

What makes University Health a Unique Place to Work?

By Monette Chiarolanza, RN

American poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf once said, "I'll lift you and you'll lift me and we'll both ascend together." This statement beautifully reflects the attitude of service from leadership at University Health (UH), an academic medical center in Kansas City, Missouri. From the chief nursing officer to student nurses, the nursing staff at UH builds up one another; making the work fulfilling and enriching. At a time when nurses across the country are feeling a lack of support and leaving the bedside, UH is creating mentorship and nurse resident programs, with layers of support and guidance. Its student nurse extern programs help support and grow nurses early in their careers, while still working to emotionally support veteran nurses feeling burned out. University Health is also an essential hospital, committed to caring for patients regardless of their ability to pay. Our medical team supports the city's most vulnerable population and is heavily involved in-community outreach programs and partnerships. Last fiscal year, the medical center provided more than \$152 million in uncompensated care. This love and compassion for our community is a bonding factor in our hospital employee community. As we lift our community, we learn how to lift one another and together we are rising. University Health was Kansas City's first medical center to vaccinate its staff from the COVID-19 virus. It took a leadership role in COVID testing, providing more 170,000 to date*. It also prioritized ensuring *everyone* had access to the COVID-19 vaccine. To date, providers have given more than 120,000 doses**. This is why we proudly declare that UH providers have the brightest minds and biggest hearts. And it is this support and servant leadership that makes University Health a perfect candidate for the HOLLIBLU 'Strive to Thrive' Award.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UH leadership has been creative about supporting its nursing staff. From free massages at the medical center, to rejuvenation rooms filled with nourishing snacks, and a space for nurses to write encouraging notes to one another. Our CNO and CEO have even brought breakfast and spent some time working as Patient Care Techs getting vital signs and blood sugars when staffing is short. These acts of service send a powerful message that let nurses know the administration sees us and is aware that we are short staffed, tired, and our bodies hurt. At a time when hospitals across the country are demanding more and more from their nurses, UH leadership is offering support. We are being offered critical pay incentives, and leadership is prioritizing its communication to ensure nurses know the quality, and compassionate care is appreciated. We receive emails with information on all the discounts nurses can receive in the area or online, are being offered space and time to rejuvenate and meditate, and most importantly, the nursing leadership does an incredible job of verbally expressing their gratitude for their nurses. They see areas of opportunity and growth, not opportunities to write up and threaten. Nurse leaders take time to learn each nurses' individual strengths and help the nurses build on them. Student nurses are able to discuss struggles at school and are encouraged and supported. Because of this support, it's not unusual for many student nurse externs to join the University Health team upon graduation. The bonds these externs build during school, carry through their nurse residency program and to the floor and bedside. The residency program provides novice nurses with mentors, preceptors, advisors, and nurse educators. That support translates to elevated patient care. Additionally, UH leadership understands the demands of the healthcare profession and is committed to the overall wellbeing of our nurses. UH stands out in our community with this commitment; recognizing how hard our dedicated nurses work by establishing the nursing sabbatical program to allow for our nurses to

recharge. The Nurse Residency Program at University Health, in partnership with Vizient and AACN Nurse Residency Program, is a fantastic program designed to support and grow novice nurses in this challenging, but highly rewarding field. Cohorts begin each January, June, and August, and participants receive salary and benefits for hours worked while in the program. Monthly education sessions focus on critical thinking, patient safety, quality care, teamwork, and evidence-based practice. The mentor's job in the Telemetry Department is to partner with our leadership team and our amazing workforce to help empower, educate, and support our staff. We believe a good mentor should be encouraging, positive, and embrace servant leadership. From the moment a new hire is welcomed to our team, our goal is ensure they have a positive onboarding and orientation experience. We also help to guide our staff through various stages of their career because we are committed to investing in our people, supporting their ongoing learning needs, and facilitating personal and professional development. The (SNE) Student Nurse Extern role was designed to provide an opportunity for future nurses to put their clinical skills into practice today and establishing a *pathway* into our Nurse Residency Program. The Nurse Mentor model is the foundation for an individualized learning program for the SNE and NR throughout their transition into nursing. The Nurse Mentor is an Educator role designed to be hands on, building a strong clinical foundation and onboarding some of the brightest minds into our diverse organization. Director of Telemetry and HSD Float Pool Services Angela Kline-Couch stated, "I have been in awe at the caliber our Nurse Residents bring to the organization who have had the opportunity to advance through our nursing pathway from SNE to Capstone to NR. I have seen lives saved and decisions made for the betterment of our patients due the training and confidence the pathway provides, I am proud to be a member of an organization that values diversity in a way that we do here at UH and celebrating our

differences. You will hear it said repeatedly that this is in itself a reason our caregivers and leaders choose to serve here at UH. The longevity of our nursing staff to our returning caregivers “boomerangs” provide proof for our dedication to our mission and values.

Recognized by HIMSS Davies Society, UH has lead the way in technical advancements supporting improved nursing workflow, connectivity, communication and safety through the partnership of our healthcare teams. Nurses and physicians collaborating together with Cerner IT to establish best practice while improving our quality of care, safety, and time at the bedside with our patients.

Nursing at UH was the first in KC area to re-establish the acute care RN – LPN team nursing model. Allowing greater opportunity to impact patient experience by providing a team of nurses to care for their patients; improving quality, safety, patient and caregiver satisfaction. Our team is engaged in the success of our patients and our caregivers from caregiver advancement to true patient centered care.

Servant leadership also includes helping nurses grow in their career and follow their passion. Whether it be switching departments, working different shifts, becoming a leader or educator, or simply improving individual areas of opportunity. Our nurse leadership helps their nurses grow where they were planted. They give us sunlight with words of encouragement and opportunities to learn from our shortcomings. They water us with empowerment, love, kindness and patience. They come behind us and pull the weeds out of our garden by offering to help and to pick up the slack when we are overwhelmed. All these acts of service allow staff nurses to grow strong roots, and blossom as loyal University Health nurses.

Here’s what nurses are saying about their nursing leadership.

“I owe my career opportunity to University Health from being accepted into the Stipend program while I was still in nursing school to supporting my advancement as a Nurse Leader. UH’s passion to serve allowed me the opportunity to be the director I am today. My hope is that I can give back as much to University Health as it has given to me over the years. We are family at UH regardless of our role and our goal is always to lift each other up- in and out of a pandemic. My greatest joy is watching new caregivers enter healthcare and grow successfully in their/our profession. The positive impact this has on our patients and our community we serve is endless. In truth, all of our Leaders including President and CEO Charlie Shields has been a guiding factor in supporting UH’s caregivers from our housekeeping team to nursing and on. UH genuinely cares about our success and that of our community. At the end of the day, serving our caregivers is easy... because they are the most dedicated and passionate individuals I have ever had the opportunity to work alongside.”

-Servant Leader, Angela Kline-Couch, MBA-HC, MSN, BSN, RN Director of Telemetry and HSD Float Pool Services

“Everybody comes together. We get it done. It makes you feel good about working here. I love the people that I work with. We are diverse. We are different. Sometimes, we can be short-handed, but when we need it, we come together. No attitude. I feel comfortable going to my leadership team about anything – all the way up the chain. Good or bad, I know I will not be judged. If you have a question, somebody will always be available to answer it. Our team always gets the support we need when we need it. No issues.”

- Jessica, Patient Care Technician

“We value servant leadership. We care not just about productivity – but the person. Our leaders move obstacles that may hinder work flow and then nurture the best in all of us.”

-Hope, Clinical Team Manager

“Our leaders are always available. I can go to any of them and they’ll help me. They have empathy. They listen – and sometimes that helps more than anything. They try to make assignments fair. They help with IVs, tasks, just anything!” **Sandy, RN**

“The best thing about working here is that there is nothing that leadership asks you to do that they won’t do themselves.” **Wendy, RN**

“When I started as a new nurse here at University Health, I felt very insecure and vulnerable, as many new nurses often do. However, I met so many people that were patient and compassionate with me. They helped me grow then, and still to this day, and I’m passionate about keeping that good fortune as a trademark of team.” –**Natalie, RN Nurse Resident Mentor**

University Health in Kansas City is filled with diverse servant leaders, nursing staff and the Brightest Minds with the Biggest Hearts. We speak many languages and come from diverse backgrounds, however we all speak the language of love and service, and we are united under the Servant Leadership of University Health.

***As of 1-19-21, University Health providers have performed nearly 192,000 COVID tests.**

****As of 1-19-21, UH providers have administered nearly 136,000 doses of the COVID vaccine.**