

# The Nursing Impact



Dearest nursing colleagues,

As chairs of the Nursing Professional Governance Councils of Emplify Health by Gundersen, we are absolutely thrilled to welcome you to this edition of The Nursing Impact. This publication is a testament to the extraordinary dedication, unwavering compassion, and profound expertise that each and every one of you brings to our organization. As we celebrate Nurses Week, it feels particularly fitting to pause and reflect on the collective power of our voice and the tangible difference we make in the lives of our patients, their families, and our community.

This report isn't just a collection of data points and achievements; it's a vibrant narrative woven from the threads of your commitment.

We are continually inspired by your resilience, advocacy, and relentless pursuit of excellence. You are the heart and soul of our organization, and your contributions extend far beyond the clinical realm. You are leaders, mentors, innovators, and most importantly, compassionate caregivers. Thank you for your tireless efforts, your insightful perspectives, and your unwavering commitment to our patients. We hope this edition serves as a powerful reminder of the collective strength and influence we possess when we work together to shape the future of nursing within our organization.

With sincere gratitude and admiration,



**Jordan Benedict,**  
**MSN, RN**  
Inpatient Council  
Chair



**Cathy Morris,**  
**BSN, RN**  
Outpatient Council  
Chair



**Elise Schneeberger,**  
**BSN, RN**  
Inpatient Council  
Vice Chair



**Brittany Klocek,**  
**BSN, RN**  
Outpatient Council  
Vice Chair



Nursing by the Numbers

2400  
nurses



Average  
Length  
of Service



9.6  
years

Count by Role

2,139 - Registered Nurses

467 - Certified Nursing Assistants

78 - Licensed Practical Nurses

423 - Medical Assistants

183 - Advanced Practice Nurse Prescribers

455 - Other Nursing Team Members

Length of  
Service by  
Role



REGISTERED NURSES  
9.4 YEARS

LICENSED PRACTICAL  
NURSES  
11.9 YEARS

ADVANCED PRACTICE  
NURSE PRESCRIBERS  
10.9 YEARS

Nurses  
Hired in  
2024

REGISTERED NURSES

223

LICENSED  
PRACTICAL NURSES

8

ADVANCED PRACTICE  
NURSE PRESCRIBERS



13



## Nursing by the Numbers

### Geographic distribution of our nurses

1,587- La Crosse

149 - Onalaska

95 - Wabasha Area



68 - Wisconsin Regional Clinics

81 - West Union Area

55 - Hillsboro Area

51 - Boscobel Area

42 - Whitehall Area

40 - Friendship Area

40 - Winona

25 - Iowa Regional Clinics

13 - Tweeten Care Center

12 - Harmony Care Center

9 - Minnesota Regional Clinics





## Nurse Excellence Award Recipients

For the past 25 years, our nurses have been recognized by fellow colleagues for their exceptional contributions in various areas of practice and exemplary expression of the Nursing Professional Framework, Caritas Processes, and Emplify Health's mission, vision & values. Congratulations to the 2025 recipients!



**Micki Gilberts, BSN, RN**  
**La Crosse Pediatric Specialty**  
Excellence in Nursing Management

"It is apparent that Micki is invested in the growth and development of our nurses. She wants nurses to feel confident and educated in what they are doing."



**Jessica Duffy, BSN, RN**  
**La Crosse Hospital Labor & Delivery**  
Excellence in Nursing Education

"Jessica isn't afraid to think differently—to find solutions where others see challenges."



**Shannon Blumenstein, BSN, RN**  
**La Crosse Hospital Float Pool**  
Excellence in Nursing Leadership

"Shannon is a beloved role model for her colleagues. She is always willing to mentor and support others, and she is a constant source of encouragement and inspiration."



**Charlene Nelson, BSN, RN**  
**Onalaska Urgent Care**  
Excellence in Nursing Innovation

"Charlene's innovative spirit, along with her ability to mentor and inspire others, has created a lasting impact on the Onalaska Urgent Care department."





## Nurse Excellence Award Recipients



**Amber Yanske, BSN, RN**

**La Crosse Orthopedic Surgery- Pediatric Team**

Excellence in Nursing Practice

Holistic Nursing RN

*"No task is 'below' Amber, and she humbly and compassionately serves our patients in everything she does."*



**Ashlee Bailey, LPN**

**La Crosse Hospital Renal Dialysis**

Excellence in Nursing Practice

Holistic Nursing LPN

*"In Ashlee's practice, she not only ensures the physical well-being of patients undergoing dialysis but also deeply engages in addressing their emotional, mental and social needs."*



**Abigail Wicka, BSN, RN**

**La Crosse Hospital Surgical Unit**

Excellence in Nursing Practice

Rookie of the Year

*"Abby brings to our unit a positive attitude, willingness to learn, and a fresh set of eyes that help us make improvements where they are needed."*



**Sandra Littlejohn, MA, BSN, RN**

**Center for Cancer & Blood Disorders**

Excellence in Nursing Practice

Lifetime Achievement

*"Sandy embodies our vision and mission daily through her strong work ethic and has helped many individuals become outstanding leaders."*



**Rose Marks, MS, RN, APNP**

**Behavioral Medicine**

Excellence in Nursing Practice

Advanced Degree

*"Rose provides compassionate, consistent, and collaborative care. She builds rapport with patients, fostering trust essential for effective treatment."*



## Nurse Excellence Award Nominees

We are pleased to recognize an additional 67 nominees from over 35 different departments across our region. Thank you to all of our nominees for the contributions you make to creating a nursing culture of excellence, belonging, accountability, respect, teamwork and humility.

Abbey Roberts  
Abby Durnil  
Adam Wallace  
Allison Mattes  
Amber Ideker  
Ann Mitoraj  
Augustus Stephenson  
Beau Ruehlow  
Bethany Girtler  
Brenna Gollnick  
Brienne Erickson  
Brittany Klocek  
Brooke Neumann  
Casey Kasten  
Chancey Shelly  
Chelsi Kahl  
Dana Mccauley  
Dana Meyers  
Dawn Wold  
Diane Roth  
Elizabeth Moen  
Emily Newbury  
Emily Summers  
Erica Cook  
Hanna Adler  
Hannah Wrobel

Heidi Roth  
Janelle Weaver  
Jenny Rourk  
Juliene Sloane  
Kali Thorson  
Karen Haines  
Katelin Clements  
Katelyn Wiese  
Katharine Miller  
Katherine Heintz  
Katie Walters  
Kelli Rickleff  
Kimberly Wichelt  
Krista Pfaff  
Kristin Ducharme  
Laura Blaken  
Laura Strobush  
Lauren Elliot  
Lauren Flanagan  
Leanne Markos  
Lindsay Schober  
Margaret Guzman  
Marie Christianson  
Michael Toale  
Mindy Binder  
Miranda Schmidt

Natalie Benda  
Olivia Baudek  
Patricia Shaw  
Rebecca Erickson  
Rebecca Roble  
Rita Roberts  
Samantha Becker  
Sandra Sternke  
Sarah Holthe  
Sarah Schmitz  
Shyler Harmsen  
Tanya Niedfeldt  
Taylor Knutson  
Theresa Falk  
Xiaozan Anderson





## Nurse Excellence Award Nominee Letters

One can feel the power of nurses through the thoughtful nomination letters that come in throughout the year. The following are excerpts from just a few of the nominee letters. These nomination excerpts are a compelling narrative of the relentless care, learning and innovation happening here every day.

### **Rebecca Erickson, BSN, RN**

#### **Friendship Hospital Surgery**

Nominated by Ashley Pugh

Becky welcomed me so well. She took the time to make sure I was comfortable and felt welcome from day one. She spent extra time training me and constantly gave me positive feedback. She communicates well with her staff and those throughout the hospital. Becky goes above and beyond to ensure our department thrives, and she strives for positive changes and growth. She ensures our staff has what they need in order to provide the best patient care we can. She leads us with positivity, strong nursing knowledge and ensures we provide the utmost standards of care.



### **Leanne Markos, MSN, RN**

#### **Infusion Services**

Nominated by Amy Vang



Leanne exemplifies the essence of a true nurse leader. She possesses the ability to unravel complex situations, reframe challenges, and troubleshoot effectively to find solutions. She is a staunch advocate for improving patient care and services, ensuring that both patients and staff are heard and recognized. Her leadership style involves creating opportunities for staff to leverage their strengths while encouraging the refinement and enhancement of their skills. As a nurse leader overseeing multiple departments involving multidisciplinary care and multiprofessional roles, Leanne's wealth of knowledge has been instrumental in building and maintaining invaluable partnerships across the system.



## Nurse Excellence Award Nominee Letters

### **Bethany Girtler, BSN, RN, CNRN**

#### **Stroke Program**

Nominated by Mary Cherney

I have had the honor to watch and help Bethany build our stroke program from a single stroke coordinator to a five-person department supporting all of our hospitals and urgent cares.



Bethany has worked hard to shape the stroke program for the past eight years. She is always mindful of how her work impacts our patients; she is passionate about providing the best stroke care possible and wants to ensure all our patients are getting the care they deserve.

If you walk through the hospital you will see some of the projects she has led in action, from the Stroke Response Team, to a patient transferring from the region into the Interventional Radiology rooms for a thrombectomy with ease, to an Emergency Services nurse who doesn't fear taking a stroke patient, because they know they are supported.

### **Hannah Wrobel, BSN, RN**

#### **La Crosse General Surgery**

Nominated by Alexis Reno

Hannah's ability to connect with patients in every aspect is genuinely inspiring. She brings a warm, compassionate approach that puts everyone at ease, making even the toughest days feel manageable. Not only does Hannah have a wealth of clinical knowledge, but she also possesses a strong sense of teamwork.



She is always ready to support colleagues, whether she's jumping in during a busy shift or sharing insights during team meetings. Her positivity and enthusiasm are infectious, creating a great atmosphere for both staff and patients. Hannah has a proactive attitude that enhances our entire team's performance.





## Nurse Excellence Award Nominee Letters

### Adam Wallace, BSN, RN

#### Onalaska Urgent Care

Nominated by Mandy Ellefson, Bri Erickson,  
Brooke Neumann & Rebecca Koehler



I can always tell when Adam is working because I hear his laugh long before I see him and his bright yellow Crocs. Adam is the type of person who will meet a patient in the lobby and have them laughing by the time they get to a room. He is able to take the visit from just being a visit, to creating a positive experience that the patient will remember fondly.

He consistently shows up for his team; they always know that if Adam is working, they are not alone. He will be there to help wherever he can. He supports everyone, no matter the role or title. His ability to lead by example, advocate for change, and mentor others has inspired his colleagues and catalyzed lasting improvements.

### Lauren Flanagan, BSN, RN

#### La Crosse Hospital

Nominated by Jennifer Lietzau & Chelsi Kahl

Lauren is a force, a beautiful light emitting source in every facet. Her nursing care is driven completely by love. She is courageously committed to giving each person around her kindness and compassion. I have watched her in wonderment as she has nursed patients back to health, listened so intently to every need and wish, facilitated the best care possible, and encouraged each person to do the very best functionally.

She is a nurse who sees the entire person and works tirelessly to provide individualized and holistic care. It has been five years since Lauren served as my preceptor and she continues to impress me with all the little things that she does for her patients and even for patients that she is not assigned to.







## Legacy of Nursing Scholarships

Our organization is committed to supporting lifelong learning and helping nurses achieve their career goals. Through our partnership with the Gundersen Medical Foundation and the Legacy of Nursing Scholarship program, scholarships are awarded to recipients each year. These scholarships encourage and support nurses at all levels of nursing education. We are thankful for the generous individuals and families who choose to invest in nursing with these philanthropic gifts. Congratulations to the 2025 recipients!

**Brigitta and William Gautsch**  
Legacy Nursing Scholarship



**Elaine Teynor, CNA**  
Viterbo University  
Bachelor of Science  
in Nursing Program

**Marie Rick-Yost**  
Legacy Nursing Scholarship



**Morgan Pagel, BSN, RN**  
Viterbo University  
Doctor of Nursing Practice-  
Family Nurse Practitioner  
Program

**Brigitta and William Gautsch**  
Legacy Nursing Scholarship



**Emma Ideker, CNA**  
Viterbo University  
Bachelor of Science  
in Nursing Program

**Drs. Michael J. and Rosemary T.  
Hammes Porter**  
Legacy Nursing Scholarship



**Katelyn Murphy, CNA**  
Viterbo University  
Bachelor of Science  
in Nursing Program

**Karen C. Pretko-Arndt**  
Legacy Nursing Scholarship



**Ava Schmitt, CNA**  
Viterbo University  
Bachelor of Science  
in Nursing Program



## Legacy of Nursing Scholarships

### Heritage Nursing Scholarship



**Kayla Mehus, BSN, RN**  
Western Governors University  
**Master of Science in Nursing -  
Leadership and Management  
Program**

### Heritage Nursing Scholarship



**Zari Ragner, BSN, RN**  
Western Governors University  
**Master of Science in Nursing -  
Leadership and Management  
Program**

### Alice Wehrenberg Scholarship



**Melinda Kunes, BSN, RN**  
Winona State University  
**Master of Science in  
Nursing- Nurse Educator  
Program**

### Julie MacDonald Nursing Scholarship



**Kelsey Lepke, ADN, RN**  
Western Governors University  
**Bachelor of Science in  
Nursing Program**

### Barbara Kroner Nursing Scholarship



**Kayla Strauss, ADN, RN**  
Rochester Community  
and Technical College  
**Bachelor of Science in  
Nursing Program**

### Dianna P. Myhre Nurse Practitioner Scholarship



**Cassandra Anderson, BSN, RN**  
Edgewood College  
**Master of Science in Nursing-  
Family Nurse Practitioner  
Program**



## A Destination Workplace for Staff and Students

Every day, our nurses are committed to creating an outstanding work environment. Our commitment to relentlessly caring, learning and innovating extends to our care of nursing staff just as it does to our patients and their families.

Despite a national vacancy rate for nurses at 10%, our vacancy rate has continually decreased over the past two years and has remained below 5% for the past year. This achievement places us in the top 5% nationwide. How do our nurses create an environment where their colleagues want to stay?

We do this through innovative orientation and onboarding programming that provides individualized, wrap-around support. We are also committed to implementing cutting edge care models like Virtual Nursing and a re-design of our Medical Specialty Unit. We keep the experience of our nurses top of mind in our programming and strategy.

“I have had good experiences with all the managers and nurses that I have come across. Each and every one of them have been extremely helpful, encouraging and uplifting. I cannot thank all the nurses enough.

- New graduate nurse”

Our support extends to nursing students as well. Throughout our system, nurses share their expertise with over 800 nursing students each year. Our nurses foster a supportive learning environment where students can take what they learned on the pages of their textbooks and translate them to professional nursing practice.

At the La Crosse Hospital, we've expanded successful roles such as patient attendants and virtual nurses. This ensures our bedside nurses have the time to do what it is they do best: be present with our patients, listen to their needs and co-create individualized care plans.





## A Destination Workplace for Staff and Students

In our clinics, we continue to focus on preventative care and consider all factors that impact health. Whether it's following up on high blood pressure or ensuring a patient has the resources they need to quit smoking, our nurses excel at partnering with patients and their caregivers to improve their health and well-being.



We prioritize the professional development of our nurses ensuring advances in care are available to all our patients. We are proud that whether our patients live in a community of 50 or 50,000, they receive consistent, top-notch care anywhere in our service area. Our rural health nurses possess a wide variety of skills and knowledge, with strong critical thinking abilities. They have the opportunity to work to the top of their scope of practice and care for their community in unique and innovative ways.



The force behind it all is the power of our nurses; the preceptors, mentors, break buddies and charge nurses. They commit each shift to living out our values of belonging, respect, excellence, accountability, teamwork and humility. Through their efforts, they create an outstanding work experience for new and seasoned staff alike.



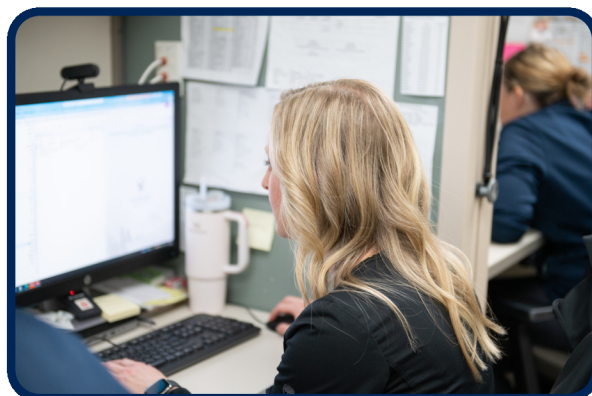


## Project Fusion

Technology has profoundly transformed the nursing profession, as it has in many other fields. For over a year, our dedicated nurses have played a crucial role in our efforts to enhance our Electronic Health Record (EHR) systems through Project Fusion, which merges our EHR with the Bellin Region. Merging EHR systems will enable more consistent, standardized, and efficient care between our two regions. With representation on over 40 workgroups, nurses from across the organization contribute their expertise to optimize the EHR, ensuring it accurately reflects our patients and populations, benefiting both our care teams and system partners. Leading the way for many of our nursing workgroups is our outstanding team of Informatics Nurses, who have specialized expertise in ensuring our use of technology adds value and enhances the overall experience for our nursing staff.

Through detailed investigations into best practices, nurses on the project are working to ensure that interactions with the EHR translate into more quality time with patients and improved clinical care. This transformation aligns with the project's core principles of putting patients first, fostering innovation, and emphasizing data-driven decision-making. By leveraging technology, our nurses are improving workflows while reinforcing their commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care. Additionally, this project has provided our nurses with the opportunity to build relationships with their colleagues from the Bellin Region.

As we approach the go-live date for the Gundersen Region this summer, over 400 nurses have been selected as Super Users for the project. These Super Users will utilize their strong communication skills, problem-solving abilities, EHR knowledge, and additional training to provide an enriching training and go-live experience for our nursing staff.





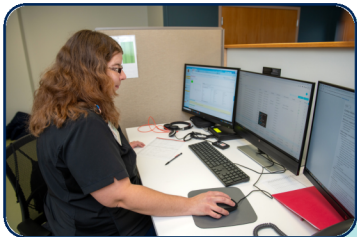


# Virtual Nursing

Virtual nursing is a care model rapidly growing in use cases as an inpatient strategy that has transformed care for staff, patients and families. This care model leans into technology by having an experienced RN, from our own system, just a moment away. Virtual nurses take on the practice of acute nursing that does not require a physical presence including admissions, patient education, discharge support, patient safety monitoring and more. This model has the capability to help our staff focus, connect, and be more available to patients and each other. It has also created efficiencies in patient care, improved patient safety, mitigated the complexity/experience gap between staff, and has improved the connection between the care team, patients, family, and each other. As we reflect back on the first year of virtual nursing, it's hard to believe that we've spent more time virtually with patients than there are hours in a year.



## Calls from a virtual nurse into the patient's room may include any of the following tasks:



- Hospital Admission
- Hospital Discharge
- Patient Education
- Overnight Rounding
- Mentorship of fellow nurses



Second nurse verification for high risk medications



## What our Patients are Saying

Every day, we hear from patients who share their experiences within our health system. Many comments highlight the empathy and compassion demonstrated by our nurses. From the very first moment, with a warm smile and attentive ear, our nurses create a welcoming environment. Their expertise extends beyond initial interactions; they play a crucial role in identifying significant clinical changes, developing personalized care plans, and ensuring that patients fully understand essential health information. Our nurses excel at keeping patients and their families informed, safe, and comfortable through meaningful connections and active listening, all while honoring each individual's unique healing journey.

“

The nurse we saw was wonderful with my son. They made him feel very comfy and not scared like most three year olds would be. Thankful for them for sure!

- Friendship Area

”

”

My nurse was caring. She has a contagious smile. She made me feel like family.

- West Union Area

“

The nurses showed a great kindness toward my child's discomforts and made efforts to respect our values.

- Wabasha Area

“

The nurses explained everything and answered all my questions and concerns in a way that I could understand everything.

- Whitehall Area

“

Our nurse was wonderful, compassionate and encouraging! She made an otherwise stressful experience very calming and reassuring:) Thank you for offering great care in our rural area

- Boscobel Area

”

“

The nurses treat you with utmost care and respect and they accommodate you and they're very personable.

- Hillsboro Area



## What our Patients are Saying

“

I was really anxious about my appointment. The nurse and doctor I worked with were so empathetic and patient with me. I'm so endlessly grateful for everything they did to help me feel safe and comfortable.

- Winona Campus

”

“

The nurses were amazing. They helped with anything I needed, were very caring and kind. I have expressed that to family and friends how impressed I am with the care that I received there.

- La Crosse Hospital



The nursing staff is always right on top of things. I would not hesitate to bring my children back for care in the emergency room if they needed it.

- La Crosse Hospital

”

Our nurse did everything to make sure this process/procedure was not frightening for our daughter. She kept us well informed of what to do and to expect. She reviewed essential information in detail. After the procedure, my daughter was in distress, so our nurse helped with calming her down and explained to us that this was completely normal after this procedure. Our nurse provided outstanding patient care, was very professional, and just wonderful.

- La Crosse Hospital

“

The nurses have a unique way to make me feel important, and make me feel calm when my anxiety is terrible when I get there. I'm in a much better mind state when I leave there.

- La Crosse Clinic

”

“

Both the midwives I met were phenomenal. All of the nurses were the absolute best.

”

- La Crosse Hospital



## What our Patients are Saying

“

The nurse I had yesterday had the most gentle touch for taking blood pressure I've ever experienced. It made it so much easier to relax. I could literally feel her kindness in her touch.

- La Crosse Clinic

”

I can't say enough about the physicians and nurses  
Saved my life NOT an exaggeration!! Thank you all for being there.

- Onalaska Clinic

”

— “ —

I'm very grateful for the nurses who respond to my messages to get me to the care I need. They are awesome!

- La Crosse Clinic

— ” —

“

The nurse practitioner and the nurse that helped her were so amazing. The time they both took to listen to me and then to go another step further and look into those issues while I was there so I didn't have to schedule other appointments.

- Iowa Regional Clinics

”

“

If I could kiss the nurses I would! They are the kindest people who are always there to care for you the minute you walk into the clinic. It's nice to be a person instead of a number! I'm sending a virtual hug to them all!

- Minnesota Regional Clinics

— ” —

I always feel like a person, never a number. All take the time, the nurses never make us feel rushed. We appreciate everyone for making us feel like we matter, listens and just overall everyone is so welcoming and caring.

- Wisconsin Regional Clinics



## Closing with Gratitude

As nurses who have had the tremendous gift of caring for patients, families, and staff in the Gundersen Region throughout our nursing careers, we take great pride in reflecting on our culture of relentless care. This culture has been fostered and maintained through our nurses' unwavering commitment to the profession, our patients, and each other. We hope these stories encourage you to reflect on this year's National Nurses Week theme, "The Power of Nurses." The incredible impact of our 2,400 nurses in this organization and the community is truly remarkable. We treasure you!



**Andrea Hauser, DNP, RN, CNL**  
Chief Nursing Officer  
Gundersen Region



**Danielle Rathke, DNP, RN, CNL**  
Director of Nursing  
Gundersen Region

## Nominate a nurse for a 2026 Nurse Excellence Award!

If you know an outstanding nurse who demonstrates excellence in nursing practice, nominate them for a Nurse Excellence Award by clicking [here](#)!

Nominations are accepted through December 31 each year. Nurses will be awarded each year in May.

Thank you to all of the contributors to this edition of The Nursing Impact, including our nurses, Nursing Council members, Nurse Excellence Award nominators, Corporate Communications and photographers.



Have a story you want to share about the impact of nurses? We want to hear it! Email us at [DepartmentofNursingCommunications@gundersenhealth.org](mailto:DepartmentofNursingCommunications@gundersenhealth.org)

To read more stories about Frontline nurses, check out the [Nursing Spotlight Page](#) on the Nursing website!