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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 Montana Standard and statewide sponsor Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana.

Bios written by Lacey Middlestead and Photographed by Joseph Scheller



We are proud of our Montana Tech nursing alumni who make an impact in Butte, across Montana, and around the world.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!

Also, thank you to our Montana Tech nursing faculty Anni Anderson, Maureen Brophy, Janet Coe, Kristin Cullen, Charie Faught, Kara Howard, Shelby Jennings, Nikole Kelly, Danette Melvin, Olunike Blessing Olofinbiyi, Tommie Perusich, Stacy Phillips, Angela Poole, Laurie Noel, Kathy Roth, Seana Ralph, and Lindsey Solomon, who are dedicated to educating and improving healthcare.



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DANIELLE JARVIS TINSLEY

It is said that only a life lived in service to others is worth living.

For Danielle Tinsley, a primary care nurse practitioner at Butte Native Wellness Center, her call to serve others began from an early age.

At just 16 years old, Tinsley decided to try out a new job and applied for a nursing assistant position at a nursing home not far from where she lived.

"I really loved that," said Tinsley. "I took care of the Alzheimer's unit and loved taking care of the elderly."

After graduating high school, the Butte native enlisted in the U.S. Navy with hopes of saving money to later go to college. Tinsley served six years on active duty as a hospital corpsman, which is essentially a medic in the military.

"So throughout that I always had my toes, so to speak, in healthcare," said Tinsley.

She shared that the navy provided extensive on-the-job training on everything from medication administration to IV therapy. The experience left her inspired to pursue the work further.

"With all of the care, responsibility, and training that really made me think, if I can do this, this is what a nurse really does, so that made me want to go get my nursing degree," said Tinsley.

After being released from active duty, Tinsley began working towards her nursing degree. During that time, she remained in the Navy Reserves and was deployed twice during Operation Enduring Freedom to both Germany and Afghanistan before graduating in 2011.

Upon returning home from Afghanistan, Tinsley decided to go back to school to further her education and earn her nurse practitioner degree. In 2018 she graduated from Walden University in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

After 24 years as a Navy nurse, Tinsley left the Navy to continue serving as a nurse in her hometown.

Tinsley has worked as a family planning provider at the Butte Health Department and most recently took on a position as the adult-geriatric primary care nurse practitioner for the Butte Native Wellness Center.

"I really felt strongly about healthcare, and I really believe in this clinic and the opportunity opened up and so I applied," shared Tinsley.



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD

Danielle Tinsley stands for a portrait outside of the Butte Native Wellness Center on Tuesday, April 15, 2025.

As an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, Tinsley is personally invested in the mission of the clinic to provide a welcoming space where native people have access to outpatient health services in a culturally relevant setting.

For Tinsley one of the most rewarding parts of her work is seeing her patient's health conditions improve. On particularly memorable patient encounter was when she helped bring a diabetic patient's

A1C of 12.5 down to a 6.8 by utilizing modern technology with a continuous glucose monitor.

Throughout the more than two decades Tinsley has served as a nurse she has come to learn that empathy and compassion are key and that every patient deserves her respect.

"We're all humans and we all have our own story and so we must not judge," said Tinsley.



JORDAN RUDIO

For many, just the thought of an emergency room invokes feelings of fear and anxiety. It is a place where most are just focused on surviving.

But for Jordan Rudio, an emergency room nurse at St. James Hospital in Butte, she doesn't just survive in such a stressful environment, she thrives in it.

"I genuinely really like the emergency room," said Rudio. "I like the fast paced, high intensity environment."

Growing up, Rudio shared that there were signs from an early age that nursing lay in her future.

"I just always had a very high interest in science and learning about the human body," said Rudio. "I've always been keen to take care of people, so I have always wanted to do that since I was little."

Rudio's aunt, also a nurse, additionally served as a role model for her growing up and a clear example of what she aspired to someday become.

Prior to becoming a nurse, Rudio spent seven years as a CNA before enrolling in the

nursing program at Montana Tech. While attending nursing school, Rudio worked as a nurse technician in the ER at St. James. That experience assured her that she was making the right career decision.

"I kind of got my foot in the door with some experience in the hospital before I officially went into nursing," said Rudio. "That just kind of confirmed my decision that I wanted to do it."

While she only officially became a nurse three years ago, Rudio has found a real home and passion for working in the ER environment.

"I work well in that so it's kind of an area that I think that I will probably stick to for my career," added Rudio. "It's definitely stressful but I work with a really great team so that helps immensely."

While Rudio remains calm and level-headed while in the ER, the task in front of her every day is to treat people who feel the exact opposite.

"People get anxious right away so it's just a lot of reassurance around 'you're in

a safe place,' 'you can trust that everyone around here knows what they're doing,' and 'we're here to take care of you,'" explained Rudio.

Rudio stressed that her ability to work in the ER is very dependent on whether she allows for sufficient self-care time outside of work. Whether it's getting her nails done, watching television, or going hiking outside with her dog, giving herself at least one day a week to decompress is crucial.

"Nursing is a highly responsible job and it's very high stress, so you have to figure out how to take care of yourself outside of that job," said Rudio. "It can be very grueling on people if they don't allow that for themselves."

While for now, Rudio is content with her current role in the ER, she did share that her future aspirations include pursuing becoming a flight nurse – a job that kicks the intensity level up another notch yet. And for Rudio, that seems to be the allure.

"I just like helping people in very high stress situations," said Rudio. "I really like



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD
Jordan Rudio stands for a portrait at St. James Hospital on Tuesday, April 15, 2025.

helping people and making a difference in their day – even if it's in the smallest way."



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SARA WELDON

It was American poet, Maya Angelo, who once said, “Try to be a rainbow in someone’s cloud.”

Sara Weldon, a nurse at Intermountain Health in Butte, grew up watching her mom be a rainbow for her patients through her work as a nurse. Those observations struck something in Weldon from an early age and set her on a path that would become her future.

“Just seeing the help that she gave and the people being so grateful for it just kind of stuck with me,” said Weldon.

When Weldon later decided to follow in her mother’s footsteps and become a nurse herself, she couldn’t have made her mother happier.

“She was excited for it,” said Weldon of her mother’s reaction. “She encouraged it, but she did warn that there will be bad times and good times and just set me up for success.”

The Butte native later graduated from the nursing program at Montana Tech and began her career being a rainbow for her patients in the Butte community.

In her current role, Weldon works at Intermountain Health in internal medicine. Weldon explained that her role often involves a lot of triage in the clinic. If a patient calls with problems, Weldon takes those calls and tries to answer their questions and get them the help they need. She also does injections, inserts catheters, and handles other direct patient care tasks as needed.

In her 10 years as a nurse, Weldon has come to learn that listening is one of the most key components of nursing.

“Just being that ear for the patients to get to talk to and get their worries and frustrations out before the provider comes,” said Weldon. “I don’t know how many times I’ve been told, ‘thank you’ for listening.”

“Even if there’s no advice given out, just for patients to be able to get their thoughts out is important,” added Weldon.

But just as her mother warned, not every day is filled with thank yous and positive outcomes.

“It’s not always rewarding,” shared Weldon. “You can’t fix everything, which I did know going into it, but you do go home a lot of times frustrated with the healthcare system and not being able to fix problems or know exactly what is wrong with patients and taking on their frustrations and feelings.”

At the end of those hard days, Weldon



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD

Sara Weldon stands for a portrait on Friday, April 11, 2025 outside of St. James Hospital in Butte.

knows she must move past it and remember that tomorrow is a new day and with that comes new patients.

“A lot of times you just have to take it for what it is and know that you tried your best and continue on because there will be another person that needs you,” said Weldon.

While she has experienced hard and challenging moments, Weldon has experienced true joys in her work too.

“Seeing patients who do get better and

seeing them light up and thank you and your provider and tell you how great you are as a team is the most rewarding part,” shared Weldon.

Through all its ups and downs, Weldon is grateful for the career she has built and the impact she’s made in her community.

Her words of advice for students aspiring to also go into nursing?

“Be prepared for the unknown,” said Weldon.



ANDREA FORSBERG



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD

Andrea Forsberg stands for a portrait on Friday, April 11, 2025 outside of the Community Nursing Home of Anaconda.

While most children ponder what they will be when they grow up and bounce from one idea to the next, Andrea Forsberg was unwavering in her dream career. Ever since she was in 2nd grade, she knew she wanted to be a nurse.

"My mom and dad are nurses, and I grew up going to work with my parents," shared Forsberg.

While her father worked as a nurse anesthetist, her mother primarily worked

in a nursing home. The experience of accompanying her mother to work further encouraged her nursing ambitions and the area of nursing she wanted to be in.

"I really fell in love with the geriatric populations when I was a teenager and I've been that way ever since," said Forsberg.

Today, Forsberg serves as the administrator and assistant director of nursing at the Community Nursing Home in Anaconda, Montana.

Forsberg shared that while the facility itself is very small, the intimate setting allows for more detailed attention to the residents.

"You have that availability to be more present and you become like one big family," said Forsberg.

"I think the most rewarding part of my work is probably the relationships I build with my residents and their families," added Forsberg.

In her 21 years as a nurse, one of the most important things she has learned is the simple act of treating others the way she would want to be treated.

"You really need to treat them (residents) as people and with respect and not as just another number out there," said Forsberg. "I think it's important that they feel like they're being heard and respected and that their personal preferences are taken into consideration."

"Part of being a good nurse is that you have to be compassionate in the care that

you give," she added. "Especially with this population that's something that your heart has to be in, and as much as you give to, you get just as much back in return."

While she loves what she does, Forsberg acknowledges that nursing is a challenging field that needs more people in it.

"I think that it's really important nowadays to try to inspire the younger generation to go into this field," said Forsberg. "Since COVID happened, a lot of negativity has been put on the nursing profession itself."

For current nurses and those considering going into the field, Forsberg's advice is simple.

"Do not be afraid to ask questions, learn from each other, always encourage each other, and most importantly, be mindful of self-care," said Forsberg. "Nursing is a profession for those who love to give to others, but you cannot fully devote yourself to caring for others if you don't take care of yourself too."

Community Hospital of Anaconda is grateful for all the hardworking and dedicated Nursing Professionals who help make patients' lives better every day. We appreciate your service, sacrifice and commitment to quality patient care.

A special congratulations
to our own

Andrea Forsberg

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REBECCA ROMINE

Coming from a family of accountants, it would have seemed like Rebecca Romine's future was already decided for her. But she had other plans in mind.

"I wanted to do something different than how I was raised," said Romine. "I wanted to do something that helps people feel better and be better."

In considering her other options, the Butte native realized that nursing would be the best fit.

"It was the human element that attracted me to nursing versus the dry element of accounting," said Romine.

After completing her bachelor's and doctorate degrees in nursing practice at Montana State University in Bozeman, Romine launched right into serving patients.

Romine noted that having graduated in 2020 at the height of the COVID 19 pandemic, she was thrust into an especially challenging time in the healthcare field. Rather than let the unique circumstances shake her, Romine chose to allow those challenges to strengthen her resolve as a nurse.

"It certainly molded and shaped who I am," shared Romine. "Losing patients and going through the fear that people feel is certainly something that has helped me appreciate people and what that fear means, whether that's fear over COVID or a cancer diagnosis or just the fear of the unknown."

Today, Romine is back in her hometown serving the Butte community as a family nurse practitioner at Southwest Montana Community Health Center. In her 10 years as a nurse, Romine has come to learn that empathy and compassion are at the heart of any nursing position.

"The human quality of emotions and consolation, empathy and compassion, and being able to relate to people in that moment and be there for them is such a rewarding experience," said Romine.

But in a role that has high burn out rates, she stressed the additional importance of being able to preserve oneself along the way.

"You have to have the ability to not take that personal responsibility in the sense that you own that problem," explained Romine. "You have to allow that to go with the patient so you can provide that level of empathy and compassion with the next patient."



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD

Rebecca Romine stands for a portrait on Friday, April 11, 2025 outside of the Southwest Montana Community Health Center.

"You have to have the ability to refresh yourself and come to peace with the fact that that is their path to walk," added Romine. "This life is hard, and each person is given their own trials and tribulations."

While she may have broken the family tradition of working with numbers as an accountant Romine has never looked back on her decision to become a nurse.

"It feels pretty joyful and exciting to know that I've had the opportunity and been able to serve the community and that

people value and appreciate that service," said Romine on being selected as a top nurse in Butte.

"I just really enjoy helping people and having the opportunity to fix something for someone or make it better," said Romine. "To be that person every day that helps someone in the midst of difficulty or makes their day or is that bright spot in the middle of despair is a pretty amazing opportunity and privilege as a human being."



SECILY DAVIS



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD

Secily Davis stands for a portrait on Thursday, April 17, 2025 outside of the Southwest Montana Community Health Center.

It has been said that nurses are the very heart and heartbeat of the medical system.

For the past 26 years, Secily Davis has been one of those beating hearts for the Butte community.

"I just really like to hopefully make someone's day better and help them out," said Davis.

A nurse for 45 years – 26 years of which have been spent working at Southwest Montana Community Health Center in Butte, Davis observed early on the kind of impact nurses have on their patients.

As a young child Davis recalled being snuck into the ICU of a hospital by nurses to visit her grandfather who was being treated for throat and mouth cancer. At age nine, she personally experienced the care of nurses while in the hospital having her appendix removed. While recovering, Davis had the opportunity to meet a 14-year-old girl also being treated for a recently removed kidney.

Looking back, Davis shared that it seemed like nursing was the path she was always meant to be on.

"I was born to be one," said Davis. "I have just always liked helping people and animals and stuff like that. I just have a huge heart for it."

Before attending nursing school, Davis honed her skills by caring for those in need both as a hospital candy striper and volunteering in a local nursing home. She later graduated from a vocational nursing program in Butte and launched a career that would span over four decades.

Davis worked on the medical floor at St. James Hospital in Butte and for a local surgical center before eventually landing in her current position with Southwest Montana Community Health Center.

Today, Davis' role involves treating a variety of patients for services including primary care, dental, behavioral health, and substance abuse.

"I've worked with providers, and we've

always been involved with a lot of mental health and addiction and low income, but we also treat everyone," shared Davis.

"That's the benefit of working here...I've always gotten to help somebody at least once or twice a day and get them through whatever they're going through," added Davis. "A lot of times I feel I get more from the job than I give."

Throughout her years as a nurse, one of the biggest lessons Davis has learned is to treat every patient with respect and honesty.

"When you look at somebody without judgment and you just talk to them, they just are ok and melt and they tell you everything," said Davis. "They just are so trusting after that."

"To be trusted that much by someone is pretty awesome," added Davis.

Davis explained that she especially learned the power of earning a patient's trust while previously working for a program known as "Homeward Bound." Of-

fered through the community health center, the program provided transitional housing and other support services for homeless individuals and families.

Rather than criticizing the individuals served by Homeward Bound for their past life choices or lack of follow-through with medications and appointments, Davis focused on meeting the patients where they were in that moment and helping them move forward.

"We need to live more in the now instead of the future or the past," said Davis. "I think we have better outcomes that way."

After more than four decades of serving others, Davis shows no signs or desire to slow down.

"Someday," answered Davis chuckling when asked if she had any plans for retirement. "It's not far ahead if I wanted but I just enjoy my job. I love what I do."

"It's amazing what you can do if you have that passion to help your community," added Davis.



Honoring all our wonderful nurses at SWMTCHC in Butte, Dillon and Anaconda.

Thank you for your dedication and compassion in caring for our communities.

A special congratulations to our own Rebecca Romine and Secily Davis!



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SHANE JENSON

For many chronic pain is a part of life, but thanks to the efforts of Shane Jenson, a nurse practitioner at Montana Advanced Pain and Spine in Butte, his patients' suffering is only optional.

A nurse for 31 years, Jenson admitted that if it wasn't for his aunt's encouragement, he never would have considered a profession in nursing. His aunt was working as a nurse in a nursing home and encouraged him to take on a job as a nursing assistant at the same facility.

"I needed health insurance," said Jenson on why he started working at the nursing home. "At that time in the 1990s it was very common for most healthcare jobs to provide good health insurance."

But after three or four years of working as a nursing assistant, Jenson realized that he was no longer in the position simply for the insurance.

"I just really enjoyed working with the residents," said Jenson. "I think I learned a lot. A lot of them would share their wisdom with me and it just kind of inspired me to keep going."

Originally from North Dakota, Jenson completed his undergraduate work at the University of

North Dakota in Grand Forks, North Dakota and his graduate work to become a nurse practitioner at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, California.

Since 2011, Jenson has done extensive work in pain management, including hospice and palliative care and chronic non-terminal pain management, including interventional pain management.

"I just like helping people who are suffering," said Jenson. "It's very rewarding when you can make a difference in their comfort level."

"That's something that really just bothers people," said Jenson of his patients' pain. "Pain is not comfortable. It causes you to function less, to work less, it causes you to have mental illness like depression and anxiety and so treating pain is actually very rewarding."

In his current role at Montana Advanced Pain and Spine, Jenson works with patients who come in for back and joint pain, migraines, occipital issues, nerve blocks, and countless other kinds of pain issues.

The key to Jenson being able to uncover the root of their pain and provide the greatest care is in the simple acts of



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD

Shane Jenson stands for a portrait outside of Montana Advanced Pain and Spine on Wednesday, April 16, 2025.

listening and loving his patients.

"You can be as intelligent and academically proficient as you want, but you really don't go places unless you're interested in what you're doing," said Jenson. "If you're interested in what you're doing, patients pick up on that and they will tell you more. They'll be honest with you which means you'll get to the bottom of their problems a lot easier."

One especially memorable experience for Jenson was with one of his very first patients in Butte. As a result of her struggling with painful neuropathy, Jenson shared that they ended up implanting a

spinal cord stimulator.

"It changed her life," shared Jenson. "The pain is all gone and she can function again on a daily basis."

But it is what she said to Jenson afterwards that left the biggest impact.

Shortly after the procedure the patient celebrated her birthday. But unlike the ones before it, she actually had a reason to celebrate.

"I have not had a birthday that I have not wished that my next birthday would not come in a long time," the patient told Jenson. "This year I was able to enjoy my birthday, and I don't think that I wish my

next one wouldn't come."

"It's very heartbreaking to hear but it's also very humbling and very honoring to hear that," said Jenson.

After more than three decades in healthcare, Jenson feels grateful for the patient lives he has been able to improve and is content in the niche he has found for himself.

"I would say that pain management is where I'm staying at this point," said Jenson. "I've been doing this a long time now and I really enjoy it, so I don't see going anywhere else."

JOSETTE UELAND

English nature writer, Izaak Walton, famously said, “Good company in a journey makes the way seem shorter.”

For the past 20 years, Josette Ueland, a nurse practitioner at St. James Cancer Center in Butte, has served as a companion for patients undertaking some of the most challenging journeys of their life.

“I really wanted to make a difference in life,” said Ueland on why she became a nurse. “I wanted to be part of a bigger picture on caring for patients.”

“Whether it be a medical diagnosis or if it was just being there for them and just being a friend throughout the whole process, I was just hoping to always make a difference in people’s world,” added Ueland.

Ueland attended Arizona State University in the beginning of her nursing career and finished at Montana Tech. She later pursued becoming a nurse practitioner at Gonzaga University.

Ueland shared that she has spent her medical career working in both an urgent care setting and an internal medicine clinic. But when a position came up with Dr. Massouh at St. James, she knew she couldn’t pass the opportunity up.

“I think the world of him, and I knew that I wanted to get into oncology and hematology just because I knew that that knowledge base was so diverse,” said Ueland.

At the heart of it, Ueland’s current role is to be there for her patients and their families and caregivers to give as much support as possible.

“I’m trying to make a quality of life and well-being for my patients,” said Ueland. “It’s a tough disease that they’re facing and it’s a very challenging disease process.”

“It’s all about physical and emotional comfort for them for sure in the cancer center because my people are dying to live, essentially,” added Ueland.

Ueland explained that all the care given at St. James employs a patient centered approach with a focus on respect and dignity.

“Just to make sure that they feel heard and that they’re not alone in this journey,” said Ueland.

While many nurses understandably strive to protect their personal well-being by leaving the lives and challenges of their patients at work at the end of the day, Ueland can’t help but carry each of her patients along with her.

“They come home with me; they become kind of family, so you worry about them even after hours and through the weekend and



Josette Ueland stands for a portrait at St. James Hospital on Tuesday, April 15, 2025.

JOSEPH SCHELLER/
THE MONTANA
STANDARD

you’re just wondering how they’re doing,” said Ueland.

Throughout her years as a nurse, Ueland has personally witnessed her fair share of sad stories. No matter the ending though, Ueland is grateful for the lessons gained by each patient encounter.

“Seeing people have quality care is the most rewarding part – even if it is at the end of their life – that they went out with dignity and respect,” said Ueland.

“There’s also the rewards of people being cancer survivors,” added Ueland. “I love to see them when they come back for their check ups and test and they’re doing good, and they are cancer survivors.”

What Ueland said she has come to learn most through being a nurse is that there are more similarities amongst people than differences.

“We are all the same,” said Ueland. “It doesn’t matter what status you’re in financially, what gender you are, what color you are – we’re all human when it comes to the end of the day, and we all have the same emotional strife and concerns in life. We know ideally, we just want to live right and have a good life.”

For Ueland, it is the patients rather than fellow nurses like herself that she feels deserves the most recognition and admiration.

“They’re the warriors and the heroes of the story; we’re just the support,” said Ueland.

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TONY BALLENSKY

Sometimes it is the smallest act of kindness that can have a ripple effect of influence on those around you.

For Tony Ballensky, a nurse practitioner at Rocky Mountain Clinic in Butte, it was watching his grandmother care for patients as a nurse in a nursing home that inspired his future path in life.

"She would talk about her residents and share stories about them with me," said Ballensky.

He shared that there were a few nights where he was even able to accompany his grandmother to work to shadow her and see caring nature at work.

"They are kind of in that end-of-life stage and it was about making things comfortable for them and giving them the best experience that she could," said Ballensky.

The combination of discussing his grandmother's work and watching her in action planted a seed of curiosity in Ballensky to help people and give them a better quality of life.

"I really wanted to do something in medicine, and it just seemed like a good fit for me, so I ended up going into nursing," said Ballensky.

The Butte native went on to pursue his nursing education outside Montana – first attending West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia for his undergraduate education and later South University in Savannah, Georgia where he obtained his degree as a family nurse practitioner.

Ballensky eventually returned to Montana, however, to serve the people of his hometown community.

Throughout his career, Ballensky has garnered a wide range of experience, particularly in ICU settings.

"I've worked pretty much every ICU you can think of," shared Ballensky.

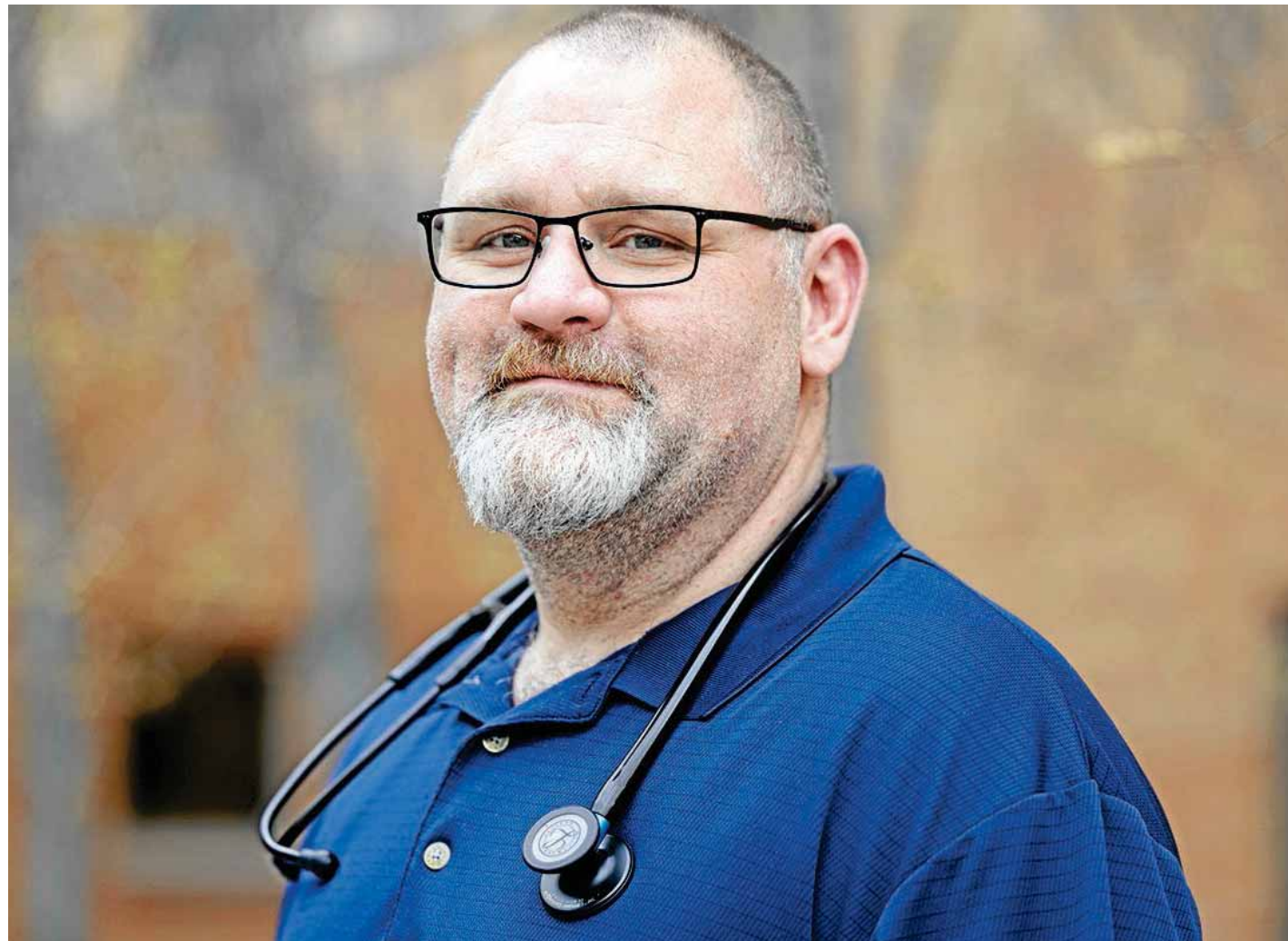
From trauma, cardiac, and neuro ICUs to working as the house supervisor at St. James Hospital in Butte in their ICU for a while, Ballensky has worked diligently to

"I've kind of had a full spectrum of nursing," said Ballensky.

Currently, Ballensky works as a nurse practitioner at Rocky Mountain Clinic in Butte where he works in internal medicine and wound care.

"I like the challenge that internal medicine provides," said Ballensky.

Recently, Ballensky stepped into a management role the Regional Director for Ad-



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD

Tony Ballensky stands for a portrait on Friday, April 11, 2025 outside of St. James Hospital in Butte.

vanced Practice Providers.

"I'm able to go see how other practitioners are trying to run their show and give them tips and help out in anyway I can," said Ballensky.

In his 16 years as a nurse, Ballensky has come to learn that patience is key when treating patients.

"Nobody's ever at their best when they're sick so having the patience to see them through it and listen to their concerns is probably the most important thing that you can do," explained Ballensky.

Along with practicing patience, Ballensky shared that learning not to "judge a book by its cover" is also important as a nurse.

"You really do not know what's going on in people's lives," said Ballensky. "They may look healthy and be perfectly presentable but on the back end they're fighting something incurable or something that they chronically have to deal with."

Looking back on his career and the different nursing roles he has had the opportunity to fill, Ballensky is simply grateful for being able to directly impact patient lives and hopefully leave them better off than they were before.

"It's getting people through that tough time," said Ballensky. "Helping people live functionally with disease is probably my favorite thing."



ALEX HAMM

Winston Churchill, statesman and former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, once said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

For Alex Hamm, it was on the journey he took to becoming nursing that he found a way to make a living for himself while simultaneously helping others make a life.

“I always wanted to do something meaningful and that really contributes to society, and for me, nursing fulfills that,” said Hamm.

Hamm, who shared that he got married right after graduating high school, found himself working various “mundane” jobs just trying to support his family and survive. He often looked at his mom, who was a nurse for over 30 years, and his dad, who worked in mental health, for inspiration.

“What impact am I going to make on the world and how can I also survive and make a good living?” was the question Hamm always asked himself. “For me it was how can

I contribute to the greater good?”

When a direct care staff position opened at Acadia Healthcare in Butte, a psychiatric residential treatment center for kids, Hamm decided to give it try.

“It was an interesting place,” said Hamm of Acadia. “I really loved working there because you dealt with a lot of stuff but also had days where you got to hang out and play basketball with a bunch of kids.”

“That’s really where I decided to become a nurse,” said Hamm.

While he continued working for Acadia, Hamm began his nursing education Montana Tech. After graduating, Hamm continued working for Acadia and later moved up to a lead position.

After having a few kids of his own, Hamm eventually craved a change of pace professionally and started working at St. James Hospital. Having never worked in a hospital setting before, he was faced with a new



JOSEPH SCHELLER/THE MONTANA STANDARD

See Hamm, **PAGE 14** Alex Hamm stands for a portrait outside of Com-passus Home Health on Tuesday, April 15, 2025.

Congratulations Alex Hamm

Compassus Home Health wants to congratulate RN Case Manager Alex Hamm for being one of the most dedicated and compassionate nurses in our community.

Alex consistently goes above and beyond in providing exceptional care. His clinical expertise is matched only by his genuine kindness, strong leadership and unwavering commitment to patient well-being.

Alex is not only a role model to his fellow workers at Compassus but also a trusted and beloved presence to the patients and families we serve.



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Hamm

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learning curve but appreciated the opportunity to boost his clinical skills in the process.

Hamm eventually transitioned into a home health position through Compass Home Health – a role that quickly turned into a permanent home for him.

“Home health has really been more of my calling, and I think it’s all based off of relationships,” said Hamm. “I’ve had some clients that I still have from when I started seven years ago.”

Everyday Hamm travels around Butte visiting patients, many of whom are veterans,

and works to give them the best possible quality of life.

“It’s a really unique end of nursing,” shared Hamm.

Unlike in a hospital where patients are discharged with the hope that their instructions for follow-up care at home will be followed, Hamm is there to make sure they really are.

“In home health we’re there to actually follow through with all those things,” said Hamm.

The challenge he faces is getting people to be receptive to the suggestions made.

“It’s a lot of advanced education about anything and everything from heart failure and COPD, to diabetic education,” said

Hamm. “It’s really where the rubber hits the road of trying to get people to make real changes in their life.”

“It’s really genuine and, quite frankly, you figure out what people are willing and not willing to do, and you just make the best of that,” added Hamm.

When it comes to making progress with patients, Hamm explained that it is all about establishing trust and building relationships.

“It’s just like get in the door and establish some trust and some relationship and then they’re just like, ‘well, I don’t want you to leave,’” said Hamm.

“Home health is really about connecting with people on so many different levels,”

said Hamm. “Even if it’s a simple act of taking out their garbage, plunging their toilet, or taking down a Christmas tree.”

“It’s really being connected in building that relationship in a way that really fundamentally gives you the tools to really help these people change their lives,” continued Hamm.

After 20 years as a nurse, Hamm has seen the ins and outs of nursing and is grateful for it all.

“I really do enjoy nursing and just being with people,” said Hamm. “And there’s times where it’s not so pleasant too, but that’s that and you can’t expect it all to be great. You’ve got to have some lows to have the highs too.”

How caregivers work in concert with doctors

Managing 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.

Proud to celebrate all nurses during *National Nurses Week*

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St. James Hospital