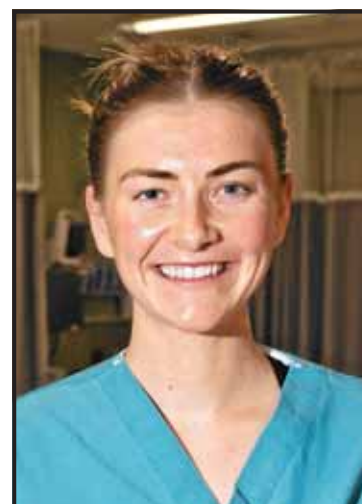


Independent Record

MAY 2025

# NURSES

*the heart of health care*



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**NATIONAL NURSES WEEK | May 6-12, 2025**



# TESSA MCGREE

Medical anthropologist Alberto Villoldo said, “Destiny is saying yes to the calling we were born with.”

Little did Tessa McGree know that her calling at birth was to be a nurse.

McGree, originally from Big Sandy, Montana, shared that at the time of her birth she became critically ill.

“They didn’t know if I was going to make it,” said McGree.

There was so much concern over whether she would survive that she received an emergency baptism while being cared for at Montana Deaconess Hospital in Great Falls. It was the valiant efforts of nurses and medical professionals who fought alongside her that later inspired her to become a nurse herself.

“I’ve known that I wanted to be a nurse since I was in kindergarten,” said McGree. “I just wanted to help others the way I was helped when I was born.”

McGree ended up enrolling in the nursing program at Carroll College in Helena.

“I was very grateful and blessed to have been able to go to a smaller school just coming from Big Sandy,” said McGree. “It was a great program and I’m thankful and blessed I could attend Carroll College.”

Today, McGree works at St. Peter’s Health in Helena as a clinical nurse educator for the medical group staff. The position is one she took on following 18 years of bedside care.

“I get to help others now support and believe in themselves so that’s pretty cool on my end to help them accomplish their own dreams and growth,” said McGree.

In her current role she helps to educate the medical staff on best practice and process improvements. She also teaches the certified medical assistant training program at St. Peter’s.

While she is now an educator, McGree enjoys still being a student herself and perpetually growing in knowledge.

“The most rewarding part is the continual opportunities to grow and provide care and transition,” said McGree.

Throughout her 24 years as a nurse, what McGree has come to understand is that displaying empathy and meeting others where they are at is the greatest act of service to her patients.

“They are somebody’s somebody so it’s really important that you provide the utmost care to everybody that you have the privilege to care for,” explained McGree.



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

**“I always say that we’re one big jigsaw puzzle in the great field of healthcare and nursing. Don’t forget that your unique puzzle is important so make sure you bring your individuality to the care that you provide.”**

Tessa McGree

“One of the biggest things I’ve learned is that through the gift of caring for others you get more in return than you will ever give,” added McGree.

For those who are considering going

into the nursing profession someday, McGree stressed the importance of knowing just how important every single person is in the healthcare profession.

“I always say that we’re one big jigsaw

puzzle in the great field of healthcare and nursing,” said McGree. “Don’t forget that your unique puzzle is important so make sure you bring your individuality to the care that you provide.”

While she may have had a rocky entrance into the world, McGree is grateful for the life she has built.

“I just love what I do, and I love the continual collaboration and learning – not only for myself but in how I provide and support others,” said McGree.

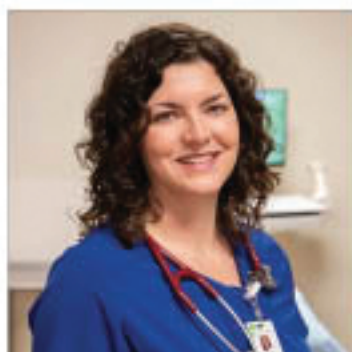
“If I had to do it over again, I would still be a nurse,” added McGree. “Nursing is the jam.”

# CELEBRATING COMPASSION HONORING EXCELLENCE

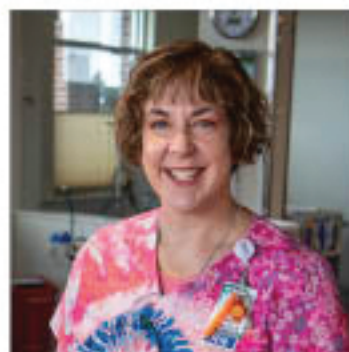
Congratulations to the St. Peter's Health team members recognized this year as Helena's outstanding nurses.



**Michelle  
Boyd, RN**  
Hospitalist



**Katie  
Gates, RN**  
Urology



**Heather  
Grell, RN**  
Nephrology & Dialysis



**Tessa  
McGree, RN**  
Clinical Nurse Educator



**Paige  
Planchich, RN**  
Float Nurse



**Scott  
Poortenga, RN**  
Diagnostic Imaging

*And, a heartfelt thanks to all our amazing nurses for their unwavering commitment to serving our community.*



St. Peter's Health



# TAYLOR AMESTOY

While happiness can stem from many places, those in the nursing profession know that true happiness comes from helping others.

“Life is hard enough without somebody also not wanting to help people,” said Taylor Amestoy, a nurse at Benefis Health System. “It just always came natural to me to help people.”

Amestoy admitted not really being sure of what she wanted to do with her life, but when one of her friends started taking prerequisite classes for the nursing program at Helena College, she became intrigued.

“I started taking my first anatomy and physiology class with her and was like ‘if I don’t like it, I’ll change,’” shared Amestoy. “But I fell in love with it and thought this is really cool and so here I am,” said Amestoy.

A nurse for the past eight years, Amestoy has worked for Associated Dermatology, the urgent care at St. Peter’s Health, and currently works for Benefis with Mary Middagh, a family nurse practitioner who specializes in gastroenterology and hepatology.

From rooming patients, checking vitals, and handling medication prior authorizations, Amestoy has her hands full each day. But at the heart of Amestoy’s work is the simple act of caring for people.

“I love getting to know patients and when they start getting to know me and having that kind of camaraderie and relationship and making people feel comfortable – especially in a GI setting since it’s not the most comfortable thing to talk about,” said Amestoy.

**“I love getting to know patients and when they start getting to know me and having that kind of camaraderie and relationship and making people feel comfortable – especially in a GI setting since it’s not the most comfortable thing to talk about.”**

**Taylor Amestoy**



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Her caring nature extends and is noticeable not only by Amestoy’s patients, but also by the staff that work alongside her.

“What truly sets Taylor apart is her ability to connect with patients on a personal level, building trust and rapport, even in the most difficult circumstances,” said one of Amestoy’s co-workers.

While Amestoy grows in knowledge and compassion through her work with every patient, it was caring for her own mother during her battle with breast cancer that most impacted Amestoy’s life and work as a nurse.

Through intimately watching one of the closest people in her life battle a serious health crisis, Amestoy came to a deeper understanding of just how challenging

fighting against cancer and other illnesses can be and the toll that fighting ultimately takes on patients.

“When you don’t feel good, literally everything else goes with it,” explained Amestoy. “It made me realize that people have vast lives and when they’re not feeling good it just transfers over into everyday life so much.”

“Having her be sick in a way like that put nursing even more into a good perspective for me,” continued Amestoy. “I think it made me a better nurse because I always empathized with people before, but I could see it better because of her.”

While Amestoy shared that her mother unfortunately lost her cancer battle in December 2023, she remains a guiding pres-

ence in her life.

“It’s been tough for sure but she is also kind of my inspiration to keep going and to help people more,” said Amestoy.

What began on a whim and taking a random anatomy and physiology course in college, transformed into a meaningful profession for Amestoy founded in the service of others.

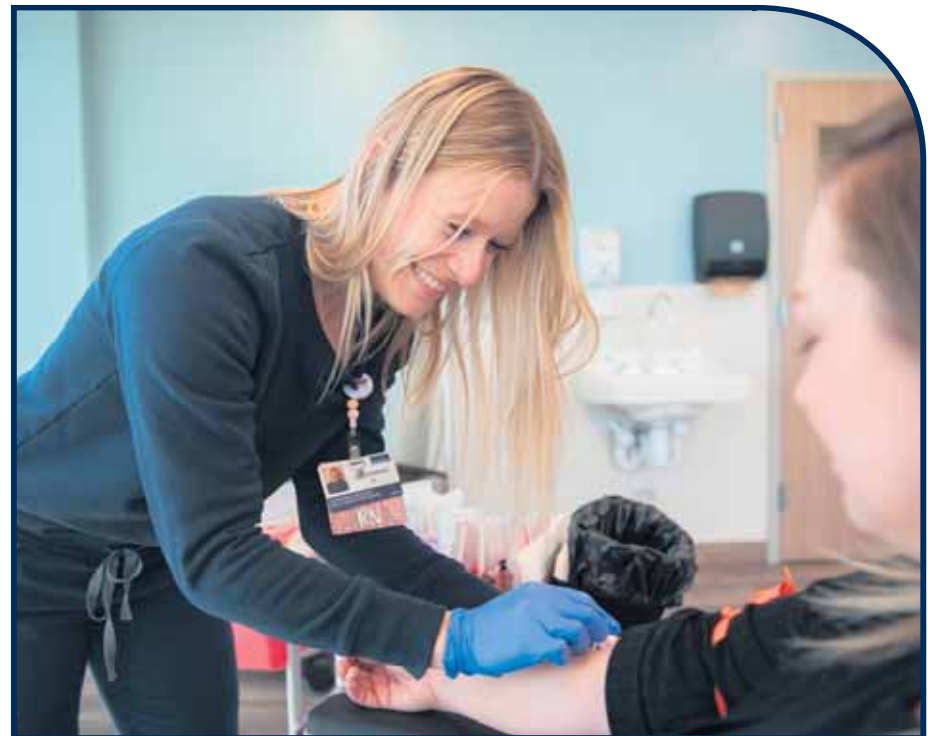
“I didn’t have a major inspiration for becoming a nurse,” said Amestoy. “I just kind of fell into it but it’s just been incredible.”

“Helping people and caring for people is never ever going to be the wrong decision,” added Amestoy. “Just being there for people on their worst days is something that not everybody gets to say that they can do, and I love that.”



Throughout Montana, nurses help to provide the baseline of care in our communities. Serving at the front line for public health, there's no overstating their importance and significance in making our lives as long and healthy as possible. National Nurses' Week, May 6th – 12th is an opportunity to thank and give back to nurses everywhere. Nurses: The Heart of Health Care celebrates those who choose a career of compassion in the nursing field and recognizes the dedication of nursing staff across the state of Montana. Ten profiles of outstanding nurses are featured, nominated by their communities for making an extraordinary difference in people's lives. Presented in no particular order, these nursing profiles give insight into those who give so much of themselves and offer thanks for their dedication to a field fraught with obstacles. Nurses Week is a time to recognize nurses and their profession and to give gratitude and respect in times of stress and a constantly evolving health care environment. This seventh-annual edition of Nurses: The Heart of Health Care is made possible by The Independent Record and statewide sponsor Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana, as well as local sponsors St. Peter's Health, and Benefis Health System.

Bios written by Lacey Middlestead and Photographed by Thom Bridge



# Happy Nurses Week!

Day after day, shift after shift,  
you are there for the people who need you.  
Nurses help patients and families through  
the hard days and the great days.  
We appreciate you every day.

The compassion, knowledge, and  
dedication you bring to work is vital.

**Thank you, nurses!**





# SCOTT POORTENGA



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Variety is the spice of life for Scott Poortenga, a nurse at St. Peter's Health.

Poortenga started his working career assisting in a furniture warehouse; however, when the monotony of the job started to wear on him, he began looking for something more diverse and exciting.

Eventually, Poortenga entered the healthcare field when he took a job as a nurse technician in an emergency room at a local hospital where he previously lived. He instantly felt like he had found a true calling.

"I just really enjoyed the variety,"

said Poortenga. "You never know what you're going to see when you walk into an emergency room and that was great because when I was working in the warehouse it was the same thing over and over again," added Poortenga.

It wasn't just the variety of patients and job duties from day to day that intrigued him though, but also the crew of people that worked alongside him.

"It was a really enlightening time in my life," said Poortenga. "In working as a tech, you really got to see that team atmosphere and the nurses and doctors treat you like a team member of equal value. That was a cool thing to see and

made me want to grow into that profession and kind of step up the ladder a little bit with nursing."

Poortenga spent five years as a tech before later graduating from the nursing program at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2008 and officially launching his career as a nurse.

In 2011, Poortenga shared that he moved to Helena and continued working as a nurse in the emergency room department at St. Peter's Health. About a year and a half ago, he switched over to diagnostic imaging at St. Peter's where he now works with both radiologists and interventional radiologist

groups.

"It's kind of a cool department," said Poortenga. "It's been fun getting to know the ins and outs of it."

"It's like a bunch of mini departments within your department because you have your ultrasound crew, your CAT scan crews, your Xray crew, and mammogram," continued Poortenga. "There are all kinds of different specialties within the department that orbit around each other but everyone's going to work together."

As with many nurses, Poortenga has learned that empathy is the most important attribute to being a nurse.



# ANNIE HARMAN



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Sometimes it only takes one person to motivate us to become the person we were always meant to be.

For Annie Harman, a nurse at Shodair Children's Hospital, that person was her sister.

While Harman has a background in teaching, it was her sister who first motivated her to change gears at age 40 and go back to school to become a nurse.

"My sister is a nurse, and she has always been an inspiration to me," said Harman.

In going back to school, Harman admitted that she had a goal beyond that of just becoming a nurse.

"When I went to school the thing that I knew would be most important as I chose a field of nursing to work in was being able to be an advocate," explained Harman. "That

was my number one force – to find a place where I could advocate for my patients."

When it came time to do her clinicals, Harman ended up working at Shodair, which provides acute child and adolescent psychiatry services, residential treatment, and genetic testing and counseling services to patients throughout Montana.

That experience not only exposed her to pediatric health care but also the field of mental health. For Harman, something immediately clicked for her with that work and particular population of patients, and she knew she'd found a home for her advocacy calling.

"I felt really strongly that that was where I could advocate for our patients and for those who had gone through some really major challenges throughout their lives,"

said Harman of Shodair.

Two years into her career as a nurse, Harman continues to relish the work she does with the pediatric patients at Shodair. While every day is different, her role of interacting with, supporting, and serving the needs of the kids always remains the same.

"The most important thing is advocating for them and caring enough about them to keep them safe physically and emotionally, explained Harman.

Along the way, Harman shared that it is the patients at Shodair that have taught her the most.

"The kids that we work with are incredibly resilient and incredibly brave," said Harman. "The really cool thing about working with kids is that their brains are still growing and developing and there's a huge potential to really help them in gaining some coping skills that will affect them throughout their lives."

"They have been through some really significant trauma but the opportunity in the potential that we have as nurses to makes some of those interventions and

really give them the tools to lead a healthy and fulfilling life is one of the most exciting parts," added Harman.

Whether patients stay for one week or several months, Harman's greatest reward at the end of the day is observing how far they've come.

"Seeing the progress that they make and the skills they have gained over their time of their stay with us is really phenomenal," said Harman.

Nursing wasn't the first career path Harman went down but it seems it was the path she was always meant to end up on.

"I think if it's something that you have a desire to do then jump in and just do it," said Harman on her advice for those contemplating the nursing profession. "There are so many opportunities. It's rewarding and it's hard and it's beautiful and it has changed my life."

"Shodair's motto 'to help, heal, and inspire hope'...that is at the crux of everything that I aim to do every single day," said Harman. "It's a very hopeful field. Everything that we do is for that hope."

## Congratulations

Annie Harman, RN  
you have set the  
standard for what it  
means to be a  
Shodair nurse.



Shodair nurses provide healing, help and hope to  
Montana's most venerable youth.

Thank you!

[shodair.org](http://shodair.org)



# PAIGE PLANCICH

From the path she took to becoming a nurse to the recovery of the patients she now cares for, Paige Plancich, a float nurse at St. Peter's Health Regional Medical Center, knows that every journey begins with a single step.

Even before she realized she wanted to be a nurse, Plancich admitted she was always intrigued by the inner workings of the medical profession.

"I always loved the medical field growing up and really just learning about how amazing the human body is," said Plancich.

The work of nurses, in particular, stood out to her.

"I really enjoyed talking to nurses and seeing the impact that they had not only in my life and my family's life, but in the lives of those that surrounded me through their different medical needs," said Plancich.

Eventually Plancich enrolled in Carroll College's accelerated nursing program. While she described the program as "very hard and short," it prepared her for all that lay ahead.

"The end result is so rewarding after you get your license and are able to serve in whatever capacity," said Plancich. "It's also really cool that nursing can take you anywhere so you can work in a hospital, a clinic, or you could do public health."

"There's so many different avenues of nursing that you're able to try out until you find something that is meaningful to you," continued Plancich.

Since becoming a nurse two and a half years ago, Plancich has come to relish the variety of her work as a float nurse. Trained to work on labor and delivery, pediatrics, medical, surgical, oncology, and beyond, she can just about go anywhere she is

**"Sometimes we have a tendency to want to push patients to be healthier or medically better. But it's about being able to take the time to sit and talk with them and realize that we have to help meet them where they're at in order for them to succeed."**

Paige Plancich



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

needed.

"I truly love the variety," said Plancich.

Regardless of the area of the hospital she is in during any given day, Plancich draws the most meaning and purpose from striving to meet her patients where they are rather than where she thinks they ought to be.

"Sometimes we have a tendency to want to push patients to be healthier or medically better," admitted Plancich. "But it's about being able to take the time to sit and talk with them and realize that we have to help meet them where they're at in order

for them to succeed," explained Plancich.

One of Plancich's most memorable experiences thus far as a nurse was once caring for a patient who went into cardiac arrest.

"He was on a ventilator for quite a long time in the ICU and we didn't think that he would ever wake up," shared Plancich. "But then he ended up getting better and I ended up being able to take care of him when he was a patient on the medical floor."

"Now I get to see him out in the community," continued Plancich. "We thought that he would never recover and so I think

that is when it truly hit me how amazing it is that I get to work all over the hospital settings because I do get to see people go from being on a ventilator to walking about in our community."

While every day in the hospital is new and different for her, Plancich's devotion to her work and the lives of her patients remains a constant.

"I really do care about this community and trying to help people through some of their hardest times in life," said Plancich.

"I'm thankful every day that I chose to become a nurse," she added.



# MICHELLE BOYD

For Michelle Boyd, a hospitalist nurse at St. Peter's Health, it was a trip abroad as a young student that first opened her eyes and heart to the possibilities and impacts of nursing.

In between graduating high school and starting college, Boyd shared that she spent a month and a half in Guatemala working with babies and young children and educating people about health and healthcare.

"It was really just seeing the need for basic education of taking care of your person and nutrition and basic hygiene and different things that made me go, 'oh my gosh, I could do this and help teach people,'" said Boyd.

Following her time in Guatemala, Boyd realized that going into nursing would be the most practical way to continue that health education piece she had found so meaningful.

While she attended nursing school in South Carolina, the Butte native eventually made her way back to Montana with her husband and four children.

In her current role at St. Peter's Health, Boyd's job involves managing the day-to-day care of hospitalized patients while working collaboratively with hospitalist physicians and other healthcare professionals. She visits patients after they are admitted, answers any questions they may have, and makes sure they understand the care plan being developed for them.

"Just whatever the doctor may need and ensuring the patient has the smoothest transition from hospital to home is kind of my goal," said Boyd.

Once patients are discharged and return home, Boyd does follow up calls within 24-48 hours to see how they are doing, make sure they understand their discharge instructions, any medications they've been prescribed, and help schedule any additional appointments for them.

"One of the most rewarding things is when patients express how grateful they are for the care they received from our team," said Boyd. "It makes you feel like, okay, at least in this person's life we made a difference, and we did well, and they felt taken care of."

In her 16 years of being a nurse, Boyd has learned that the best way she can care for her patients is by putting aside any expectations or assumptions and simply meeting them where they are at that moment.

"Anytime a person is in a healthcare situation, they're super vulnerable," ex-



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

**"One of the most rewarding things is when patients express how grateful they are for the care they received from our team. It makes you feel like, okay, at least in this person's life we made a difference, and we did well, and they felt taken care of."**

Michelle Boyd

plained Boyd. "Taking the time to just be with them and understand and listen I think is the biggest thing I've learned."

"When you take the time to figure out where they're coming from and why they do the things that they do, it can really help when you're trying to earn their trust and provide them with good care," added Boyd.

It isn't just Boyd's patients that notice the special care and attention she gives but also her co-workers.

"Michelle is compassionate, efficient, and relentless in her pursuit of high-quality care for patients," said one of Boyd's co-workers. "She navigates the difficult terrain of delighting patients, their families and loved ones, the physicians, the

hospital nurses, care management, and administration."

While one trip to Guatemala years ago lit a flame inside Boyd to educate and serve those around her, it has been every patient and doctor interaction and opportunity as a nurse since that has kept that flame burning.

"I love my job," said Boyd. "I really love St. Peter's and especially the hospitalist doctors. They are some of the finest doctors I have ever worked with in my life over the years. They are some of the most compassionate and smart doctors and I'm just really super proud to be a part of that team."

"Nursing is about putting others first," added Boyd. "I do because I love people, and I want to see that they get what is best for them."

# KATIE GATES



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

Sometimes in life you don't know what you're waiting for until you arrive there. That certainly seems to have been the case for Katie Gates, a nurse for St. Peter's Health in their urology clinic.

Gates admitted that she had always had an interest in science and the human body but had never really considered nursing for a profession. Initially, she explained that she was looking for a career that had "flexibility and good job security and where I knew I could work anywhere."

After realizing that nursing may fulfill all those requirements, Gates decided to pursue it by enrolling in the nursing program at Montana Tech in Butte.

"I really didn't have much background in nursing," explained Gates. "I don't have any family members who are nurses, so I really didn't realize the full depth of what it means

until I became more experienced.

Now 18 years as a nurse later, Gates can't imagine doing anything else.

"As I went along, I realized just how rewarding it is as a career and that it really made sense for me," said Gates. "It fits me really well."

Since joining the St. Peter's Health team, Gates has worked in cardiology, pulmonology and the intensive care unit prior to landing in her current position at the urology clinic.

"It's a very interesting specialty where I get to do a lot of hands-on care," said Gates. "I'm very passionate about helping people manage their medical conditions and have a better quality of life."

While Gates admitted that being a good nurse requires empathy and a strong work ethic, at the heart of the job is learning how

to see patients for the people they are rather than as a set of symptoms listed on a chart.

"Seeing every patient as an individual no matter what their medical condition is and treating them with compassion and dignity no matter what the situation is or what's going on around us," said Gates.

While Gates is passionate about patient care, one of the things that has proved the most rewarding for her personally as a nurse is having the opportunity to educate her patients so they can make confident and informed decisions.

"A lot of times I get to spend more time with the patient than the doctor does so it's a great opportunity to be able to educate them," explained Gates. "The patient can be more in control of their decisions and outcomes if I can give them a better understanding of what is going on with their body."

"Ultimately they're the ones that have to make their own decisions and experience the consequences, so my biggest focus is always making sure people understand what's happening to them and what the doctor's plan of care is," added Gates.

Just as Gates strives to educate her patients, she also hopes to educate others – like herself – who haven't fully considered all the joy and meaning the nursing profession can offer.

"Nursing is a great profession, and not only what we get to do, but how many different areas and avenues you can take with the career," said Gates.

"My best advice would be to just be committed to learning," continued Gates. "Self-study, chase all the knowledge you can because that brings good experience and opens doors for different opportunities."



# GRACE STEFANO

Sometimes laying the groundwork for purposeful work is an effort started by those who came before us.

For Grace Stefano, it was her late grandmother who first inspired her to become a nurse.

"I've always wanted to work in healthcare of some sort, and my grandma was a nurse, so it was kind of always on my radar," said Stefano.

While Stefano's grandmother unfortunately passed when she was little, she shared that she treasures still having her nursing cap and LPN license to remember her by.

As Stefano grew up, that nagging feeling in the back of her mind to follow in her grandmother's footsteps never left her.

"I just enjoy helping people," said Stefano. "I want to be there for people and help them whether it's their best day or their worst day, so nursing felt like a good career to be able to do that."

In May 2020, Stefano graduated from nursing school at Montana Tech and officially launched into a career dedicated to helping people. Currently, she works at Benefis Helena Specialty Center, which opened in early 2024.

"People have been very excited to have another healthcare facility and so seeing their reactions each time they come in and see the building is really cool," said Stefano.

While she initially started out



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

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Grace Stefano

in their neurology department at Benefis, Stefano recently transitioned into family medicine.

"I just wanted to do something different," said Stefano. "It's kind of nice because some of my patients from neurology I'm now working for their primary care provider, so I'll get to see them on the other side of it and not just in the neurology world."

From scheduling and getting patients checked in to answering questions and completing insurance authorizations, there is never a shortage of tasks to complete.

For Stefano, the key to managing it all is harnessing the virtue of patience.

"Whether it's a crazy workday, you've got to be patient with yourself, you've got to be patient with the environment," said Stefano. "You've got to be able to multitask but still keep a level head."

The fact that Stefano started nursing during the COVID-19 pandemic, also forced her to more quickly learn the importance of meeting patients with understanding and an open mind.

"What I've learned about

healthcare in general is that everyone around you is going through something, and you may not know what that is, so treating each person you meet with a blank slate and kindness is so huge," shared Stefano.

From cherishing her grandmother's nursing cap as a young girl to now treating patients in one of Helena's newest healthcare facilities, Stefano's nursing journey has been an inspired one.

"I think the most rewarding part is when I've fought for something on my patient's behalf," said

Stefano. "Whether it is like when I was working in the hospitals to get a patient back to baseline or now in my outpatient job where I might have to go back and forth with insurance to get a medication approved or get a patient referred to a larger facility."

"It's not always easy and sometimes it's a pretty big fight," continued Stefano. "When I get that thanks from my patient, that just makes it all worth it."

"At the end of the day everything I'm doing, I'm doing for my patients," said Stefano.



# HEATHER GREIL

In the words of British writer C. S. Lewis, “You are never too old to set a new goal or to dream a new dream.”

For Heather Greil, a nurse at St. Peter’s Health Dialysis Unit, those words are a powerful reminder that age is just a number, and you can always pursue new aspirations and goals, no matter your age or circumstances.

A mother of three, Greil started out her professional career working as a cosmetologist. The flexibility of that job allowed her to set her own hours and spend the quality time she craved with her family.

When she reached her mid-40s, however, Greil began longing for something more for herself.

“I knew I wanted to go back to college, and I wanted to further my own personal growth,” said Greil.

Ironically, it was the experience of caring for her mother-in-law in her final days following an illness that was the tipping point to spur her on and pursue a new profession – nursing.

“At a time when some people are contemplating their retirement years or winding down their career, Heather decided to make a big change by deciding to become a nurse,” said Jim Greil, Heather’s husband.

Upon her acceptance into the nursing program at Helena College, Greil set a new precedent for herself and her family.

“Nobody else in my family is a nurse and actually I am the first-generation graduate in my family,” shared Greil. “My parents, grandparents, siblings...none of them went to college so it was kind of this daunting prospect for me to switch gears and figure out how to go to college.”

To ensure her success in school, Greil admitted that it required immense support and aid from her family and especially her husband.

“It was my family being supportive, picking up some different roles, taking on the hard work of home stuff so that I could spend all my time basically studying and being a college student,” shared Greil.

Before Greil had even graduated from Helena College, she had already lined up a position on the medical floor at St. Peter’s Health. While working at the hospital, Greil continued her education online through Montana State University Billing to get her bachelor’s degree.

Throughout her nearly six years as



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

nurse, Greil has gained experience working on medical floors, in operating rooms, and most recently, in the new dialysis unit at St. Peter’s.

Her work in the dialysis unit involves aiding patients with end stage renal disease, cancer, or other illnesses impacting their kidneys. Multiple times a week, Greil’s patients come in to get hooked up to a machine that filters their blood for them to keep them healthy while awaiting possible transplants.

“I’m just a piece of the puzzle because it’s a whole lot of people working together for these patients,” said Greil.

“We are just basically a team that is there for their support to help them help

themselves,” continued Greil. “We have this amazing unit at St. Peter’s Health that creates a positive environment for patients.”

While Greil found the profession she was meant for in nursing, she found a home in her current role in the dialysis unit.

“I love the fact that I do see my patients multiple times a week because you definitely end up naturally falling into a relationship with them,” said Greil.

“I love the idea of taking care of a person from a holistic view, meaning mind, body spirit,” added Greil. “It’s all connected and if one of those is imbalanced that it’s all going to be imbalanced

Greil’s path to becoming a nurse may have been a bit more winding than it was for others, but in the end, she found a profession and a passion that was always meant to be.

“I just haven’t even looked back,” said Greil. “It’s just been this amazing journey.”

“No matter what your age, what your background you can do it,” shared Greil on her advice for future nurses. “It’s still hard and it’s a lot of work but you can do it and the fulfillment and the enjoyment that you’re going to get from all the things you accomplish are totally going to make all that work worthwhile and worth it in the end.”



# KENNEDI FERRITER

It is the question most people recall being asked at some point while growing up:

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

For Kennedy Ferriter, a nurse on the surgery floor at Benefis Helena Specialty Center, she knew her answer to that question from an early age.

She wanted to be a nurse.

“When I was little and would go to the doctor’s office, I always enjoyed my nurses,” recalled Ferriter. “I think that honestly is what made me go, ‘oh my gosh, their job looks fun.’”

A Butte native, Ferriter went straight into nursing school at Montana Tech after graduating from high school. While she was still in school Ferriter had the opportunity to work on the surgery floor at St. James Hospital in Butte. It was an experience that had an immediate and lasting impact on her.

Upon earning her nursing degree, Ferriter’s first real nursing job was working on an oncology surgical floor in Kalispell. Later, a desire to be closer to family, brought Ferriter to Helena where she was offered her current position on the surgical floor at Benefis.

It seems that no matter where she’s lived or worked, fate has kept pushing Ferriter towards the care of surgical patients.

“Honestly I’ve worked in surgery my whole nursing career and it’s just kind of fallen in my lap, so I guess that’s my calling because I really like it,” said Ferriter.

In her three years as a nurse Ferriter has worked to hone her skills and serve as a source of guidance and support for her patients through the simple act of listening.

“It’s really important to listen to the patient and use my nursing judgement to see if they’re feeling anxious and feel them out a little,” said Ferriter. “Every patient has their specific needs, and I think it’s important to advocate for the patients to make sure they’re getting the care that aligns with what they want.”

As a nurse in a surgery center, Ferriter sees patients come in every day with injuries impacting their daily life. The transformation from when they first walk in the door to when they leave, is where Ferriter draws her greatest joy.

“Every day is rewarding,” said Ferriter. “When you’re having surgery, obviously there’s something wrong with the patient, and they get to leave the building knowing that they’re probably going to be feeling better after they recover from the surgery itself.”

That comfort Ferriter strives to deliver to



THOM BRIDGE, INDEPENDENT RECORD

**“It’s really important to listen to the patient and use my nursing judgement to see if they’re feeling anxious and feel them out a little. Every patient has their specific needs, and I think it’s important to advocate for the patients to make sure they’re getting the care that aligns with what they want.”**

Kennedi Ferriter

her patients in turn fosters greater confidence in the care they receive.

“Every time a patient is in the hospital or having surgery, they’re in a really vulnerable situation so it’s rewarding to be able to offer them care that can help them feel comforted,” said Ferriter.

“Everyone at some point is going to need a nurse in their life so it’s important that they trust us,” added Ferriter.

It isn’t only patients that Ferriter has had an impact on but also her fellow nurses and co-workers.

One of Ferriter’s co-workers, who nominated her as one of Helena’s top nurses this year, reiterated her total dedication to the nursing profession.

“What stands out is how Kennedy exemplifies what it means to be an outstanding nurse – not just through her skill but

through her kindness and dedication,” said the co-worker. “She deserves this recognition for the impact she has on our patients on a daily basis.”

From the little girl who once looked up in admiration to the nurses in her doctor’s office to becoming a full-fledged nurse herself, it seems that Ferriter always had an intuition about the path she was meant to be on.

“I just kind of went for it – nursing – right out of high school, and ever since, it’s been awesome and I have no regrets,” said Ferriter. “I’ve really enjoyed the profession.”

Her words of advice for any aspiring nurses?

“Do it!” said Ferriter. “There are so many job opportunities and so many different fields in the nursing profession.”

“It’s just a really good profession, it’s rewarding, and there’s a lot of room for growth,” added Ferriter.



# How caregivers work in concert with doctors

**M**anaging an illness, disease or injury often requires a collaborative effort that involves a number of medical professionals, such as doctors and nurses. The support and assistance of family caregivers also is essential when managing illness. In fact, family members can play important roles when they work closely with medical professionals in helpful ways.

How can family caregivers assist doctors and nurses as their loved ones receive medical care? And what can medical professionals do to ensure caregivers are afforded the respect they deserve? There are many steps each can take.

## ■ **Become a communicator.**

Communication is key in a doctor-caregiver relationship. Doctors may strive for extreme focus on the patients' care, but they also can welcome input from family members who may have information that can help doctors work more effectively. Caregivers should not be afraid to speak up out of fear that their insight will be dismissed.

■ **Keep communications concise.** In modern medical settings, health care professionals see many, many patients over the course of a day. This is likely followed by paperwork and then email or phone correspondence follow-up. Caregivers should realize that doctors and nurses are busy professionals and aspire to keep their communications concise.

■ **Be patient.** According to the American Association for Physician Leadership and a 2018 survey by the Physicians Foundation, doctors work 51 hours a week and see 20 patients per day on average. Unless there is an extreme medical emergency, family caregivers should not expect an immediate follow-up to a concern or question following a visit. However, most doctors offer a call or patient portal message when time allows.

■ **Aim for assertive, not aggressive, interaction.** A family caregiver is often a patient's most diligent advocate. But being too aggressive when interacting with nurses and doctors might lead the care team to view a caregiver as an adversary rather than an ally, advises AARP. Instead, it is best for caregivers to come across as informed, pleasant and respectful partners.

■ **Do your research.** It is alright for a caregiver to delve deeper into information about a patient's condition so they can be as informed as possible. Also, he or she should feel free to reiterate care directions back to the medical staff to make sure that everything is understood and can be followed according to the plan established by the doctor.

■ **Prepare for appointments.** During medical appointments, patients have the undivided attention of their doctors. This is the best time to ask questions, bring up concerns and provide follow-up about what is going on at home. Caregivers and patients can come ready with a list of items that have been jotted down on paper or itemized on a smartphone.

Medical staff and family caregivers must develop relationships built on communication and respect to provide the best level of care to patients.





# THE ROLE OF CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANTS

The nursing profession is vast and attracts an array of talented people. A career as a nursing assistant can be a rewarding path for those who want to get into the profession.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, health care jobs are expected to grow by 13 percent between 2021 and 2031, making a nursing career an attractive option.

## What is a nursing assistant?

According to Premier Nursing Academy, a certified nursing assistant is an entry-level step into the medical field. A CNA is not a nurse, but these individuals will

work very closely under the supervision of licensed nursing staff, physicians and other health care providers.

## Why become a CNA?

Many people are drawn to becoming a CNA because the job presents a start in a career in health care. While some are content to remain CNAs for the duration of their careers, other CNAs use the position as a way to get on-the-job experience that can help them decide if they want to go further in the field of nursing. CNA certification does not require extensive education. On average, it takes between four to 10 weeks to complete the necessary

coursework to become a certified nursing assistant.

## Average day for a CNA

According to Indeed, a CNA can expect to perform these tasks on any given day.

- Administer medications to patients.
- Assist patients with activities of daily living.
- Bathe and dress patients.
- Check vital signs.
- Serve meals and help patients eat.
- Watch for changes in patients' behaviors or worsening conditions.
- Reposition bedridden patients.
- CNAs work in many different settings,

including at hospitals or in residential nursing homes.

## Salary and outlook

The BLS estimates that demand for certified nursing assistants will increase by 5 percent by 2031. Interested parties can expect to earn a median annual wage of \$30,290. Should one want to go on to becoming a registered nurse, he or she can expect a salary of \$77,600.

Certified nursing assistants play important roles in the medical field. CNAs hone their skills in facilities and can choose to stay put or go on to more advanced nursing careers.



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