.

For those drawn to life-saving respiratory work, the Respiratory Care program trains students to help patients breathe easier - from premature infants to adults recovering from illness or injury. With access to advanced simulation labs and clinical rotations, students gain real-world experience and confidence in their skills before entering the workforce.

In the Surgical Technology program, students learn to prepare operating rooms, assist surgeons, and ensure patient safety in one of the most dynamic and critical areas of health care. It's a fast-paced, high-reward career where teamwork and precision make all the difference.

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