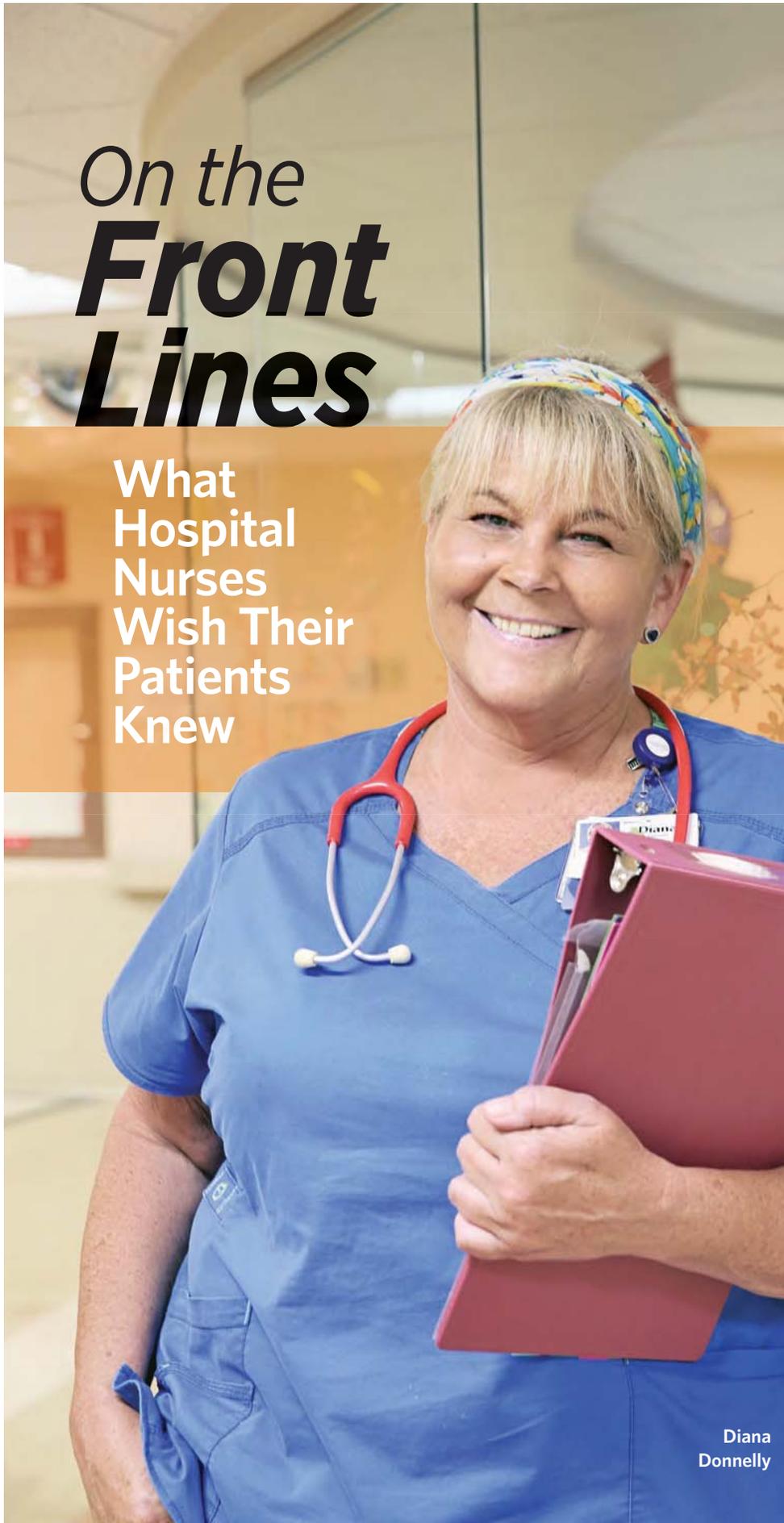


On the **Front Lines**

What
Hospital
Nurses
Wish Their
Patients
Knew



Diana
Donnelly

Looking for the heartbeat of the hospital? You don't have to go far to find it. Just look for a nurse.

In HCA hospitals, more than 80,000 nurses tend to patients' wounds, administer medications, answer questions about tests and treatments, celebrate births and recoveries, and comfort those facing bad news or tough choices. The work is taxing, both physically and mentally, but the rewards far outweigh the hardships, according to the following three recipients of the 2016 HCA Excellence in Nursing Award.

These individuals embody the attributes of nursing excellence, which led us to ask them what they wish patients and their families knew about nursing. Their answers can help you improve your hospital experience.

1 We want you to partner with us. Patients do better when they take an active role in their care, says Victor Smith, RN, director of medical-surgical nursing at North Florida Regional Medical Center in Gainesville, Florida. He encourages patients and their loved ones to speak up if they're confused about a diagnostic test or have concerns about the doctor's treatment plan.

"We don't want to give you the information and then send you out the door," Smith says. "If you don't like a particular treatment plan, let's work together to find something that works better for you. Many of our patients don't feel like they have the right to speak up, but we want you to."

RHIAN SWAIN, SHAWNA ROSS

Veronica Meardith



2 **Honesty is always the best policy.**

It can be embarrassing to admit you still smoke, overindulge in alcohol or eat a pint of ice cream every night. But the more your nurses know, the better, says Veronica Meardith, RN, clinical manager of the cardiac cath lab and chest pain coordinator at Doctors Hospital in Augusta, Georgia. Nurses' insights are key to ensuring your doctor knows what's going on with you and can tailor treatments accordingly.

3 **Symptoms can flare up when least expected.**

No one likes being woken up at 2 a.m. by a nurse checking vital signs, but round-the-clock monitoring is essential to ensure your condition remains stable.

"We want to provide quality care at all times, not just from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.," Smith says.

4 **We wish we could be everywhere at once.**

Nurses may appear to have superpowers as they care for multiple patients during each shift. That's because they are constantly prioritizing tasks based on the level of care each patient requires, explains Smith.

A patient struggling to breathe will take priority over one who wants ice chips.

"It's difficult to explain this to patients, but it's necessary," Smith says. "We do hourly rounds to visit every patient. We try to anticipate needs when we make that visit, promising to return the next hour. It's important that we keep that promise."

5 Your emotional well-being is also a priority. Hospitalization can be stressful and frightening. Nurses

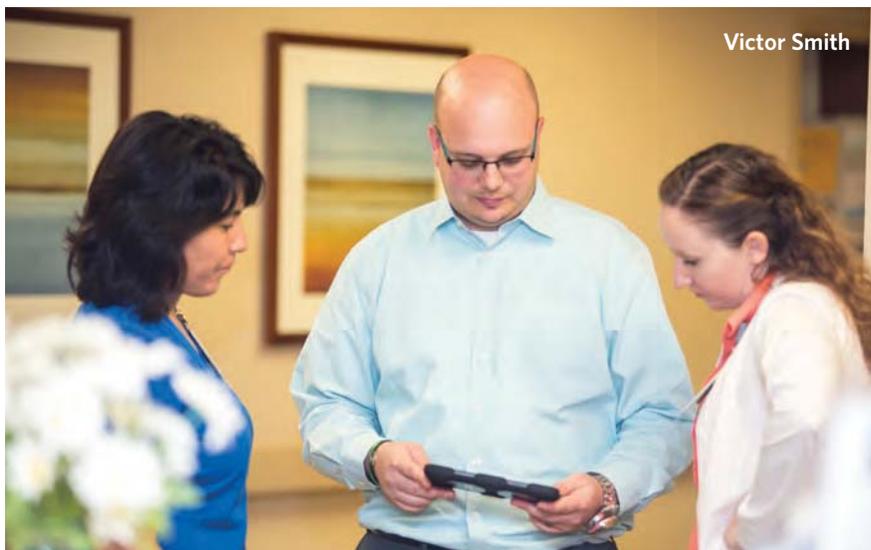
want to calm your fears and will offer a listening ear or a hand to hold when they can.

"I dive in deeper to what's causing [my patients] stress," explains Diana Donnelly, RN, a cancer nurse navigator at Fawcett Memorial Hospital in Port Charlotte, Florida. "We ask those hard questions about what's going on in their lives."

When you need more support than they can provide, nurses can arrange for you to receive volunteer visits, pastoral care or counseling.

6 We feel pain, too. A nurse's job can be emotionally draining, says Smith, especially when they have to be the bearer of bad news or explain an upsetting diagnosis. Nurses often become close to their patients, and learning that someone they care about is suffering or is not responding to treatment is never easy.

7 Our job extends beyond the bedside. Nurses do a lot of behind-the-scenes recordkeeping to keep track of your status and treatments. They also attend continuing education courses to stay up-to-date on the latest healthcare advancements. And many, like Meardith, use their skills



Victor Smith

to serve their communities. As a chest pain coordinator, Meardith travels to churches, schools and community centers to talk about heart disease prevention and healthier living.

8 *Your family and friends are a valuable part of your care team.* Research shows that patients who have a good support system, both during a hospital stay and after discharge, tend to have better outcomes and quicker recoveries.

“We want family members or loved ones to participate in the patient’s care,” Donnelly explains. “Family members are often the ones taking notes and asking questions, and they are the ones who will notice a sudden change such as breathing problems if we’re not in the room.”

If you’re not sure what you can do, just ask the nurse. (Learn more ways

The Nation’s Largest Healthcare Profession

With more than 3.1 million registered nurses in the United States, nurses are estimated to outnumber physicians by 2 to 1.

Source: American Association of Colleges of Nursing



to support someone in the hospital on pages 12–13.)

9 *It takes more than a doctor’s signature to discharge a patient.* People get impatient when they know they are about to be released from the hospital, but

discharge planning is a multi-step process, especially for those who need additional rehabilitation or outpatient services. Everyone wants to be sure you know what you need to do to continue your recovery, so the nurse will prepare written discharge instructions, prescriptions and other information about self-care, Meardith says.

Nurses affiliated with HCA facilities are among the most dedicated in the industry. They work hand in glove with the entire hospital staff to increase patient satisfaction, educate patients about their conditions and treatments, and improve communication. Nursing leaders also visit patients every day to learn how care is being delivered in the unit, Smith explains.

Together, these efforts advance nurses’ ultimate goal: Putting patients first. ■



“Helping patients realize they’re loved is equal to meeting their pain and nutritional needs.”

— Diana Donnelly

In **Love** With Their Work

Nursing Is More Than a Job

Diana Donnelly’s 12-hour shifts start with 87 steps: the distance between the elevator on the oncology floor and the nurses’ station at Fawcett Memorial Hospital in Port Charlotte, Florida. Getting to that spot, she says, feels “like going home.” And that nursing station will be command central for Donnelly as she tends to patient’s medical needs and interacts with their loved ones.

Like other nurses recognized for excellence, Donnelly doesn’t see her job as merely a way to earn a living. To her, nursing is a calling—one she discovered in midlife after working with at-risk youth for more than 20 years. Today, she relishes the opportunity to serve and comfort those at their most vulnerable.



“It’s satisfying to heal a patient, but it’s equally pleasant to watch employees grow.”

— Victor Smith

“When I get in the car to go to work, I still have that first-day-of-school feeling. It’s a feeling of excitement,” says Donnelly. “I haven’t lost that. I hope I never do. I was supposed to be a nurse.”

Impacting Lives

To speed healing, nurses embrace a variety of roles. Nurse navigators like Donnelly, for example, walk with patients and their families through cancer diagnosis and treatment. Those duties can range from coordinating meals with registered dietitians to working with clinicians on pain management. In some situations, Donnelly even partners with social workers to help patients manage transportation and financial needs.

It’s a job that takes a combination of compassion and attention to detail. She recalls once when a patient was nauseous and weak after chemotherapy, she requested macaroni and cheese from the hospital’s food service team.

“That simple act was the difference between her getting stronger or growing weaker,” Donnelly.

Those kinds of comforting gestures can stick with patients and families for years, as Victor Smith, RN, knows quite well. As a teen, Smith’s father had a car accident that landed him in the hospital for an extended period. While there, one of his main caregivers was a male nurse named Bubba.

“Bubba wasn’t just treating my father. He was also a huge support to my mom and my father’s small kids,” Smith recalls.

Seeing the impact Bubba had on his family convinced Smith to study nursing. Today, he is director of medical-surgical nursing at North Florida Regional Medical Center in

Gainesville, Florida. Smith says one of his favorite things about his job is that no two shifts are alike.

“Here in North Florida, we get everything from flesh-eating bacteria to monkey bites, so every day’s a little different,” Smith says.

Sharing Knowledge

Balancing two roles at Doctors Hospital of Augusta, Georgia, keeps Veronica Meardith, RN, on her toes. And she wouldn’t have it any other way. As coordinator of the hospital’s cardiac cath lab, Meardith works with a team of nurses to treat patients who need cardiac stents. When she’s not in the lab, her responsibilities as chest pain coordinator take her into the community to advise groups on heart care, healthy cooking and exercise.

“I am passionate about educating people about prevention, early detection and treatment of heart disease,” Meardith says. “People are usually open to health advice. They just need someone to show they care. People want to be empowered.”

Smith says he also finds satisfaction in empowering others, particularly the nurses he trains and mentors.

“It’s satisfying to heal a patient,” Smith says. “But it’s equally pleasing to watch employees grow from being new students to graduating and becoming critical care nurses or labor and delivery nurses.”

Making Connections

One of the best parts of nursing is getting to know patients, Donnelly says. Talking to patients about their life experiences and work can provide insights that improve treatment, but it helps in other ways, too.

“I want to let them know they are unique,” Donnelly explains. “Helping patients realize they’re loved is equal to meeting their pain and nutritional needs.”

And it’s not only the patients who benefit from these connections.

“I wish my patients knew the impact that they had on my life,” Meardith says. “I think about my patients long after they have left the hospital. I often sit and wonder how they are doing. Nursing is a hard job, but it is my passion. Nursing is not just what I do, but it’s who I am.” ■



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