

**NATIONAL NURSES WEEK MAY 6 – MAY 12, 2026**



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who make a difference!*



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# A National Nurses Week Tribute | May 6–12, 2026



It's hard to imagine a world without nurses. Whether caring for patients in hospitals, schools, nursing homes, hospice facilities or private homes, nurses are an essential part of the fabric of health care. At some point in our lives, nearly all of us will rely on a nurse – and in that moment, the care they provide can make all the difference.



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Nurses offer far more than medical expertise. They bring compassion, resilience and an unwavering commitment to the people they serve. Whether offering comfort during uncertain moments, advocating for patients and families or simply being present when it matters most, nurses show up every day with purpose. Each year, National Nurses Week is celebrated from May 6 through May 12, concluding on the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing. This week serves as a national reminder to recognize and appreciate the vital role nurses play in caring for our communities.

Across Montana, nurses are deeply woven into everyday life – not only as health care professionals, but as neighbors, mentors, and trusted members of the communities they serve. Their work on the front lines of care and public health is both meaningful and essential.

This year, we are proud to spotlight 10 outstanding nurses nominated by the very people whose lives they've touched. These individuals were recognized not only for their clinical skill, but for the compassion, empathy and dedication they bring to their work every day.

Selecting just 10 nurses was no easy task. Each nomination told a powerful story of care, connection and impact – a reflection of the profound difference nurses make in the lives of others.

This special section, Nurses: The Heart of Health Care, is dedicated to them – and to nurses everywhere. During National Nurses Week, we celebrate their contributions, honor their commitment, and thank them for the care they provide when it matters most.

## Celebrating Nurses Week: A Heartfelt Thank You

As we celebrate Nurses Week, we take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to the incredible nurses who dedicate their lives to caring for others. Your unwavering commitment, compassion, and expertise make a profound difference in the lives of patients and their families every day.

Nurses are the backbone of our healthcare system, providing essential care and support in countless ways. From administering medications and treatments to offering a comforting presence during difficult times, your contributions are invaluable. You work tirelessly, often under challenging circumstances, to ensure the well-being of those in your care.

This week, we honor and celebrate you. We recognize the sacrifices you make, the long hours you work, and the emotional strength you exhibit. Your dedication to your profession is truly inspiring, and we are grateful for the positive impact you have on our community.

To all the nurses, thank you for your hard work, your compassion, and your unwavering dedication. You are heroes, and we are privileged to have you as part of our healthcare team. Happy Nurses Week!

Sincerely,



**Janet Harris,**

*DNP, MBA, RN, CENP  
VP, Chief Nursing Officer  
Intermountain Health,  
Peaks Region St. Vincent  
Regional Hospital*



**Dania**

**Block,**

*MSN, RN, NEA-BC  
Chief Nursing  
Officer  
Billings Clinic*

Celebrating Nurses:

# Where Compassion Meets Innovation



At Intermountain Health, we honor our nurses—your compassion and drive for innovation makes every patient's experience better. Your dedication inspires progress and shapes the future of care, making a difference every day. During Nurses Week and all year long, we celebrate all you do to advance nursing care.

**Thank you for your compassion and bringing new ideas to Intermountain Health.**



**St. Vincent Regional Hospital**

# KELLY BOURGEOIS

## DNP-C, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON  
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

**K**elly Bourgeois didn't set out to become a nurse. Her career began in the arts, where she managed a contemporary arts museum before eventually finding her way into health care.

While the work was fulfilling, she found herself wanting something more hands-on — a role that allowed her to connect more directly with people.

"I love talking to people," Bourgeois said. "But I wanted to develop my skills in a different way and be more involved in their care."

That realization led her to pursue a more direct role in patient care, first working as a radiologic technologist in interventional radiology and MRI. Though the role was important, she found the patient interaction limited and began to feel pulled toward nursing.

She went on to earn her nursing degree, building on a diverse educational background that includes degrees in business and the arts. Now, she is nearing completion of her Doctor of Nursing Practice, continuing a pattern of lifelong learning that she says is central to who she is.

"I love to learn," Bourgeois said. "No two days are the same, and that's one of the reasons I enjoy nursing so much."

For the past four and a half years, Bourgeois has worked in the intensive care unit — a setting she chose intentionally for both its complexity and its challenge.

"It's incredibly complex, both physiologically and socially," Bourgeois said. "Every patient is different, and I knew that if I wanted to be the best I could be, this was the place for me."

In the ICU, patients are often critically ill, requiring constant monitoring and advanced interventions. Nurses typically care for one or two patients at a time due

to the level of attention required — a pace that is demanding, but one Bourgeois finds meaningful.

"You're caring for people at some of the most critical moments of their lives," Bourgeois said.

While much of the work is highly technical, Bourgeois says one of the most important aspects of her role is understanding that patients are never just individuals — they're part of a larger network of relationships.

A significant portion of her care extends to families, especially when patients are unable to communicate.

"A patient is connected to so many people, and supporting the people who matter most to them helps the patient heal," Bourgeois said. "That perspective shapes how I approach each shift, taking time to learn about patients beyond their medical condition!"

Bourgeois describes herself as outgoing and naturally curious, often asking questions and encouraging families to share stories about their loved ones. She also creates a more personal environment for patients whenever possible.

"I like to know their backstory," Bourgeois said. "I encourage music in the room, and I try to understand what they would want. I read the room and meet people where they are."

Critical care also comes with emotional challenges. Patients may be in the ICU for extended periods, and outcomes are not always positive. Over time, Bourgeois has learned the importance of developing healthy ways to process those experiences.

She turns to activities like yoga, art and spending time with family and friends, while also acknowledging the emotional weight that comes with the profession.

"You walk through some really hard moments working in the ICU," Bourgeois said. "It's very emotional, but I'm committed to staying present and engaged in the work."



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Billings Clinic

**NURSING PROGRAM:** Helena College and Montana State University

**FOCUS:** Intensive Care Unit

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 4.5

**"No two days are the same, and that's one of the reasons I enjoy nursing so much."**

Kelly Bourgeois



■ “Montana is home to over 23,000 nurses, with many serving right here in Billings.”

■ “Nearly 9 out of 10 nurses are actively caring for patients, showing their vital role every day.”

■ “Local hospitals like Billings Clinic and Intermountain Health are welcoming dozens of new nurses each year, strengthening our community.”

■ “Nursing remains one of the most in-demand and trusted professions, with hundreds of openings annually.”

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# AMBER BRIEN

BSN, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON  
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

After working as a graphic designer for several years, Amber Brien realized she wanted something different — a career that offered stability and a deeper sense of purpose. With a degree in hand and a young family at home, she made the decision to return to school and pursue nursing — a path she once considered.

“Graphic design wasn’t what I thought it was going to be,” Brien said. “I remember wanting to be a doctor when I was little, and I thought nursing would be an easier pathway.”

Brien earned her associate degree in nursing through City College in Billings before completing her bachelor’s degree at Montana State University Billings. She began her career on an inpatient cardiovascular unit, gaining foundational experience as a new nurse. After two years, she transitioned into pediatric hematology, oncology and infusion services — a specialty she had her eye on.

“When it came to choosing a field, I always knew I wanted to work with kids,” Brien said.

In her current role, Brien cares for pediatric patients with a wide range of conditions, from blood disorders such as hemophilia to cancer diagnoses requiring chemotherapy and ongoing treatment. Working in an outpatient setting, she helps administer infusions, manage IV access and support patients and their families throughout their care.

While pediatric oncology can be difficult, Brien says the long-term nature

of the work allows her to see patients through every stage of their journey — from diagnosis to recovery and beyond.

“We see them for years,” Brien said. “We get to watch them go through treatment, recover and come back for follow-up. It’s a unique perspective that includes challenging moments and meaningful progress — but we have more good days than bad.”

Brien describes her approach as calm and adaptable, adjusting to each patient’s needs and personality. She enjoys building rapport but can also quickly shift her approach when a patient prefers less interaction.

“If a kid doesn’t want to talk and just wants you to get in and get done, that’s OK,” Brien said.

When it comes to turning off her thoughts after a shift, Brien says that’s something she’s still working on.

“I don’t know that I’ve figured that out,” Brien said. “It’s difficult to justify worrying about certain things at home when I know the kids and families I work with every day are going through really difficult things they have no control over.”

Over time, she says her confidence has grown, particularly in advocating for her patients and communicating within her team. That growth, shaped by the realities of the job, has influenced how she approaches her work and the profession.

“I’m probably better at asking for what I need and advocating for my patients,” she said. “It’s not all touchy-feely — kindness is important, but you’ve got to be ready to work.”



“When it came to choosing a field, I always knew I wanted to work with kids.”

Amber Brien



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Billings Clinic

**NURSING PROGRAM:** City College at Montana State University - Billings and Montana State University - Billings

**FOCUS:** Pediatric specialties

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 8

# LESLIE CUTHILL

MSN, RNC-MNN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON  
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

Rather than following a defined path, Leslie Cuthill's journey into nursing took shape over time — guided by a growing realization that she belonged in medicine.

In high school, she explored that interest through medical courses and worked as an athletic trainer, but when she began college, she chose a different direction, earning a degree in health and human development with plans to pursue counseling or social work.

"After graduating, that path no longer felt like the right fit," Cuthill said. "I ultimately needed to be in medicine."

She returned to school to earn her nursing degree, later continuing her education with a master's degree in nursing, all through Montana State University.

Cuthill began her career in cardiac telemetry, where she had previously worked as a certified nursing assistant during nursing school. While she valued the experience, a colleague encouraged her to consider a different path — one that would ultimately shape the rest of her career.

She transitioned to the mother-newborn care unit, where she has remained ever since, caring for mothers and newborns following delivery and focusing not only on recovery but also on education — helping families navigate the early days of parenthood.

"We're truly helping these individuals become parents," Cuthill said. "It includes breastfeeding support, education on caring for their baby and guidance for their own recovery, both mentally and physically."

In addition to her bedside role, Cuthill also serves as a clinical instructor at Montana State University — Bozeman, teaching nursing students and sharing the knowledge she has gained over nearly two decades in the field.

"I really enjoy education," Cuthill said. "It's fun to be able to share what I've learned with new nurses. It allows me to continue growing professionally while staying closely connected to patient care."

Cuthill says the emotional weight of the job doesn't always stay at work. She takes every story home with her and relies on family to help her process and move forward.

"I lean on my husband and my kids," Cuthill said. "They keep me busy and help me push through."

Throughout her career, one piece of advice has stayed with her — both in her personal life and in her work.

"You can't change people," Cuthill said. "You can only control your response to them."

It's a mindset that reflects her approach to nursing — one grounded in patience, consistency and a commitment to providing safe, evidence-based care while supporting patients through some of life's most meaningful moments.



**"I lean on my husband and my kids, they keep me busy and help me push through."**

Leslie Cuthill



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Intermountain Health St. Vincent Regional Hospital and Montana State University - Bozeman

**NURSING PROGRAM:** Montana State University

**FOCUS:** Mother newborn

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 17

# MICHAELA EDWARDS RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON  
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

From an early age, Michaela Edwards saw the impact a nurse could have through her grandmother, who worked at a veterans hospital in South Dakota and was one of the kindest people she knew.

That influence stayed with her as she moved from high school directly into nursing school, graduating from the University of South Dakota and beginning a career that has now spanned more than two decades.

“I’ve always been motivated by her and wanted to follow in her footsteps,” Edwards said.

Edwards began her career as a medical-surgical nurse, building a strong foundation in patient care while working long shifts, weekends and holidays. As her family grew, she began to reevaluate what balance looked like and eventually transitioned into ophthalmology — a move that allowed her to continue caring for patients while working a more consistent schedule.

That path ultimately led her to Vance Thompson Vision, where she now serves as ambulatory surgery center director.

In her current role, Edwards oversees daily operations, supports her team and ensures patients receive high-quality care from start to finish.

While her role today is primarily leadership-focused, Edwards says what motivates her most is seeing the

immediate impact of the care her team provides.

“I love my team and the patient outcomes that we get to see every day after surgery,” Edwards said. “Some patients come in and haven’t been able to see for months or years, and after surgery, it’s overwhelming for them to start seeing faces again or colors.”

At the surgery center, Edwards and her team perform procedures such as cataract and glaucoma surgeries, as well as corneal transplants — often helping restore vision in a matter of minutes. That transformation is what makes the work especially meaningful.

“I try to relate to the patients,” Edwards said. “They’re coming in and it’s a stressful situation much of the time, so I try to calm their nerves and be an advocate for them.”

Over time, she says her confidence has grown significantly — something she remembers lacking early in her career.

“I think any new nurse is insecure, lacks confidence and doubts themselves,” Edwards said. “The more comfortable you get in your role, you start to grow into it.”

For Edwards, that growth is paired with a simple but meaningful philosophy she carries into both her work and her life — one she shares at home with her husband, who is also a nurse.

“Show compassion,” Edwards said. “Even small acts of kindness make a difference. You never know what someone is going through, and everyone deserves that kindness.”



“You never know what someone is going through, and everyone deserves kindness.”

Michaela Edwards



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Vance Thompson Vision

**NURSING PROGRAM:** University of South Dakota

**FOCUS:** Ophthalmology

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 21



Whitney Williams, RN



Brooke Dawes, RN



Lauren Swain, RN



Jamie Harley, RN



Melissa Anderson, RN



Brooke Daugherty, RN



Madisyn Ramstad, RN

## Wishing Our Nurses A Happy National Nurses Week!

This week we celebrate, appreciate, and recognize the vast contributions and positive impact our incredible nursing staff has on our patients 365 days a year.

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# LAURI FERALIO

BSN, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON  
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

**A**t just three years old, Lauri Feralio was already trying to care for others. When her grandfather was very ill, she walked into his room with a pack of Life Savers, telling him she could make him better — a moment her family still talks about today.

“For me, it’s always felt like a calling,” Feralio said.

For Feralio, nursing wasn’t something she discovered later — it was something she always felt called to do. After graduating from high school, she went straight into nursing school at Carroll College in Helena, working as a certified nursing assistant while she was in school to gain hands-on experience.

From the very beginning, she knew exactly where she wanted to focus. While many of her classmates were unsure, she was certain she wanted to work in geriatrics — a decision that would shape her entire career.

“I was the only one in my class who had any interest in it,” Feralio said.

Feralio built her career across several senior living communities, advancing from a floor nurse into leadership roles over the years. Today, she serves as director of nursing at Westpark Village.

Her work starts well before a resident ever moves in — meeting with families, assessing needs and helping guide them through what can be a major transition. But even with the administrative responsibilities, the heart of her job hasn’t changed.

“What gets me up in the morning

is seeing the residents,” Feralio said. “Getting to know their stories and their families — they really become part of your life.”

With nearly 200 residents, she takes pride in knowing each person by name — something she sees as a simple but meaningful way to build connection and trust.

That sense of connection extends beyond her day-to-day role. For years, her husband served as the community’s chaplain, and for a time, their son also worked in the dining area — creating an environment where both her professional and personal life were closely intertwined.

Throughout her career, Feralio has also had the opportunity to take part in meaningful experiences outside of her regular responsibilities, including participating in nine Honor Flights, accompanying World War II veterans to Washington, D.C., to visit memorials built in their honor.

“Those were incredible experiences,” Feralio said.

She still misses bedside care and, when she can, steps in to work alongside her staff — a chance to reconnect with residents and focus solely on their needs.

That perspective also shapes how she leads. Early in her career, strong mentors helped guide her development, and she now works to provide that same support to others — especially new nurses and caregivers.

“We can teach skills,” Feralio said. “But we can’t teach compassion.”

For Feralio, that belief defines her approach to care and leadership alike — treating every resident as if they were part of her own family.



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Westpark Village

**NURSING PROGRAM:** Carroll College

**FOCUS:** Geriatrics

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 30

“We can teach skills,  
but we can’t teach compassion.”

Lauri Feralio

# KELLY GARDNER

BSN, RN-WCC

BY JENNIFER L. MASON  
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

From an early age, Kelly Gardner showed a natural instinct for caring for others — even before she knew what it might mean for her future.

She remembers walking with her grandmother as a young girl when a fall left her with a scraped knee. Gardner helped her home, cleaned the wound and carefully bandaged it — a simple act that would later take on deeper meaning.

“She told me I would be a nurse one day,” Gardner recalled. “That’s the first time I remember thinking about it.”

Though that moment planted the seed, her path to nursing wasn’t immediate. Gardner attended Montana State University, initially pursuing a degree in marketing before ultimately earning a degree in English. Still searching for direction after graduation, everything clicked during an unexpected moment one Halloween.

“While getting ready for Halloween, I reluctantly put on a pair of scrubs a friend had given me, and in that moment, it hit me,” Gardner said.

Health care had always been part of her world. Her mother spent more than five decades working as a physical therapist, and her father was a physician assistant — influences that shaped her understanding of the field and ultimately guided her back to it.

That decision launched a career that has now spanned 14 years and taken Gardner across a wide range of experiences. She began on a cardiac unit before moving into international work supporting clinics in Ghana during the Ebola outbreak. She later returned to Montana, where she stepped into a leadership role on a neuro-trauma floor and worked in public health during the height of pandemic.

Each role, she said, has contributed to how she leads today.

As Chief Nursing Officer at the

Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana, Gardner oversees a team of about 50 staff members while remaining closely connected to the day-to-day realities of patient care. Patients often arrive after life-altering events — strokes, traumatic injuries or serious illness — working toward the goal of returning home.

“We get patients who’ve had something break their body in some way,” Gardner said. “Our goal is to get at least 80% of them back home — whatever ‘home’ looks like for them.”

While outcomes are important, Gardner says her focus extends beyond patient care to the people providing it. Creating an environment where nurses feel supported, heard and fulfilled is what drives her most.

She prioritizes being present — stepping in to help when needed and making time to listen. In many cases, she said, simply being available makes the biggest difference.

“Sometimes they don’t want me to fix anything,” Gardner said. “They just want to be heard.”

That philosophy is rooted in one of the most important lessons she’s carried throughout her career: to assume good intentions. It’s a mindset that has shaped her leadership style and helped foster trust among her team.

“Assume that people mean well,” Gardner said. “There’s no reason to believe someone is trying to make your day harder. That perspective changes everything.”

For Gardner, nursing is not an easy profession — but it’s one that offers a deep sense of purpose. Over time, it changed how she sees the world, strengthening her sense of compassion while reinforcing the importance of human connection.

“The feeling of taking away someone’s fear or pain — there’s nothing like it,” Gardner said. “I can’t think of another career that could be more rewarding.”



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** The Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana

**NURSING PROGRAM:** Denver College of Nursing

**FOCUS:** Rehabilitation

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 14

“I can’t think of another career that could be more rewarding.”

Kelly Gardner

# MADELEINE HAMMOND

BSN, RN,  
VA-BC

BY JENNIFER L. MASON  
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

It took time — and a few different paths — before Madeleine Hammond found her footing in nursing.

“I went to college three times,” Hammond said. “The first two times, I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. The third time, I finally committed to being a nurse.”

Before that decision, Hammond worked as a certified nursing assistant, a role she began shortly after high school while exploring other areas of study, including surgical technology and counseling. Even then, nursing wasn’t always the plan.

“I didn’t think I could ever accomplish it, if I’m being honest,” Hammond said.

That perspective eventually shifted. She went on to earn her associate degree in nursing through City College in Billings and later completed her bachelor’s degree online through Aspen University.

After becoming a registered nurse in 2018, Hammond began her career on a medical-surgical unit, building a foundation that strengthened her clinical judgment and confidence.

She later transitioned into a specialized role on the vascular access device team, where she spent five years placing PICC lines, midlines and other devices for patients across the hospital. The role required advanced training and precision while exposing her to a wide range of patient needs.

That experience sparked her interest in quality and process improvement — an area she hadn’t fully considered early in her career, but one where she saw the

opportunity to make a broader impact.

Today, Hammond serves as the manager of nursing quality at Billings Clinic, where she oversees nursing-sensitive indicators across the hospital, including patient falls, infections and other measures that directly impact patient outcomes.

“My job is to connect with bedside nurses and leadership, identify opportunities for improvement and help implement changes that enhance patient care,” Hammond said.

Her role allows her to step back and look at the bigger picture, working across departments to support both caregivers and the patients they serve.

“My confidence has grown with experience, along with my ability to navigate challenges and speak up when needed,” Hammond said. “You don’t know what you don’t know at the beginning. Now I know who to go to and what resources I have. I’m definitely not the same nurse I was as a new grad.”

That growth didn’t happen overnight. Early in her career, speaking up could feel intimidating, especially in an environment where experience levels varied widely. Over time, that uncertainty gave way to a stronger sense of assurance — not just in her skills, but in her ability to advocate for patients and collaborate with her team.

For those considering a career in nursing, she emphasizes the importance of resilience and purpose.

“It takes a lot of grit, but it’s also incredibly rewarding,” Hammond said. “The meaningful moments make it all worth it.”



“It takes a lot of grit, but it’s also incredibly rewarding.”

Madeleine Hammond



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Billings Clinic

**NURSING PROGRAM:** City College at Montana State University - Billings and Aspen University

**FOCUS:** Quality

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 8



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# JILLIAN JOHNSTON BSN, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

After working as a certified nursing assistant during high school and college, Jillian Johnston moved away from her goal of becoming a middle school science teacher and pursued a career in nursing.

“I love taking care of people,” Johnston said. “And when I was in school for teaching, I realized maybe this is where I’m supposed to be.”

That realization led her to pursue nursing, earning her associate degree in Sheridan, Wyoming, before completing her bachelor’s degree online through the University of Wyoming.

Over the course of her career, Johnston has gained experience across multiple areas of patient care, building a broad foundation and developing a deeper understanding of what it means to support patients in different settings.

For Johnston, one of the most meaningful aspects of nursing is the flexibility the profession offers — the ability to grow, adapt and pursue different paths over time.

“I love the variety and the change,” she said. “Every day is something different, and you’re always learning.”

She describes her approach as positive and approachable — something that helps her connect with both patients and coworkers.

“I’m pretty sunny and lighthearted,” Johnston said.

That outlook is evident in her work

with patients, where she creates a supportive and comfortable environment — even in challenging situations.

Over time, Johnston has also developed a deeper understanding of communication — not just in what she says, but in how she listens.

“Communication isn’t just about talking,” she said. “It’s about listening and picking up on the subtleties with patients and with your team.”

She recently stepped into a role as a staff nurse on a psychiatric unit, a field she has long been drawn to. At the same time, she is pursuing her psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner (PMHNP) degree, continuing to build on her commitment to mental health care.

That move reflects the versatility of nursing — something Johnston has come to value throughout her career.

“To see someone come in struggling and then start to get better — that’s really meaningful,” Johnston said.

Like many nurses, Johnston has learned how to balance the emotional demands of the job with the need to stay present and grounded.

One piece of advice she has carried with her over the years is simple, but impactful.

“Be where your feet are,” Johnston said. “When you’re at work, you’re there for your patients and your team. And when you go home, you’re there for your family.”

It’s a mindset that continues to guide her — both in her work and in her life.



“When you’re at work, you’re there for your patients and your team. And when you go home, you’re there for your family.”

Jillian Johnston



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Billings Clinic

**NURSING PROGRAM:** Sheridan College and the University of Wyoming

**FOCUS:** Psychiatric

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 16



# Happy International Nurses Week!

Thank you for being at the  
forefront of keeping humanity  
healthy and hopeful

# SETH ROBERTUS BSN, RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON

Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

**S**eth Robertus didn't set out to become a nurse — but a wilderness first responder course pointed him in that direction.

While finishing his degree in outdoor adventure leadership at Montana State University, Robertus took the course, an experience that sparked his interest in medical care.

"I thought that was pretty cool," Robertus said. "So I talked to the instructor, and he kind of advised me to go into nursing."

From there, the transition was quick. Robertus began completing prerequisite courses during his final semesters and, after graduating, applied directly to nursing school.

Now, just over five years into his career, he works as a registered nurse in the emergency department at Intermountain Health St. Vincent Regional Hospital, where he also serves as charge nurse on the day shift.

For Robertus, the emergency department was a natural fit — a place where no two days are the same and quick thinking is essential.

"It's fairly unexpected," Robertus said. "You just have to be ready for it."

Patients arrive with a wide range of concerns, from minor injuries to life-threatening conditions, and part of his role is determining urgency and coordinating next steps in care.

"It's kind of investigatory," Robertus said. "You come in with a complaint, and our job is to figure out what's going on — is it life-threatening, is it something we can treat, or does it need a specialist?"

That fast-paced environment can be intense, but Robertus is known for maintaining a calm, steady demeanor — something that becomes especially important in his leadership role.

As charge nurse, he oversees the flow

of the department, balancing incoming patients, available beds and staffing needs while continuing to provide hands-on care when needed.

"It's kind of like a chess game," he said. "You're looking at the whole department and trying to figure out what needs to happen next."

While technical skills are essential in emergency care, Robertus says communication is just as important — both with patients and with the broader care team.

Over time, his confidence has grown, along with his ability to navigate complex situations and collaborate effectively.

"Early on, everything feels new," he said. "Now I can go into situations with a better sense of what resources I have and who I need to talk to."

Despite the fast pace of the emergency department, Robertus also emphasizes the importance of connecting with patients on a personal level. He describes his approach as adaptable, adjusting to each situation and each patient's needs.

"I try to engage with people and see what they need," he said. "Some people are talkative, some aren't — you just adjust to what works for them."

Humor is one way he builds that connection when appropriate.

"I've got a handful of one-liners," he said with a laugh. "Some people get them, some don't."

Like many nurses, Robertus has learned how to cope with the emotional challenges that come with the job. Not every outcome is positive, and some shifts are more difficult than others.

"It's hard," Robertus said. "You can do everything right, and it still doesn't turn out the way you hope. But you learn to process it — lean on the people around you, whether that's your family, your coworkers or the resources available to you — and just keep showing up for the next patient."



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Intermountain Health St. Vincent Regional Hospital

**NURSING PROGRAM:** Montana State University - Billings

**FOCUS:** Emergency Department

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 5

**"I try to engage with people and see what they need."**

Seth Robertus

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# BRIDGET STURGIN RN

BY JENNIFER L. MASON  
Brand Ave. Studios Contributing Writer

After more than a decade working in administrative roles, Bridget Sturgin found herself ready for something different — a path that felt more meaningful than the routine she had grown used to.

“I needed a change,” Sturgin said.

She spent about 12 years in office-based roles, including time with a construction company, before deciding to make a change. That search led her into the medical field, where she trained and began working as a medical assistant — a shift that gave her a more hands-on role with patients.

She quickly realized she had found the right environment.

“I loved being in the medical field,” Sturgin said, adding that a physician she worked with encouraged her to take the next step and pursue nursing — advice that would ultimately change the course of her career.

“That meant I had to leave that position to go to nursing school,” Sturgin said.

Sturgin describes nursing as her third career — one shaped by years of experience in other fields that continue to influence her work.

“There are so many skills that transfer,” Sturgin said. “Even now, I still use things I learned in my previous jobs.”

After graduating, Sturgin began her nursing career in Ohio, working on an ICU step-down unit before relocating to Montana. She later found her way into oncology — a direction shaped in part by deeply personal experiences, including her father’s cancer diagnosis during

nursing school and her sister-in-law’s long battle with the disease.

“That really inspired me,” Sturgin said.

She now works on an inpatient oncology floor, where she cares for patients receiving chemotherapy as well as those experiencing complications from treatment.

For Sturgin, one of the most meaningful aspects of her work is the relationships she builds with patients over time.

“I have been with multiple patients from the day they are diagnosed through their entire treatment,” Sturgin said. “You get to know them and their families really well,” Sturgin said. “I try to be a steady, encouraging presence for patients during difficult moments.”

Those connections allow her to support patients not only physically, but emotionally — helping them navigate some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

She describes her approach as encouraging and steady, often using humor and conversation to help patients feel more at ease.

“I want them to smile and interact,” Sturgin said.

Among her coworkers, she is known as a dependable resource — someone others turn to for help.

“I’m a go-to person,” Sturgin said, noting that supporting others is something she takes pride in.

For Sturgin, nursing is about more than clinical care — it’s about understanding the full picture of what patients are experiencing.

“We see people at their darkest hour,” Sturgin said. “If we can help lift them up, even a little bit, that makes a difference.”



“I try to be a steady, encouraging presence for patients during difficult moments.”

Bridget Sturgin



## STATS

**EMPLOYER:** Intermountain Health St. Vincent Regional Hospital

**NURSING PROGRAM:** Mercy College of Ohio

**FOCUS:** Oncology

**YEARS OF SERVICE:** 5

# PEAK ZEN

How mountain meditation could help you feel more grounded

## TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

**T**here's nothing many a stressed soul would like more than a little inner peace and tranquility. But how to get there? Mindfulness and meditation are known to help people find calm, ground themselves and stabilize a life out of kilter.

The key is holding steady no matter what life throws at you. Is there anything that might inspire emulation? How about a mountain?

Mountain meditation is part of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, or MBSR, a program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Kabat-Zinn, who has a doctorate in molecular biology, is professor of medicine emeritus at the school, where he founded the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Clinic in 1979 and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society in 1995.

Mountain meditation doesn't require sitting cross-legged, guru-like, atop a mountain. It's a visualization technique that typically takes about 15 minutes. If you think that's too long and could be sped up, remember: MBSR, which incorporates elements of yoga and Zen, is effective only when it's unhurried.

More broadly, meditation can reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety disorders. It can improve emotional health and sleep quality, too. According to the United Nations, people have been meditating for 7,000 years, and hundreds of millions worldwide do so today.

Mountain meditation is a visualization technique that typically takes about 15 minutes.

**DANIEL INGOLD, TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE**



## A step-by-step guide to mountain meditation

- 1** Sit down comfortably in an upright posture and close your eyes. Take a few moments to become aware of your breathing and settle fully into the present moment.
- 2** Now, picture in your mind's eye the most beautiful mountain you know of or can imagine. Envision its shape, its peak, its broad base rooted solidly in the Earth. Take in the mountain's majesty, its permanence, how it's simply there and perfectly serene.
- 3** Feel the mountain's stability and imagine yourself becoming one with it. Your head is the peak, your shoulders and arms the slopes, your pelvis and legs the solid base. You are now the mountain, solidly rooted, stable and in the moment.
- 4** Hold this inner attitude and observe the changing times of day around you, the mountain. The sun creeps across the sky, night falls, the moon and stars appear, a new day dawns. The mountain simply remains, unchanged by the passage of time.
- 5** The seasons come and go. In spring, the mountain's slopes take on a tender green hue. In summer, they turn lush, and in autumn the leaves change color. The mountain's peak becomes snow-capped in winter, but the mountain's essence is unaltered.
- 6** The weather changes: sunshine, fog, storms, rain, hail, snow, heat, cold. Sometimes the mountain's peak is clearly visible, sometimes it's shrouded in clouds. But the mountain simply stands there unmoved, firm and steadfast no matter what the conditions.
- 7** If your thoughts start to wander, redirect them to the mountain and absorb the strength in this mental picture. In your meditation – and in your life – you can embody the mountain's stability. Thoughts, feelings, sensations, events cross your consciousness. Some are pleasant, others unpleasant or neutral. Like the mountain, you can take them as you rest in your center. You're not your thoughts, nor feelings. You're the sentient being that's aware of them – stable, dignified, steady as a mountain.
- 8** Continue meditating for as long as seems right for you. When you're ready, let the mental picture of the mountain go and open your eyes. Mountain meditation is easiest when it's guided. You can ask someone to read a relevant script to you while you meditate, or use an audio file. Guided mountain meditations can be found in meditation apps and on the internet.



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