

Nursing Excellence

ANNUAL REPORT MAY 2024



Valley
Children's
HEALTHCARE



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Embracing Optimism

A First-Year Reflection as Chief Nursing Officer

By **Vicky Tilton, DNP, MSN, RN, NEA-BC**
Vice President, Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer

As I reflect on my first year as Chief Nursing Officer, it has been a year full of experiences that I am sure we all have shared as nurses: successes, challenges, trials, joy, sorrow, grace, compassion and more. Through it all, I have drawn great strength from each of you and your optimism and, for that, I am grateful. In a profession where challenges often seem insurmountable and uncertainty looms large, optimism serves as our guiding light, illuminating the path forward with hope and resilience.

Optimism, to me, is not simply a passive state of mind, but rather an active choice to see the possibilities in every situation, no matter how dire. Optimism is the unwavering belief that, despite the obstacles we face, we possess the strength, ingenuity, resilience and compassion to overcome.

As Chief Nursing Officer, I firmly believe that fostering an optimistic work environment empowers our nurses to deliver the highest quality of care to our patients. It has been both a privilege and a responsibility to cultivate a culture where optimism flourishes within our nursing community.

Optimism does not deny the reality of our challenges, but rather acknowledges them with courage and determination, drives us to find creative solutions, and holds us together as a team.

Looking ahead, I am filled with optimism for the future of nursing here at Valley Children's Healthcare. I am confident that by embracing optimism as a guiding principle, we will continue to overcome obstacles, achieve new heights of excellence, and make a positive impact on the lives of those we serve.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to you for your unwavering commitment and resilience. Your optimism is truly the heart and soul of our healthcare community, and I am honored to stand alongside you as we navigate the challenges and triumphs that lie ahead.

Warmest Regards,

Vicky



Transformational Leadership

Nurse of the Year 2024 Excellence in Transformational Leadership

Stacie Venkatesan, MSN, RN, CNS, RNC-NIC
Director Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)
and Patient Throughput



As Director of NICU and Patient Throughput, Stacie Venkatesan leads her team with a relentless focus on achieving exceptional neonatal outcomes. Her leadership at Valley Children's Healthcare includes accountability for three community-based NICU satellites. Stacie is a dynamic and deliberate leader committed to fostering excellence in patient care and professional development. Her strategic initiatives have elevated nursing practice, ensuring efficient and exemplary care delivery from an empowered and highly skilled nursing workforce.

Stacie established processes with the Medical Director and NICU team to purposefully ground all performance improvement (PI) and quality improvement (QI) projects in outcome data. She conveys clear understanding of the rationale behind PI and QI efforts and their impact on overall neonatal outcomes. One of Stacie's key achievements is the creation of systems to support the charge team, resulting in enhanced communication and collaboration within the NICU. Her team has achieved remarkable patient outcomes, boasting more than 850 days without a catheter-associated bloodstream infection and 2,000 days without a stage III/IV or unstageable pressure injury. Her team's reduction of unplanned extubations places Valley Children's NICU among the top performers in comparable groups.

Stacie is a respected figure in the healthcare community who inspires others to make a difference in patient care. Her impact on nursing practice extends beyond the NICU. She collaborates with expert clinicians to improve patient outcomes across multiple facilities within the service area, and works with her Neonatal Outreach Coordinator to advocate for best practices in neonatal care in delivery rooms throughout the region.

Underscored by her impressive academic achievements and steadfast dedication to mentoring others, Stacie's commitment to professional development is a cornerstone of her leadership philosophy. Possessing two

master's degrees, Stacie exemplifies a relentless pursuit of knowledge and growth, setting a high standard for continuous learning within the healthcare community. She empowers others to unlock their full potential and make meaningful contributions to the healthcare profession.

Her mentorship has grown a future nursing director, created new positions such as the neonatal nurse practitioners, and supported individuals growing in their educational and career trajectories. Stacie's involvement in the Valley Children's Healthcare Professional Development Committee demonstrates her dedication to advancing the nursing profession. Through initiatives such as exam preparation tools and a mentor program, Stacie has supported a significant increase in the percentage of bachelor's-prepared nurses at Valley Children's. Despite challenges like staff turnover, she remains devoted to the committee's goals, spearheading efforts to revise the clinical advancement program to align with the organization's pursuit of the ANCC Magnet Recognition Program®.

In times of crisis, Stacie rises to the occasion and demonstrates her commitment to the organization extends beyond her immediate responsibilities. Assuming the role of incident commander, she guided the interdisciplinary team to successful outcomes and proved her ability to lead decisively under pressure. Stacie's leadership is motivated by her passion for healthcare and characterized by strategic focus, innovation, quality improvement, and a steadfast dedication to the well-being of her team and the organization.

We congratulate Stacie Venkatesan,
Valley Children's Nurse of the Year 2024 Excellence in Transformational Leadership.

Valley Children's Healthcare Profiles

Fiscal Year 2023

Nursing Statistics

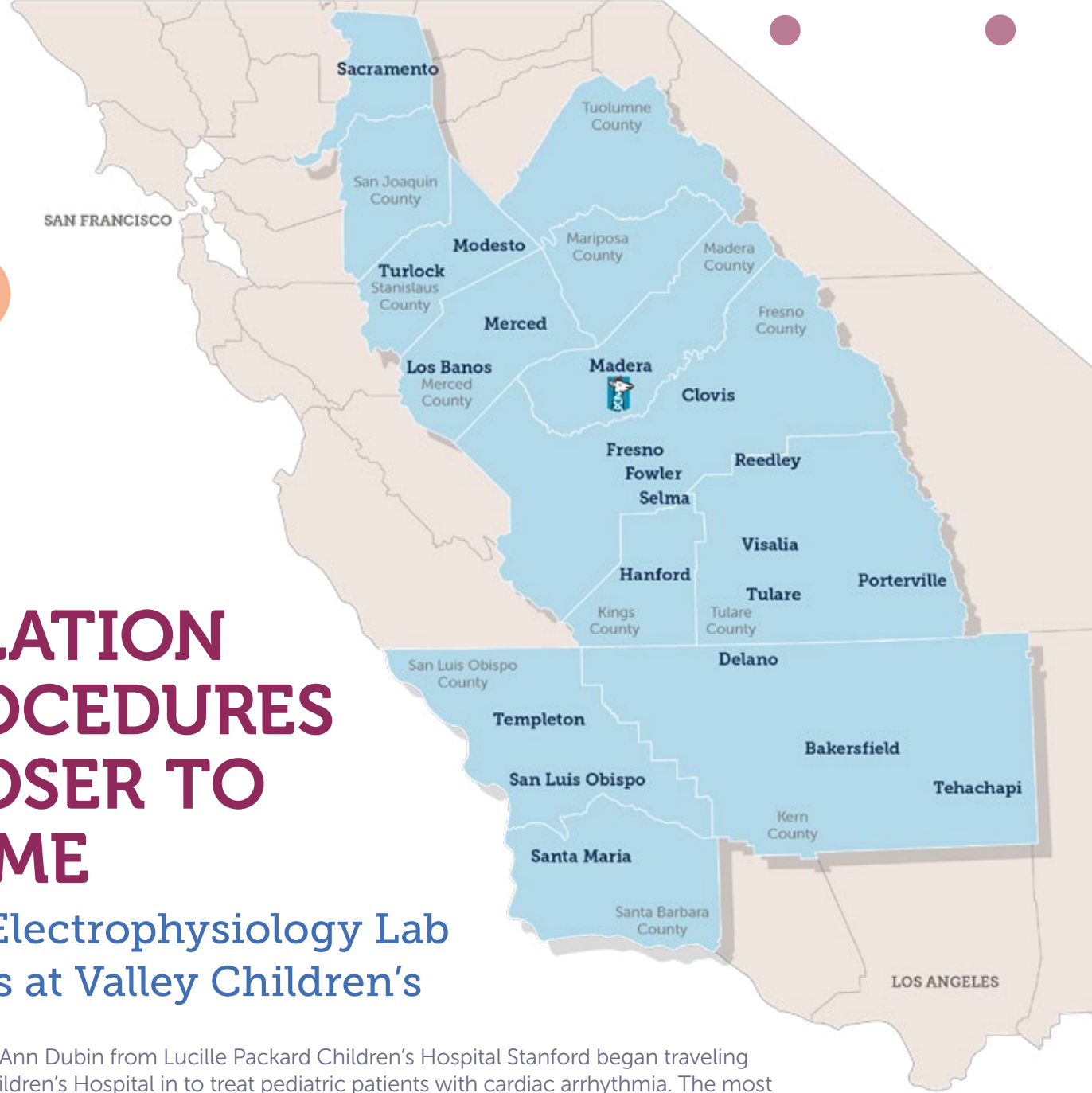
- 64 Nurse Practitioners
- 1,116 Registered Nurses
- 25 Licensed Vocational Nurses
- 1,205 Total Nurses

Includes Case Managers, Clinical Nurses, CNO, CNSs, Infection Control Nurses, Informatics Nurses, LVNs, NPs, Nurse Coordinators, Nurse Educators, Nurse Leaders, Nurse Managers, Occupational Health Nurses, Quality/Risk Nurses, Vascular Access Specialists, and Wound & Ostomy Specialists

Organizational Statistics

- Licensed Beds: 358
- Inpatient Encounters: 9,955
- Average Daily Census: 182.2
- Emergency Department Encounters: 85,161
- Transports (Air & Ground): 1,198
- Day Surgery Encounters: 8,059
- Main Campus Specialty Pediatric Practice Encounters: 149,486
- Regional Specialty Care Center Encounters: 205,095
- Primary Care and Charlie's Clinic Encounters: 71,047





ABLATION PROCEDURES CLOSER TO HOME

New Electrophysiology Lab Opens at Valley Children's

In 2007, Dr. Ann Dubin from Lucille Packard Children's Hospital Stanford began traveling to Valley Children's Hospital in to treat pediatric patients with cardiac arrhythmia. The most common arrhythmia seen at Valley Children's is supraventricular tachycardia (SVT), a type of irregular heartbeat where the heart beats fast and unevenly due to a problem in the heart's accessory pathway. One of the treatment options recommended for SVT is an ablation procedure, which is performed in an electrophysiology lab.

As the volume of patients who needed electrophysiology intervention continued to grow, Dr. Kara Montonaga also began making the trip from Stanford to Valley Children's. Several cases seen by these physicians called for some type of electrophysiology procedure, forcing families to travel to Stanford for treatment.

Approximately 55 per 100,000 children suffer from an arrhythmia, and 13% of those arrhythmias are an SVT arrhythmia. With more than 1.3 million children living in the 13-county area served by Valley Children's Healthcare, the population of patients diagnosed with cardiac arrhythmia supported bringing treatment closer to home.



"We identified a need for our own cardiologist who specialized in electrophysiology and hired Dr. Bianca Castellanos in 2021," said Tiffany Tharp, MSN, RN, CPN, perioperative nurse manager.

Bringing Bianca Castellanos, MD, pediatric cardiologist, on board was only the beginning of developing an all-new electrophysiology program at Valley Children's.

Building the Electrophysiology Lab

It is common practice for hospitals to combine their cardiac catheterization lab and their electrophysiology lab. "Our catheterization lab was already up for a remodel," said Tharp. "We based the design for the lab on knowing we were going to add the electrophysiology service line."

In preparation for the remodel, Tharp traveled to four other children's hospitals across the United States to tour their labs and learn why they chose the equipment in their labs and what motivated their choice. Tharp also consulted with Dr. Castellanos to determine her preference for equipment and supply purchases for the new lab.

The choice was made to partner with both Abbott Medical® and Medtronic®. Each vendor not only provided the necessary functionality for electrophysiology interventions, but their equipment also works well in a pediatric environment, with accessories available in various sizes for the different ages of the patients treated at Valley Children's. Cardiac arrhythmia can be caused by a congenital heart defect or begin as a complication after heart surgery. Patients born with a defect may not have any symptoms until they are older and become active. They might pass out, and their racing heart leads to a diagnosis.

"Patients who most commonly need this service are adolescents," said Tharp. "But we currently treat an age range of patients from about 7 to 20 years old. Finding equipment that worked for pediatrics was essential."

The remodeling project began in January 2022 and continued through December of the same year.

"During the construction, we identified one nurse and one tech from the existing cardiac catheterization lab team to be leads," said Tharp, referring to Audrey Peach, Registered Nurse, and Lisa Leedom, Special Procedures Technician, who traveled to Stanford once a month with Dr. Castellanos to participate in ablation procedures at Lucille Packard. "Our doctor assisted the Stanford doctors in performing the procedures while our RN and tech observed. They continued to attend procedures at Stanford for a year, even after our lab opened."



Educating and Training Staff

Representatives from Abbott Medical® and Medtronic® made bimonthly trips to Valley Children's for nine months to educate staff on the physiology of the heart and how the ablation procedure corrects it.

"Certain safety protocols had to be learned," said Tharp. "The vendors gave one-on-one training on the machines. All RNs on the cardiac team and the tech who is present for



Pictured left to right: Tiffany Tharp, MSN, RN, CPN, perioperative nurse manager; Audrey Peach, MN, BS, RN, PHN, CCRN; Bianca Castellanos, MD, pediatric cardiologist; Lisa Leedom, Special Procedures Technician

electrophysiology interventions went through that training.”

Tharp worked with her team to amend policies for the catheterization lab to incorporate the new electrophysiology service line. The amended policies were reviewed and approved by the director of perioperative services, the medical director of cardiology, the chief nursing officer, and the chief executive officer.

Dr. Castellanos and the cardiac team performed the first procedure in the new electrophysiology lab on March 15, 2023. Since then, more than a dozen procedures have been performed, but not all of them have been ablations.

The electrophysiology lab can also be used for loop recorder implantation or removal and to change a patient’s pacemaker generator or lead. Conducting minimally invasive procedures through a small percutaneous access site provides many benefits to patients who need a heart monitor or who already have a pacemaker that needs new wires or a new battery. Cardiologists can use the equipment in the electrophysiology lab to perform these procedures rather than opening up the patient’s chest.

When families make a risk assessment for the ablation procedure, Tharp points to the statistics measuring quality outcomes. Wolff-Parkinson White is a form of SVT that carries a risk of sudden death up to 0.3% annually. The ablation procedure has a 93-97% success rate and a <1% complication rate.

“The new electrophysiology program at Valley Children’s has successfully treated, without complication or recurrence, many of these types of arrhythmias,” said Tharp. “More importantly, we have successfully treated one case of Wolff-Parkinson White classified as high-risk for sudden death.”

As of March 1, 2024, the team has performed 10 ablation procedures, and seven other procedures. These numbers exceed Tharp’s projections during the early stages of exploring whether to invest in the new service line, making it a win not only for Valley Children’s, but also for the families dealing with a cardiac arrhythmia diagnosis.

“It’s a big blessing to the patients,” said Tharp. “Our first case involved a patient who was diagnosed

long before we opened our lab, but the family elected to wait for the procedure until we opened." The weight of concern over traveling to the Bay Area has been lifted with the opening of the new lab. "More than one patient had financial hardship," said Tharp. "These families chose to wait to have the procedure in our lab to avoid the cost of traveling. For others it was proximity. They chose to wait, out of convenience. The patient misses less school and the parents miss less work. Also, they are closer to home for a follow-up visit."

One of the driving forces at Valley Children's is a commitment to treat families with ill or injured children close to home. The new electrophysiology program at Valley Children's Healthcare is yet another example of that commitment. The organization is also committed to quality patient outcomes. The cardiac team serving in the new electrophysiology lab exemplifies why Valley Children's has earned Magnet® designation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center five times and proof of a hard-earned commitment to overall nursing excellence.



Special Thanks

The success of Valley Children's Electrophysiology program would not have been possible without the unwavering support of many different individuals, including but not limited to:

- Jane Willson, Senior Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer
- David Christensen, MD, Senior Vice President, Medical Affairs and Chief Physician Executive
- Beverly Hayden-Pugh, MOB, BSN, BHSc, RN, Senior Vice President and Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer
- Vicky Tilton, DNP, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, VP, Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer
- Christine Netzley-Morales, MSN, BSB, RN Director Perioperative Services
- Dr. Carl Owada
- Dr. Bianca Castellanos
- Dr. Paolo Aquino
- Dr. Kara Montonaga
- Dr. Scott Ceresnak
- Lori Medicus, MN, RN, CNS, CPNP
- Catheterization Lab team
- Cardiology Clinic
- Cardiac Testing team
- Pediatric Anesthesia Associates Medical Group members
- Abbott Medical®
- Medtronic®

A Very Special Thank You

To Audrey Peach, MN, BS, RN, PHN, CCRN and Lisa Leedom, SPT for the countless hours they have spent and continue to spend ensuring delivery of the safest, most innovative care in the electrophysiology realm.





Structural Empowerment

Nurse of the Year 2024 Excellence in Structural Empowerment

Rougeh Awad, MSN, RN, FNP-BC
Director Ambulatory Clinical Practice

With more than 28 years' experience as a registered nurse, Rougeh Awad is a family nurse practitioner who joined Valley Children's Healthcare in 2003. Rougeh has worked in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, Rehabilitation, and the Emergency Department, progressing from staff nurse to charge nurse. In 2018, he became a clinical education specialist focused on the ambulatory setting. Rougeh currently serves as the director of Ambulatory Clinical Practice with direct supervision of the Ambulatory Treatment Center, Hematology, Oncology, Willson Heart Center, Cardio Testing, and Nephrology clinics. In addition, Rougeh serves as the home care director for Patient Care Services.

Rougeh's passion for lifelong learning shines in his daily work. He earned his Master's in Nursing from Fresno State, and plans to pursue his Doctor of Nursing Practice in the summer of 2024. Rougeh's commitment to professional growth extends beyond himself. He played a pivotal role in creating the Academic Mentor Program, which pairs staff members attending school with a mentor staff member who helps them navigate their education for career advancement. Rougeh's focus on mentoring also supported the development of the new chief nurse practitioners. He met with them monthly to advise them, and guided their transition by rounding on the clinics with them.

Rougeh applies his teaching talent beyond Valley Children's by serving as a clinical instructor for two colleges, developing the skills and knowledge of future nurses. He has participated in effective student outreach to numerous nursing schools, where he not only shares his knowledge of nursing practice, but also encourages students on their journey to become a nurse. Committed to supporting graduates in their post-nursing school endeavors, Rougeh created a pathway for onboarding new hires in the ambulatory setting.

Rougeh adds valuable insight as an active nursing governance leader at Valley Children's. He serves as chair of the Executive Nurse Council, facilitator for the Nurse Practitioner Council, facilitator for the Ambulatory Professional Practice Council, and he co-leads the Measurement and Rounding sub-committee on the new Service Excellence Committee. Rougeh also participates on the Hematology, Oncology, and Ambulatory Treatment Center Recruitment, Retention, and Recognition Committee, as well as the organizational Patient and Family-Centered Care Committee, Nurse Leader Council, and the MyChart Taskforce.

Quality and patient safety are top priorities for Rougeh. He created education for the reintroduction of the J-Tip device to ease peripheral IV insertion pain, and helped implement a new fall-risk initiative in the ambulatory clinics. As the Solutions for Patient Safety lead, Rougeh reports on quality measures that help improve patient care.

Rougeh encourages interdisciplinary teamwork and inspires his unified team with positivity. A creative problem solver, Rougeh collaborates with staff to determine the best approach and stands behind the ideas they develop, helping to employ solutions for positive change. He led the implementation of the apheresis program in the Hematology clinic, which involved educating both ambulatory and inpatient staff. Rougeh's active presence as a respected leader promotes the profession of nursing and the delivery of high-quality care.

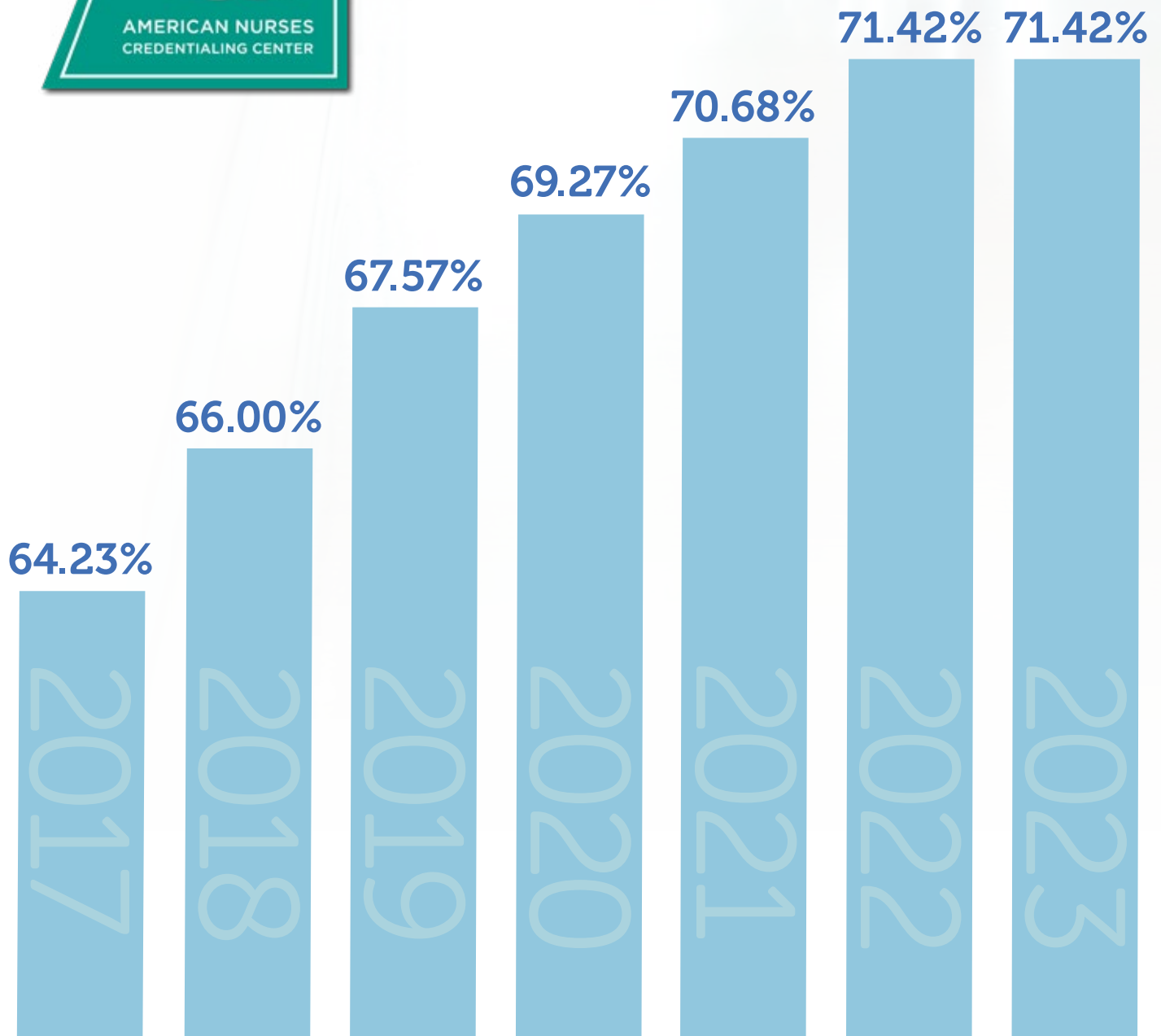


We congratulate Rougeh Awad,

Valley Children's Nurse of the Year 2024 Excellence in Structural Empowerment.

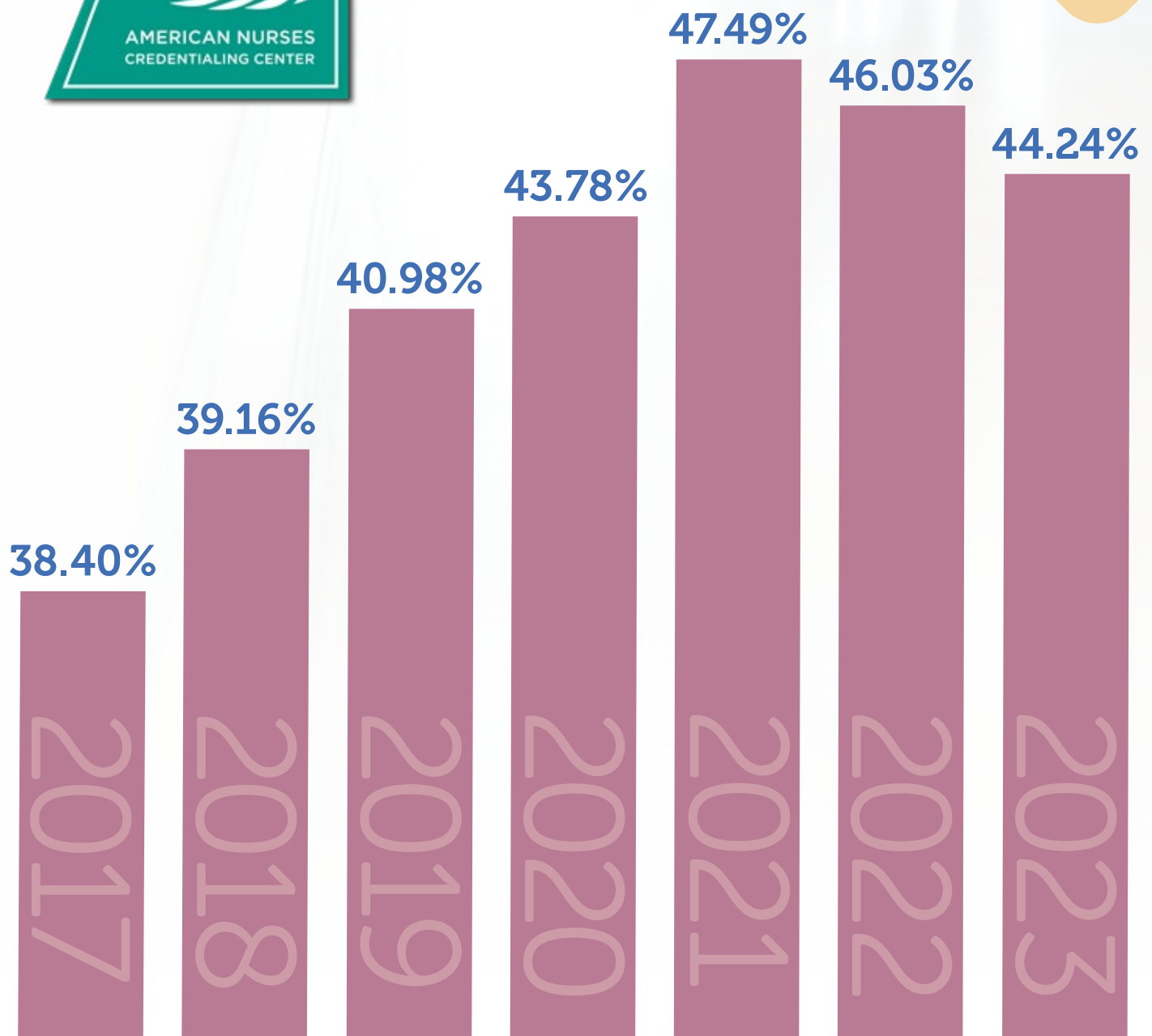
Professional Development

Organizational BSN Data Trend
Percent BSN or Higher in Nursing

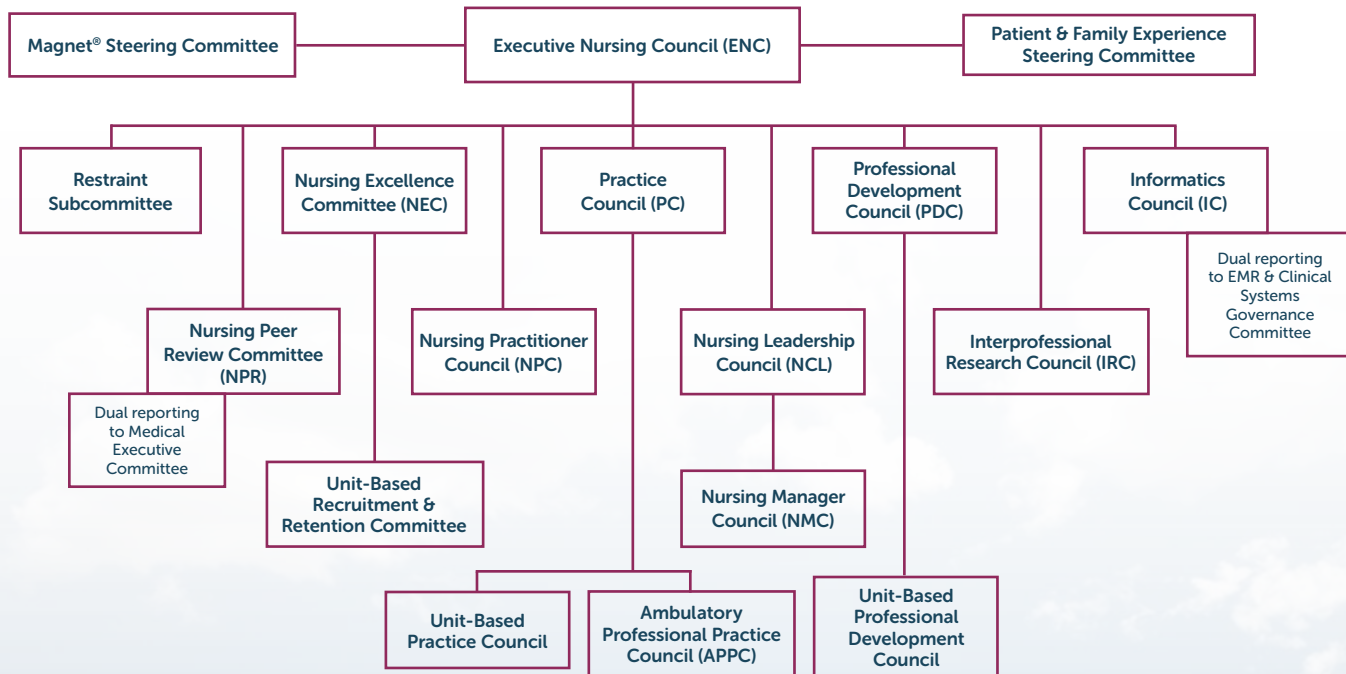


Professional Development

Organizational National Certification Trend
Percent National Certification



Nursing Governance



Council and Committee Accomplishments

Executive Nursing Council

Rough Awad, MSN, RN, FNP-BC, Chair
Denise Vermeltfoort, MSN, RN, NE-BC, Facilitator

Objective

Provide leadership and oversight of the governance of Nursing Services, including nursing governance, quality, advocacy and recognition.

Accomplishments

- Approved the implementation of the Nurse Manager Council and Nursing Excellence Committee.
- Monitored nursing quality outcomes, providing support and recommendations when indicated.
- Selected Nurse of the Year in Exemplary Professional Practice, Transformational Leadership, Structural Empowerment, and New Knowledge, Innovations and Improvements. Selected Team Excellence and Friend of Nursing award winners.

Nurse Practitioner Council

Kelly Folmer, MSN, RN, CPNP, Co-Chair
Pamela Marsh, DNP, RN, CPNP, Co-Chair
Rough Awad, MSN, RN, FNP-BC, Facilitator

Objective

Responsible for determining the practice of Nurse Practitioners (NP) within the organization, including development and approval of Standardized Procedures and Scope of Practice/Delineation Form, management of issues related to advanced practice nursing and the promotion of nursing research and publication.

Accomplishments

- Developed Specialty-Specific Furnishing Lists.
- Collaborated with Leadership to gain approval for NP administrative time to be used on an as-needed basis.
- Partnered with Lisa Watkins, Physician Wellness Coordinator, for NP mentorship program with five mentee/mentor pairs.
- Doubled attendance at NP Council Meetings.
- Held annual meeting of Co-Chairs with Ambulatory managers to improve NP onboarding processes.

Practice Council

Eleana Martinez, BSN, RN, Chair
Stacie Licon, DNP, MSN, RN, CNS, ACCNS-P, CPN, Facilitator

Objective

Guide the ongoing development of nursing care at Valley Children's Healthcare.

Accomplishments

- Approved 138 policies, giving highest priority to Provision of Care in Nursing policies.
- Established Practice Council Chair as a standing agenda item at Transition to Practice for new nurses to discuss importance of policy-driven practices and shared governance.
- Updated the Bylaws to align members as a diverse, interdisciplinary Practice Council.

Ambulatory Professional Practice Council

Ines Hodzic, BSN, RN, Chair
Rough Awad, MSN, RN, FNP-BC, Facilitator

Objective

Promote ambulatory standard of evidence-based patient care, clinical performance initiatives, and education; and address patient and safety practices.

Accomplishments

- Increased clinic participation in APPC, growing membership from 10 to 25 members representing various ambulatory practice settings.
- Began biannual rounding to ambulatory clinics to address ambulatory concerns and promote APPC.
- Completed Epic Standardization in the following areas:
 - Education documentation
 - "Humpty Dumpty" Fall Assessment
 - Calley's Law education

Nursing Peer Review Committee

Jane Henning, ASN, RN, Co-Chair
Natasha Reilly, BSN, RN, Co-Chair
Vicky Tilton, DNP, MSN, RN, NEA-BC,
Facilitator

Objective

Promote the quality of nursing care by identifying and recommending opportunities for improvement.

Accomplishments

- Collaboration with Pharmacy and PICU educators on huddle topics and enhancing monitoring processes for betalactam antibiotics.
- Identifying opportunities to enhance "Transition to Practice" education based on case review.

Restraint Subcommittee

Brandee Cruz, BSN, RN, CPEN, Co-Chair
Robb Smith, BSN, RN, Co-Chair
Cauryn Updegraff, MSN, RN, CNML, Facilitator

Objective

Monitor the quality of nursing care offered to patients and provide a venue for identifying and recommending opportunities for improvement.

Accomplishments

- Restraint documentation updates and improved flow of documentation.
- Algorithms for post operative management (medical immobilization versus care management).
- Care Management order renewal reminder for care team within EPIC.

Nursing Leadership Council

Vicky Tilton, DNP, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, Chair
Denise Vermeltfoort, MSN, RN, NE-BC, Facilitator

Objective

Promote and guide the strategic direction of Nursing Services.

Accomplishments

- Developed and implemented Nursing Strategic Plan.
- Approved and adopted Nursing Continuing Education Assessment and associated plan.
 - Developed enhanced structure for Nursing Governance.

Nurse Manager Council

Brittany Meyer, BSN, RN, CPN, Chair
Vicky Tilton, DNP, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, Facilitator

Objective

Promote a professional practice environment by engaging clinical nurses in the professional practice of nursing and ensuring nursing operational initiatives are effectively implemented.

Accomplishments

- Offered a space for collaborative interaction with the Chief Nursing Officer and clinical leaders.
- Enhanced process for information sharing with multidisciplinary leaders.
- Promoted opportunities to identify and share process gaps and performance improvement needs.
- Guided organization-wide nursing operational initiatives.

Nursing Excellence Committee

Stacie Venkatesan, MSN, RN, CNS, RNC-NIC, Co-Chair
Marcia Frye, MS, BSN, RN, CNML, Co-Chair

Objective

Provides leadership, coordination, and delivery of strategies promoting a culture of recognition and celebration.

Accomplishments

- Established draft Committee Bylaws.
- Recruitment of membership.
- Committee launched with goals established.

Professional Development Council

Nichole Hackbarth, MSN, RN, CPN, Chair
Stacie Venkatesan, MSN, RN, CNS, RNC-NIC, Facilitator

Objective

Promote national certification and ongoing academic progression for nurses.

Accomplishments

- Exceeded goal for Bachelor of Science in Nursing or greater by reaching 71.42%
- Promoted a culture of recognition through hosting a certified nurses celebration.
- Initiated a taskforce to optimize and revise the clinical advancement program and launch a new clinical advancement program in FY25.
- Raised more than \$4,000 in support of the Professional Development Nursing Scholarship Fund.

Interprofessional Research Council

Stacie Licon, DNP, RN, CNS,
ACCNS-P, CPN, Co-Chair
Trish Regonini, CIP, Co-Chair

Objective

Promote and support the understanding and effective use of research and scholarly activity to enhance the provision of evidence-based nursing care. Advance research literacy and promote a spirit of inquiry throughout the organization.

Accomplishments

- Advanced the understanding of research study challenges and complexities via the presentation of seven research studies.
- Advanced the understanding of evidence-based practice by presenting two Valley Children's-initiated quality improvement projects.
- Provided three didactic training sessions to council members on scholarly activities.
- Consulted with researchers preparing for two research proposals undergoing development.

Informatics Council

Bryan Carlson, PharmD, Co-Chair
Cathy Hinds, BSN, RN, CPAN, CPN,
Co-Chair

Objective

Utilize an interdisciplinary team to review, design and evaluate enhancements to the electronic medical record (EMR) to improve patient care and promote patient safety by optimizing workflow, information management, and communication.

Accomplishments

- Increased membership to include 16 additional bedside nurses representing various clinical care areas.
- Presented and explored more than 200 tasks to enhance the documentation and communication of patient care between the interprofessional care team.
- Completed 17 EMR-related requests to enhance inpatient workload-acuity scoring



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Growing our Clinical Leaders

By Cauryn Updegraff, MSN, RN, CNML
Director Emergency and Trauma Program and Emergency Management

The pandemic was a catalyst for change in the workplace. Valley Children's Healthcare experienced a significant shift to remote capabilities that have continued due to efficiencies and agreement that hybrid roles can work in healthcare. Seasons of adjustment can result in discomfort and accelerated growing pains. The impact of the pandemic challenged our way of thinking and drove adaptation.

The pandemic had a significant impact on our education system, dramatically affecting practical experience, socialization, and overall skill set. Generational and societal evolution was reflected in our new-generation workforce, which requires a different leadership approach and level of support. Expectations for excellence remained unchanged at Valley Children's. When we began experiencing higher turnover rates and opportunities to improve satisfaction, we knew we needed to pivot our approach to support new team members in achieving our expectations of excellence.

We initiated a trickle-down approach by equipping our nursing leaders with leadership soft skills. Our leaders are appropriately educated and trained with a high degree of skill around operational management, however an opportunity was identified to provide new tools to enhance their skill set in leading their team members.

We focused our attention on our clinical managers first, preparing a leadership curriculum that included topics such as the importance of vulnerability, fundamentals in team building, approaching difficult conversations, and understanding generational differences. Each presentation was a two-hour interactive, in-person session. Managers along with their directors

attended and supported dialogue around the topics, sharing successes and challenges. These sessions were noted by attendees to be immensely helpful and much appreciated.

With the early success of the program, the scope was ready to evolve to our frontline leaders: charge registered nurses (RNs) and charge respiratory care practitioners (RCPs). Nursing leaders partnered with our human resources (HR) colleagues to design curriculum that was further tailored to the roles, and paired a director with an HR counterpart to co-deliver the education. From August 2023 through November 2023, four sessions with four offerings each session were supported to allow our frontline teams to participate in this education.



Topics presented included:

- The Responsibility of a Leader: Driving Culture and Embracing Leadership
- Influential Leadership: Positional Power Versus Personal Power
- Balancing Empathetic Leadership and Accountable Leadership
- Managing Multi-Generational Teams and Leading Resilient Teams

The feedback from the attendees was overwhelmingly positive.

On October 9, 2023, our most recent staff satisfaction survey closed for tabulation and evaluation. Encouraging results were presented in December 2023. We increased our engagement scores by five points, putting Valley Children's in the 86th percentile of health-care organizations.



Notable improvements that can be linked to our leadership education efforts include:

- 6-point increase: "My manager is open and responsive to staff input."
- 4-point increase: "My ideas and suggestions are important to Valley Children's."
- 6-point increase: "Valley Children's does a good job communicating with employees."
- 4-point increase: "My manager keeps our team focused on clear priorities."
- 5-point increase: "My manager provides me with feedback about my performance to help me do my job better."

These remarkable results support the continuation of leadership growth. We have expanded the curriculum and will apply it to all new-leader onboarding within the organization. Key lectures will also be applied to our Transition to Practice Program, growing the professional skills of our new graduate RNs.

Notable feedback from our charge group

What did you like most about the session?

- "I was very excited about the content in this session and truly enjoyed the pre-work. During the session, I also appreciated the content overall and felt that the first group activity was helpful."
- "I enjoyed the reflection opportunities."
- "Group discussions and scenarios to share."
- "Interacting with other leaders."
- "Interprofessional so we all learn from one another to better work as a team as a whole."
- "Great information and strategy with difficult conversations."
- "I love to learn all-new ways to inspire those I work with."
- "It is interactive. Getting to know more strategies that other leaders apply."
- "Ability to share common concerns. Time to role play and give suggestions."
- "I liked the ability to talk to other charge RNs to get perspective on difficult conversations that I needed to have that week. It actually made the conversation go really well."
- "I like the casual, comfortable feel of these classes. The conversations are easy and I enjoyed hearing how others have handled difficult situations."
- "The presenter remains engaged throughout the entire session."
- "I liked it all."
- "Great class."

Helping Student Nurses Live the Dream



Pediatrics is a special niche that most nursing students are not exposed to until later in their nursing school program. Jessica Moody, MSN, RN, PED-RN, Apollo Manager, knows from her own experience that only a small part of instruction in nursing school is dedicated to pediatrics. “The majority of course work is focused on medical/surgical care for the adult patient population,” she said. “Where I attended, pediatrics was only a one-month course.”

Nichole Hackbarth, MSN, RN, CPN, Clinical Education Manager, knows the value of recruiting the best talent while still in nursing school, as well as the importance of staying ahead of vacancy rates by attracting new graduates to begin their nursing careers at Valley Children’s Healthcare.

With the limited exposure to pediatrics given to nursing students, Hackbarth and Moody were determined to provide opportunities for interested nursing students to explore career options available to them at Valley Children’s.

“While pediatrics is a specialty, graduates can enter it

right out of nursing school,” said Moody. “We needed a way to get in front of the students to share our story. That’s when I thought of association meetings.” Moody understood that attending a California Nursing Student Association (CNSA) meeting would open the door to introducing the most engaged nursing students to the possibilities awaiting them. She approached several Fresno State nursing students who were at Valley Children’s for their clinical rotation, and asked if Fresno State had a CNSA chapter — a question that fanned Moody’s spark of an idea and ignited a positive change. The answer was yes!

One of the students connected Moody with the chapter’s president. “Our goal was to get in front of students early to showcase Valley Children’s and introduce them to our culture,” said Moody.

“Valley Children’s consistently receives exceptional feedback from students during their clinical rotations, which is a testament to all of our wonderful nurses,” said Hackbarth.

CNSA Presentations Begin October 7, 2022

Having made the connection to the CNSA chapter president, Moody asked if she could bring a contingent of Valley Children's nursing leaders to speak about pediatrics and the opportunities available to them with the organization. Fresno State welcomed the idea and extended an invitation for an hour-long presentation, followed by another hour for Q&A. Moody reached out to ambulatory clinics and inpatient managers and directors to participate. All were supportive and several attended the first meeting.

Hackbarth jumped at the chance to get in front of the students. "The outreach at Fresno State gave us a good opportunity to see how engaged the students were and their interest in learning more about working at Valley Children's," said Hackbarth.

Managers, directors, clinical nurses, and clinical education team members attended the chapter meeting to showcase the clinical departments at Valley Children's. "We not only talked about what we do, but we also told our stories," said Moody. "Nurses shared why they applied to Valley Children's and why they've been working here 10 years, 15 years, or even longer in some cases."

"Hearing from the content experts who have so much passion for their department and specialty was inspiring," said Hackbarth. "The engagement from the students was powerful, and they were excited to hear about Valley Children's."

Students were encouraged to reach out to leaders, who graciously provided their contact information and proved willing to speak further with perspective candidates interested in their specialty.

Small Group Tours Begin November 2, 2022

After the successful presentation at Fresno State's



CNSA meeting, Moody and Hackbarth reached out to other nursing schools in the region. Word quickly spread not only about the positions available upon graduation, but also about jobs students could apply for while still in school: Pediatric Nurse Extern (PNE), Pediatric Care Technician (PCT), Intensive Care Technician (ICT), Emergency Support Technician (EST), among others.

"When Jessica and I went to our first association meeting, students were interested in job shadowing, but increasing exposure wasn't possible due to continued pandemic restrictions," said Hackbarth. "After talking about potential strategies to help the students understand more about the units they would



be applying to, we thought it might be helpful to offer small group tours of the hospital."

Hackbarth collaborated with Candace Biberston DNP, RN, CPN, Clinical Education Specialist, Acute Care and Perioperative, to submit a proposal to begin offering tours led by a member of the clinical education team, who could answer questions from potential job applicants about roles and onboarding. A manager or a unit staff member would also participate to provide another friendly face and answer questions about their department. Hackbarth and Biberston proposed ending the tour with a member of the recruitment team explaining the application process. Nursing leaders supported the initiative, and Hackbarth began scheduling tours for first and second-semester students.

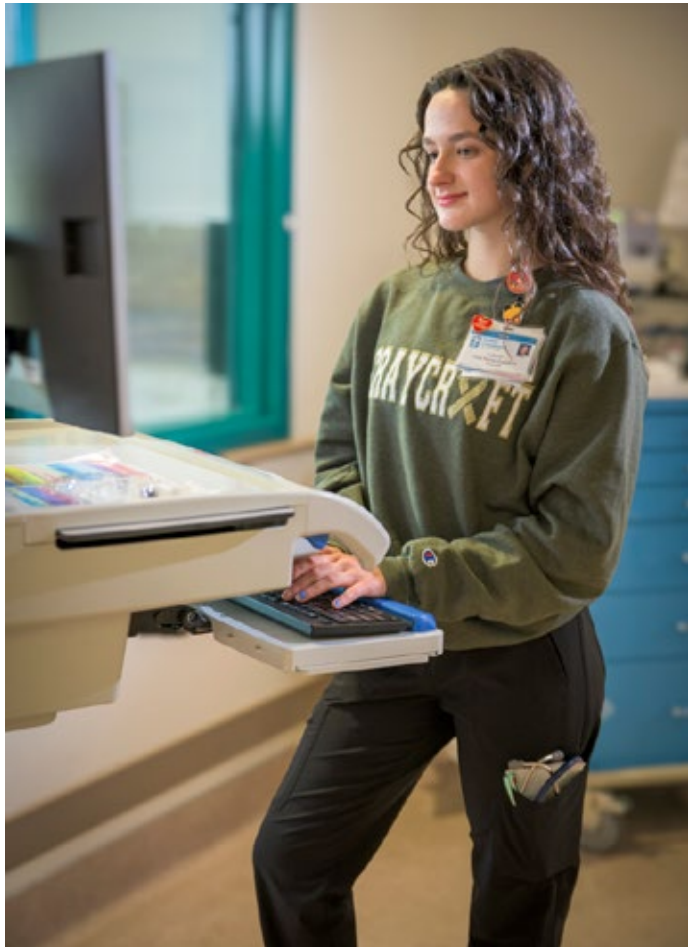
"The goal is to show them our welcoming environment," she said. "If it wasn't for the tour, a nurse we now have on Craycroft would never have become a PNE."

"The goal is to show them our welcoming environment."

Outreach Leads to New Hires

Lauren Bennett is a nursing student at Fresno State who contacted Hackbarth immediately following her tour. Within a week of that contact, she was hired as a PNE in the hospital's oncology unit, known as Craycroft.

"I have been with Valley Children's as a nurse extern for more than a year now," said Bennett. "My experiences thus far have been amazing and it wouldn't have been possible without the help from staff and educators. Before I was hired, I had the



opportunity to meet a large group of representatives from Valley Children's through presentations and tours that were given. From these interactions, I quickly grew to love this hospital and everything it stands for. From my first day at Valley Children's Healthcare to now, every member of the team has shown me compassion and has pushed me to achieve all the goals that I have set. I am graduating this semester and will be continuing my career as a registered nurse on the Oncology floor. Valley Children's has opened so many doors, and I couldn't imagine starting my career anywhere else!"

The tours take students through Craycroft and other

acute care units, as well as all three of the hospital's critical care units, perioperative services, and the ambulatory clinics.

"We leaned on department leaders to help coordinate schedules for the tours," said Moody. "I don't have expertise in every area of the hospital, and I want the students to hear from the people working in those areas. With leaders, educators, and clinical staff onsite at assigned time slots, the students could not only come through and see the department, but also hear from the experts in that department."

"Valley Children's leaders agree that having the students come for tours is a value add," said Hackbarth.

The outreach to student nursing associations evolved throughout 2023. Moody's idea expanded to include a recruiter from the Human Resources department to help track the impact this targeted outreach was having on the RN vacancy rate.

"We want to invest in the best of the best for our future RNs who want to care for our pediatric population," said Hackbarth.

"Nursing students who get hired as PNEs almost always end up joining our team as graduates," said Moody. "We put a lot of faith in new candidates. If we can hire within, it's beneficial. Being a PNE is like a walking interview."

The transition from student-held positions like PNE, PCT, ICT, and EST to licensed registered nurse is a smoother transition when hired from within. Based on trends, 85% to 90% of the nursing students filling those roles will stay with the organization once they become RNs, another reason Hackbarth and Moody set about to encourage early exposure to the organization among nursing students.

The outreach to student nurses that began as an idea to help reduce the nurse vacancy rate at Valley Children's has evolved into a popular program helping nursing students like Lauren Bennett live their dreams. And one day, these young graduates may very well grow into problem-solving leaders like Moody and Hackbarth.

"We want to invest in the best of the best for our future RNs who want to care for our pediatric population."



Exemplary Professional Practice

Nurse of the Year 2024 Excellence in Exemplary Professional Practice

Shelbie Holden, MSN, RN, RNC-NIC, Charge
Nurse, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)



Shelbie Holden is a dynamic charge nurse at Valley Children's Hospital who exemplifies excellence in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), organization and community. With a focus on outcomes, communication, and innovation, Shelbie consistently challenges her team and their processes.

Shelbie led the implementation of safe sleep concepts, overseeing the rollout of crib caddies and sleep sacks to mitigate risks and promote well-being, ensuring every infant in the NICU receives the highest standard of care. As facilitator of the NICU Quality, Patient Safety and Clinical Effectiveness Committee, Shelbie spearheads initiatives aimed at improving patient outcomes through direct peer-to-peer feedback. Guided by her leadership, the committee empowers staff to identify and address potential issues promptly, fostering a proactive approach to quality improvement. The implementation of K-cards offers a streamlined avenue for daily quality audits and ongoing monitoring of critical measures of success.

Shelbie engages in shaping policies and practices, leveraging her expertise to drive positive change. She showcased her leadership skills in the NICU RN lead role for the organization-wide Minimizing Distractions Failure Mode and Effects Analysis (FMEA), driving initiatives aimed at optimizing care environments for improved patient outcomes. She participates in various committees including the Practice Council, where she represents the NICU's interests to ensure policies and care practices align with the unit's unique needs and challenges. Her membership on the Smart Pump Integration and Utilization Committee underscores her dedication to implementing technology for improved patient care. Shelbie is also an active member of the National Association of Neonatal Nurses and the local chapter of Central California Association of Neonatal Nurses.

Shelbie's commitment to fostering a culture of accountability elevates clinical practice within the unit. Through

her clear and inspiring communication, she promotes a sense of shared purpose and collective responsibility among team members. By engaging her peer charge nurses in purposeful rounding for outcomes, she empowers them to take ownership of patient care and continuously strive for excellence. This proactive approach not only enhances patient outcomes, but also creates a collaborative and supportive environment where every team member is committed to delivering the best possible care.

Shelbie exhibits a meticulous approach to enhancing documentation processes. She demonstrated excellence in clinical practice through her involvement in documentation redesigns aligned with the NEOBrain Collaborative goals. By ensuring the NICU captures data pertinent to specific aims, she enhances clinical decision making and quality improvement efforts. Additionally, her collaboration with clinical nurse specialists to revise the electronic medical record (EMR) reflects her commitment to optimizing data capture, such as measure mats and length boards, crucial for accurate neonatal assessments.

Shelbie embodies transformative leadership, driving alignment with the organization's mission and vision. Her multifaceted contributions highlight her significant impact on nursing practice. Shelbie promotes professional growth, implementation of best practices, and support for the organization's goals and objectives. She demonstrates a deep commitment to patient safety and optimal outcomes, driving positive change and advancing the delivery of high-quality care within the NICU and beyond.

We congratulate Shelbie Holden,
Valley Children's Nurse of the Year 2024 Excellence in Exemplary Professional Practice.

Nursing Professional Practice Model

Nursing Excellence in Action

Collaborative Relationships

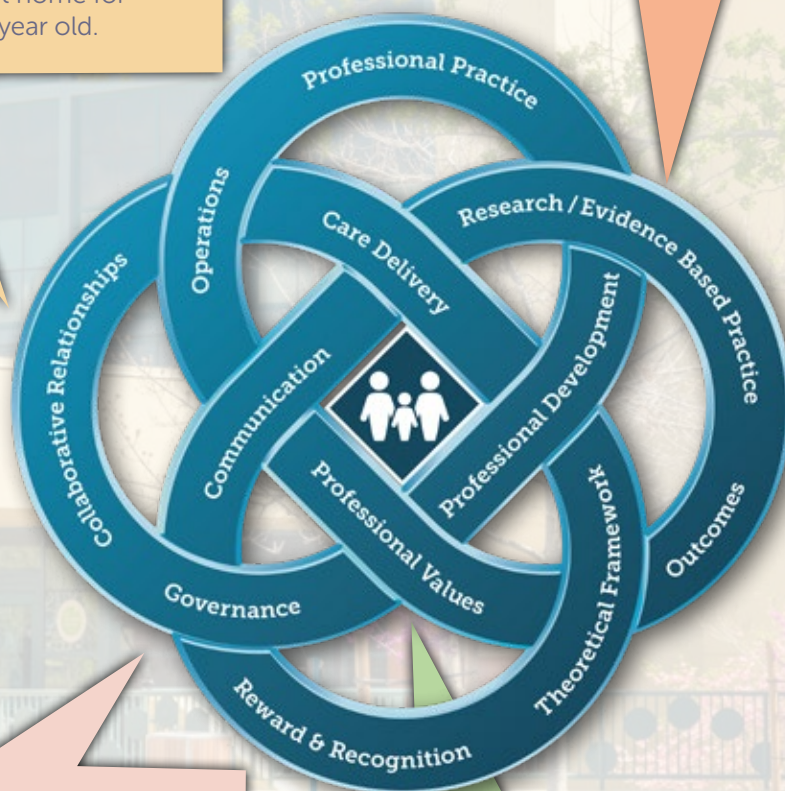
Valley Children's collaborated with key internal and external stakeholders, such as the Central Valley Safe Sleep Coalition, a nine-county collaborative, to reduce infant deaths. Valley Children's also obtained funding from the Guilds Center for Community Health to provide 30 cribettes to support a safe sleep environment in the hospital or at home for infants less than a year old.

Research/EBP

Nursing research regarding peripherally inserted central catheters (PICCs) in pediatrics continued with a new study, "Anomalies of the Inferior Vena Cava Identified During PICC Placement: A Pediatric Case Series."

Outcomes

We received the Lisa Bollman Transport Award for excellence in patient safety and quality improvement. Our Transport Risk Index of Physiologic Stability (TRIPS) score outmatched other teams in the state.



Governance

Initiated as part of Nursing Governance Structure, the new Nurse Manager Council comprises nursing and interprofessional managers who collaborate to address opportunities for improving systems and processes to enhance the quality of patient care.

Professional Values

Our core value of compassionate care aligns with the mission of Valley Children's to recognize the importance of playfulness in human interaction and the health of children. The memorable tailgate at a Fresno State football game enjoyed by PICU patients and ECMO graduates with nurses and staff is just one example of our commitment to compassionate care.

Pursuit of Excellence

The Magnet® Journey

By Denise Vermeltfoort, MSN, RN, NE-BC, Nursing Excellence Officer
Magnet Program Director (MPD)

The vision to realize Magnet® designation began more than two decades ago with a firm belief grounded in the extraordinary team of professionals who provide exceptional care to children in the Central Valley. Since then, Valley Children's Healthcare has repeatedly achieved the highest nursing credential attainable by any healthcare organization.



Denise Vermeltfoort with Cathy Hinds, BSN, RN, CPAN, CPN

Achieving the Dream

Valley Children's realized its goal within a few years, achieving Magnet® designation for the first time in 2004. The powerful mission and vision of the organization combined with the dedication and proficiency of the interprofessional teams equaled success! At the time, Magnet Recognition® had been achieved by less than 1% of all hospitals in the United States. Valley Children's became one of seven children's hospitals in the country and the first children's hospital west of the Rockies to achieve this prestigious designation.¹

Growing the Excellence

The Valley Children's culture continually reflects shared attitudes and behaviors that contribute to excellence and the pursuit of "Our Best." Our ongoing Magnet® journey has seen nursing's structure, processes, roles, and programs develop, evolve, and improve. Examples of those enhancements include introducing the

following models, programs, and nursing roles:

- Nursing Professional Practice Model
- L.E.G.A.C.Y. Nursing Care Delivery Model
- PICC Program
- Palliative Care Program
- Leadership Development
- New nursing governance councils and committees
- Family-Centered Care
- Child Advocacy Program
- Partners in Care
- Injury Prevention Program
- Sedation Services
- EMU Unit
- ECMO Program
- George's Pass
- RN Navigator Role

Additionally, a series of nursing research studies have been introduced and carried out in the fields of pain, pediatric falls, PEWS, peripherally inserted central catheter (PICC), and professional practice. Our strong structure and processes have led to exemplary outcomes. The number of nurses with professional certification and bachelor's degrees or greater has continued to increase, contributing to improved patient care outcomes and incredible advances in patient safety.



Five Consecutive Magnet® Designations

2004 • 2008 • 2014 • 2019 • 2024
Two Decades of Distinction

External recognition of excellence has grown including:

- Designated Platinum Center of Excellence by the Extracorporeal Life Support Organization (ELSO)
- Lisa Bollman Transport Award



Ultimately, the organization's pursuit of excellence has been validated with Magnet® redesignation in 2008, 2014, and 2019. In March 2024 we achieved the distinction of achieving our fifth ANCC Magnet Recognition®.

Magnet Recognition® Exemplars

Our achievement of Magnet Recognition® has been further substantiated by the identification of exemplars. Magnet® appraisers highlight programs or practices they deem worthy of imitation and have identified 26 exemplars at Valley Children's over the past five designations.

A few examples of exemplars include:

- Beads from the Heart
- Innovative use of Family-Centered Care
- L.E.G.A.C.Y. Nursing Care Delivery Model
- Meeting individual patient needs via birthday parties, baptisms, end-of-life care, and Condition Help
- Community Partnerships
- Nursing Peer Review Committee
- Addressing the cultural and ethical needs of patients
- Interprofessional team collaboration
- George's Pass
- Inpatient outcomes for Central Line-Associated Blood Stream Infection (CLABSI), Catheter-Associated Urinary Tract Infection (CAUTI), Hospital-Acquired Pressure Injury (HAPI) Stages 2 and above.
- Inpatient unit-level patient satisfaction for Patient Engagement/Patient Centered Care, Service Recovery, Courtesy and Respect, and Pain.

These and numerous untold efforts have resulted in an enduring impact on the lives of thousands of children and families.

The Future

As one of only 9.7% of hospitals in the US with Magnet® designation², Valley Children's models the way with our journey. Our success is built on the foundation of excellence in patient and family-centered care, the professional practice of nursing, the work environment, and unceasing dedication to the children and families we serve. As healthcare needs continue to evolve, we will work hard to find innovative solutions to address and anticipate these needs. Our future achievements will stem from applying new knowledge through evidence-based practice. Committed to ongoing research, performance improvement, and scholarly activities, we believe professional development, shared decision-making, and interprofessional collaboration are central to nursing excellence.

We are committed to the quest for excellence; nothing less will do.

¹Nursing Honors | Valley Children's Healthcare (valleychildrens.org), accessed April 9, 2024.

²Nursing World (n.d.). Find a Magnet Organization, ANCC American Nurses Credentialing Center. Retrieved from <https://www.nursingworld.org/organizational-programs/magnet/find-a-magnet-organization>, accessed March 14, 2024.



Friend of Nursing Award

Hok Sisana, Utility Engineer, Maintenance

In the realm of healthcare, there are individuals whose impact transcends their designated roles, leaving an indelible mark on the lives they touch. Hok Sisana, utility engineer, is one such individual. His unwavering dedication to sustain and improve the environment surrounding the patients, families, and healthcare teams at Valley Children's makes him a true friend of nursing.

Hok embodies the spirit of collaboration, compassion, and excellence in every facet of his work. His commitment to environmental sustainability has not only supported our facility's infrastructure, but also enriched the quality of care provided to patients and their families.

Nurses can count on Hok to address all concerns with precision in a timely and professional manner. Whether ensuring families find their way, extending a friendly greeting to everyone he encounters, or always being positive and approachable, Hok's genuine care and concern for patients and their families have been a source of encouragement to all who have had the privilege of crossing paths with him.

Hok's team spirit and steady support for the neonatal intensive care and pediatric intensive care teams at Valley Children's have been nothing short of extraordinary. He understands the unique challenges faced by these specialized units, and has worked tirelessly to provide them with what they need to deliver the highest standard of care.

Valley Children's Healthcare expresses our deepest gratitude for Hok's selfless dedication and tireless efforts, which exemplify the very essence of what it means to be a true friend of nursing. In honoring Hok with this well-deserved recognition, we not only celebrate his remarkable achievements, but also reaffirm our collective commitment to excellence, compassion, and collaboration in everything we do.

Hok is truly a shining example of the difference one person can make in the lives of many.

We congratulate Hok Sisana,
Valley Children's 2024 Friend of Nursing Award.

Team Excellence Award

Critical Care Transport Team



Since its establishment in 1973, Valley Children's Healthcare Critical Care Transport team has transcended its modest beginnings to become a beacon of excellence in neonatal and pediatric transport across Central California and beyond. The team initially was comprised of on-shift Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Registered Nurses (RNs) and Respiratory Care Practitioners (RCPs) who conducted the first transports utilizing a simple van driven by a Plant Services worker. The evolution from humble origins to the sophisticated operations of today, mirrors the team's relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation in critical care transport.

The pioneering spirit of the Critical Care Transport team is evident in its early adoption of an RN and RCP team model for interfacility transports, a concept that has since been embraced by other teams for its efficiency and effectiveness in improving patient outcomes. The team's innovative approach to care, including the early integration of therapeutic hypothermia during neonatal transports, has helped set new standards in the field and contributed to the broader adoption of this lifesaving technique across the United States.

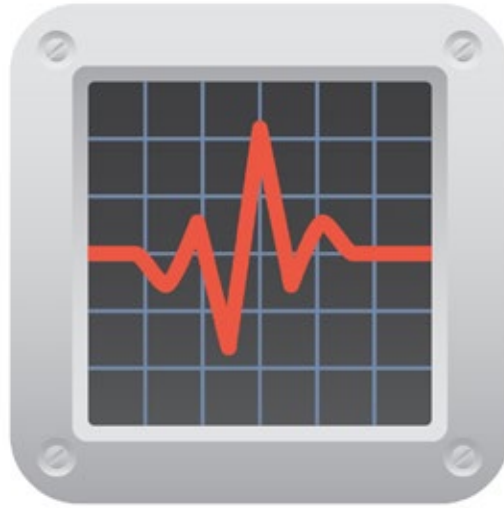
Today, the Critical Care Transport team is made up of a dedicated group of professionals including dispatchers, neonatal and pediatric nurses, and critical care respiratory therapists, all united by a shared mission to provide exceptional care to the youngest and most vulnerable patients. Conducting approximately 1,400 transports annually by ground and air, the team ensures that critical care begins the moment they are called upon and serves as the vital link to the comprehensive care offered at Valley Children's.

The team extends their commitment beyond the immediate needs of transport to actively contributing to the education of healthcare professionals within the community and beyond. Through collaboration with outreach programs and training initiatives, the team plays a pivotal role in elevating the standard of neonatal and pediatric care, ensuring that high-quality care is accessible in all communities across the Valley.

As we celebrate the achievements of the Valley Children's Healthcare Critical Care Transport team, we recognize their unwavering dedication to innovation, education, and excellence in care. Their journey from a modest operation to a leading force in critical care transport exemplifies the transformative power of our values including collaboration, innovation, excellence, and compassionate care. The team not only impacts the lives of the families they serve, but also shapes the future of neonatal and pediatric transport, continuing to push the boundaries of what is possible in the pursuit of excellence.

We congratulate the Critical Care Transport Team

Valley Children's 2024 Team Excellence Award.



New Knowledge, Innovations and Improvements

Nurse of the Year 2024

New Knowledge, Innovations & Improvements

CJ Rojas-Noto, BS, RN, CEN, CAISS

Trauma Program Quality Coordinator RN,
Trauma Administration



From her position as Valley Children’s Hospital Trauma Program Quality Coordinator RN, CJ Rojas-Noto is helping shape care for children suffering from traumatic injuries. She has committed herself to improving outcomes and advocating for best practices, embodying a deep sense of responsibility and professionalism to ensure trauma patients’ well-being and optimal return to quality of life.

A passion for exploring new frontiers, CJ championed efforts to transform the computer trauma registry, providing leadership in data capture, entry, and analysis. She watches pediatric trauma literature closely to identify opportunities to enhance nursing practice and deliver the best trauma care possible. CJ understands that performance improvement is a vital component of healthcare organizations. Through innovative and influential leadership, CJ continually strives to drive the meaningful progress of Valley Children’s Trauma Program.

Under CJ’s leadership, the trauma program is participating in a national trial with potential to significantly improve care for children with cervical spine injuries. She recently collaborated with providers and key stakeholders to develop clinical pathways grounded in evidence-based practice for patients with blunt cerebrovascular injury. She also took the initiative to apply her knowledge of trauma systems to investigate whether guidelines for solid organ injury were being optimized. Her research identified opportunities for new guidelines to be implemented and for ongoing staff education to support alignment with best practices and enhance consistency in care delivery. The trauma program at Valley Children’s did not previously have a formalized pathway for solid organ injury, but CJ helped guide the trauma committee to formally adopt evidence-based guidelines to follow, moving forward. Her work was showcased with a poster presentation at the national annual meeting of the Pediatric Trauma Society.

CJ introduced and secured funding for an innovative practice to enhance the trauma response team’s communication. She works on the team designing and implementing the dashboard, which provides real-time communication on critical patient care information including head-to-toe assessments, medications administered, and more. CJ utilized her skills as a video creator to prepare the proposal for the Emergency Department Epic Resuscitation Dashboard and Monitor project, a collaborative effort between the Trauma Program and Emergency Medical Response Team Committee. She was also involved in the creation of the Trauma Injury Prevention Dashboard. With its interactive graphics and heat map, the dashboard identifies geographical locations of injury types and mortalities of patients, helping support injury prevention efforts.

CJ’s dedication to learning and imparting knowledge is matched by her high level of integrity, which magnifies her influence in the nursing community. CJ is a member of the Society of Trauma Nurses, Texas Trauma Coordinators Forum, Pediatric Trauma Society, and Emergency Nurses Association. She shares innovative practices on a national scale through active membership in the American Trauma Society (ATS), and regularly participates in National Trauma Awareness Month and Trauma Prevention Coalition Partnership Workgroups.

CJ exemplifies the attributes necessary to not only succeed, but also continually improve trauma care.

We congratulate CJ Rojas-Noto,

Valley Children’s Nurse of the Year 2024 Excellence in New Knowledge, Innovations & Improvements.

NICU Patients Employ All Five Senses for Healthy Brain Development



Valley Children’s Healthcare has been part of the California Perinatal Quality Care Collaborative (CPQCC) for many years, tracking neonatal outcomes and participating in collaborative improvement projects. In July 2022, the NICU team joined the CPQCC-sponsored collaborative NEOBrain, which stands for NICUs Enabling Optimum Brain Health. Scientific evidence has shown that positive sensory input helps with brain development in premature infants, and NEOBrain focuses on high-impact areas of neuroprotection. Valley Children’s is one of 30 hospitals empowered through membership to improve outcomes for critically ill newborns through neuroprotective care.

In January 2023, Sarah von Ah, RN, filled the newly created position of NICU Nurse Navigator and serves as a family’s first contact in the NICU. Her role has evolved with the introduction of the CPQCC NEOBrain collaborative to include incorporating and expanding the NICU practices of neuroprotective care.

“My role as nurse navigator is to engage with families and equip them to be part of their infant’s care,” said von Ah. “I work hard to build trust with parents, creating a supportive environment where parents feel comfortable asking questions, expressing concerns,



and sharing their experiences.”

Introducing Neuroprotective Care to the NICU

The NEOBrain Collaborative aligns with patient and family satisfaction goals at Valley Children’s. Membership serves as an anchor to solidify the neuroprotective and holistic care provided by the NICU team to medically fragile infants and their families.

Neuroprotective care is designed to:

- promote maturation of the infant’s brain in a normal way,
- protect the infant’s senses and neuronal pathways, and
- prevent injury to the brain.

“Minimizing noxious stimuli during the first 72 hours may be critical to determining lifelong neurodevelopmental outcomes.”

Neuroprotective care not only helps promote brain development, but also helps prevent adverse outcomes such as intraventricular hemorrhage (IVH), a brain bleed unique to premature babies.

“Tiny neonates are at especially high risk for IVH within the first three days of life,” said Jennifer Norgaard, MSN, RNC-NIC, ACCNS-P, CNS NICU. “Minimizing noxious stimuli during the first 72 hours may be critical to determining lifelong neurodevelopmental outcomes.”

Noxious stimuli can be sound, light, handling, or any encounter in the NICU environment that will have a negative impact on the little, developing brain.

“You can’t eliminate all of the negative sensory stimuli,

but we are working to minimize it," said Norgaard. "The NICU team knows not to poke if you don't need to. They know to provide comfort without giving meds when appropriate and to intentionally approach the babies with touch first."

Forming the NEOBrain Taskforce

Nursing leadership worked with Norgaard and von Ah to form the NEOBrain Taskforce, an interdisciplinary team tasked with developing processes and providing education to implement the neuroprotective plan of care at Valley Children's.



The taskforce established two main goals:

- engage parents as a second set of hands to support their baby during painful procedures or care times, and
- implement tools that support parent-infant interactions and promote positive touch and sensory input.

The taskforce determined key drivers to support neuroprotective care in the NICU, and implemented the new processes in September 2022.

"Initially, we presented NEOBrain at a staff meeting in the NICU," said von Ah. "One of our neonatologists explained what this approach to care looks like."

Methodologies of neuroprotective care include:

- promoting positive sensory interaction,
- minimizing unnecessary interventions, and
- integrating parents as crucial team members and partners in care.

"There are things we can do in the NICU to provide neuroprotective care for preterm babies by creating an environment that is similar to what they would experience in utero," said Norgaard. "Care parameters



may include positive touch, like kangaroo care and hand hugs."

Terms like hand hugs and kangaroo care (a name for skin-to-skin contact between parent and baby) are championed by the SENSE program developed by USC Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, NICU Therapy Lab. SENSE, an acronym for supporting and enhancing NICU sensory experiences, defines interventions for all five senses by gestational age.



SENSE helps maximize parent engagement throughout their infant's hospitalization, empowering them to positively influence their baby's outcomes.

"Valley Children's is focused on all senses in our NICU, not just touch," said Norgaard. Babies benefit from hearing their parents read to them and from smelling their mother's scent.

"Valley Children's is focused on all senses in our NICU, not just touch."

The NEOBrain Taskforce implemented a toolkit that contains scent cloths with instructions as well as a booklet detailing other ways to provide positive sensory input to help tiny patients grow and develop in the NICU. Upon admission, families receive their kit along with educational guidance from a member of the care team.



Educating Clinical Staff and NICU Families

The NEOBrain Taskforce developed the plans and procedures for educating the nursing and occupational therapy teams on the new plan of care. They also implemented a program of education for the family.

Learning the ins and outs of the SENSE program began with bedside staff. “We held a NEOBrain cookies social where we presented our booklets,” said von Ah. “It was like a meet and greet for RNs to come in and see the products we were going to use at bedside.”

The Level IV NICU at Valley Children’s Hospital is an out-born facility with admissions arriving by neonatal transport. Due to the critical nature of the first hours of a premature baby’s life, von Ah worked with the transport team to engage with families to begin practicing neuroprotective care before they arrive in the NICU.

“The transport team has teamed up with our vision,” said von Ah. “They are helping to encourage and

support parents in establishing positive sensory interactions with their baby prior to leaving the referring facility.”

New processes for documenting Positive Parent Touch were implemented to capture sensory interventions that took place at the referring facility and enroute to Valley Children’s.

“If a family learns how to do a hand hug before arriving, their baby benefits during the critical 72-hour window of neurodevelopment,” said Norgaard.

The thought of handling critically ill infants with complex ventilators covering their tiny faces and umbilical IV lines inserted into their midsections can cause concern.

“We have one of the best UPE rates amongst our NICU comparisons,” said Norgaard of unplanned extubation events at Valley Children’s. “We are measuring UPE and IVH rates as our counterbalancing measures. We want to ensure they don’t go up. And they have not. Kangaroo care has not affected these rates at all.”

“There was some initial resistance from the staff and physicians to implementing family-centered care, especially in regard to early holding,” said von Ah. “Families can be nervous about having their baby’s lines come out. Sometimes it’s all they can do to stand at the isolette.”

Committed to implementing neuroprotective care in the NICU, the NEOBrain Taskforce pressed through the challenges intrinsic to providing positive sensory input to critically ill infants.

“This goes a long way in fostering a sense of control and confidence during a challenging time.”

“Educating parents about their baby’s condition, treatment options, and care procedures empowers them to actively participate in their baby’s care and decision-making,” said von Ah. “This goes a long way in fostering a sense of control and confidence during a challenging time.”

Providing hands-on training to parents equips them to practice essential care skills under the guidance of healthcare professionals, boosting their confidence in caring for their fragile infant. Demonstrated skills include feeding, diapering, bathing, and monitoring their baby’s vital signs.

"Recognizing that each family's needs and preferences are unique, I tailor education and support to meet the specific needs of the parents and their baby," said von Ah.

"A lot of touch is not positive," said Norgaard. "Premature babies want firm pressure, not soft stroking or patting. Rather than telling parents, 'No,' we say, 'Let me show you how your baby likes to be touched right now.' A term baby wants different sensory experiences. The SENSE program teaches what kind of touch is comforting to premature babies."

"We have changed the culture from 'no you can't' to 'this is the why,'" said von Ah. "A mom recently said to me, 'Sarah, they asked me if I wanted to hold skin-to-skin. Yes, I do. But my baby was showing signs of not being ready so I didn't.' Families are learning the why of not holding, and they know when their baby is or isn't ready."

Documenting Neuroprotective Care



The NEOBrain Taskforce worked with the Information Technology department at Valley Children's to optimize the electronic medical record (EMR) to capture all sensory input provided by the care team and parents. Together, they updated the nursing flow sheet in Epic EMR to include sensory interventions among the selections in the drop-down menu under "Care Provided" in the developmental care section.

Acknowledging the emotional impact of having a critically ill baby, the NICU team offers support, validation, and coping strategies to help parents navigate the rollercoaster of emotions they may experience, including anxiety, fear, grief, and hope.

"If we can get families involved in their baby's care early, their perception of confidence at discharge improves," said Norgaard. "Families feel more prepared to minimize pain and provide comfort."

Key Drivers to Success with Eligible Infants* Process Measures:

- Infants receiving parental positive touch within 72 hours of birth improved from 46% to 80%
- Infants receiving parental positive touch on a weekly basis improved from 0% to 35%
- Infants receiving positive touch daily from care team improved from 50% to 100%
- Infants receiving skin to skin in the first week of life improved from 0% to 44%
- Breastfeeding at discharge improved from 69% to 75%

Outcome Measures:

- Percentage of parents reporting yes to "Were you allowed to be involved in your child's stay as much as you wanted?" improved from 72.7% to 100%

Balancing Measures:

- Percentage of eligible infants who develop severe IVH (grade III or IV) remained unchanged at 1%
- Percentage of unplanned extubation (UPE) among eligible infant remained unchanged at 0%

*Data reported June 2022 – August 2023. Measures averaged over a 14-month period. Qualitative data collected via parent survey. Quantitative data collected via patient chart reviews. Eligible infants: born less than 32 weeks' gestation and admitted to NICU within 24 hours of life.

Family-integrated care models are associated with decreased maternal and paternal stress at discharge and improved mental health outcomes.

"By actively involving parents in the care of their fragile babies, we not only promote the baby's health and development, but also strengthen the resilience, confidence, and well-being of the entire family unit," said von Ah.

The data charting the impact of implementing positive sensory input in the Valley Children's NICU has shown remarkable results.

Doctors Radhika Narang and Vidhi Shah, Norgaard, and



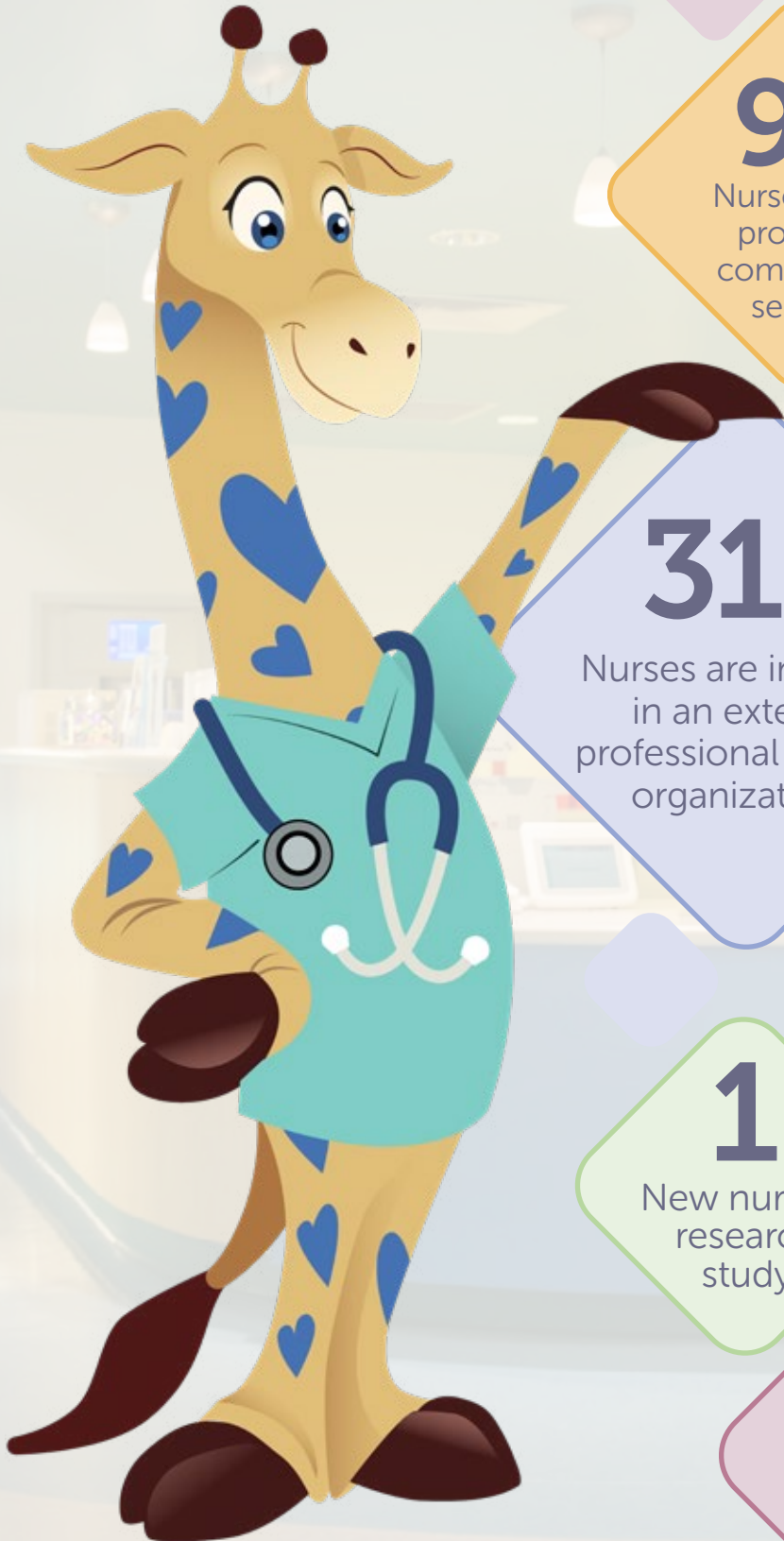
von Ah submitted an abstract proposal to the 37th Annual Gravens Conference on The Environment of Care for High-Risk Newborns. They proposed to make either a poster or a podium presentation, and the conference honored these innovators by extending an invitation to the team to present at their podium in March 2024. Dr. Narang and von Ah traveled together to the conference, and credit the success of the neuroprotective care program at Valley Children's to the entire NICU team.

"The care team has done a wonderful job implementing neuroprotective care in our NICU," said von Ah. "They've been 100% on board since we joined the collaborative. Not a day has gone by that they haven't been engaged. I'm incredibly proud of them."

Norgaard agrees. "The engagement of the NEOBrain Taskforce has been absolutely tremendous — from the neonatologists to the nurses to the other disciplines on the taskforce," she said. "Their dedication is a credit to the success of the program."

By integrating positive sensory interventions with the family, the NICU team is working to improve parents' perceptions of competence and involvement in their baby's care. The team hopes to not only sustain the neuroprotective care model at Valley Children's, but also work toward evolving the NEOBrain program to include a Neonatal Intensive Parenting unit one day in the future.

Scholarly and Community Activities Statistics (FY23)



22

Nurses serve as adjunct faculty or clinical instructors

98

Nurses have provided community service

25

Nurses presented external poster or podium presentation

311

Nurses are involved in an external professional nursing organizations

7

Nurses published in external professional literature

1

New nursing research study

92

Nurses are enrolled in an academic program (8.2%)



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