

Caring for loved one leads to career

Linda Smith, RN, joins nurses in celebrating National Nurses Week

BY ANNA WILSON
BLUE RIDGE HEALTHCARE

MORGANTON - Ever since she can remember, Linda Smith, RN, wanted to be a nurse. She doesn't remember wanting to be anything else.

Like a lot of people entering the nursing field, Smith had helped take care of a loved one - her grandmother who had a stroke and moved in with the family when Linda was in high school. She also had a strong role model - an aunt who was a nurse.

"She helped a lot with my grandmother, who had feeding tubes and a Foley (a catheter)," Smith said.

You could say Smith slowly worked her way into the field working in the lab at Valdese Hospital while she attended high school at Hildebran. After high school graduation in 1973, she attended Western Carolina University for a year before coming home to Burke County. She graduated from Western Piedmont Community College and her pinning ceremony is still a vivid memory 30 years after the fact.

"I don't know where that white dress is now, but I remember wearing it and those white clinic shoes. Remember those? Hardly anyone wears them anymore, but I remember being excited when I got my first pair," she said. "We carried a lamp. It was a special day."

Smith is just one of more than 500 nurses who will be celebrating National Nurses Week (May 6-12) at Blue Ridge HealthCare facilities along with all patient care providers. The system has planned appreciation events throughout the week.

"I'm proud to work with such a dedicated, caring, professional group as the nurses of Blue Ridge HealthCare," said Laura Lambeth, Senior Vice President of Physician and Patient Care Services. "I salute them and recognize the work they do not just during this special week but throughout the whole year."

Lambeth, also an RN, says nursing is a calling and a passion. "I know many nurses feel the same way," she said.

Smith certainly does. Later this month, Smith will receive her 35-year service award. She has absolutely no regrets about her career and offers this advice for anyone thinking of becoming a nurse:

"It really is rewarding and it really is hard work," she said. "You have to learn to balance your life - your work life and your home life. When you go home and think of the things you've done to help people, it makes your life worthwhile.



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Grace Hospital Emergency Department Nurse Manager Linda Smith, RN, left, checks paperwork from ED nurse Christy Lingerfelt, RN. Smith has been in the health care field for 35 years - 30 years as a nurse.

Nurses Week history

NATIONAL NURSES WEEK begins each year on May 6th and ends on May 12th, Florence Nightingale's birthday.

1982 - President Ronald Reagan signed a proclamation for "National Recognition Day for Nurses" to be May 6, 1982.

1990 - The American Nurses Association expanded the recognition of nurses to a week-long celebration, declaring May 6 - 12, 1991, as National Nurses Week.

1993 - The ANA designated May 6 - 12 as permanent dates to observe National Nurses Week in 1994 and in all subsequent years.

1996 - The ANA initiated "National RN Recognition Day" on May 6, 1996, to honor the nation's indispensable registered nurses for their tireless commitment 365 days a year.



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Part of Smith's duties as nurse manager is making sure the Emergency Department staff has all the supplies needed.

You have a purpose."

Smith's career has led her to work in various departments even though her first dream was to go into obstetrics.

"I always said I was going to work in obstetrics, but I never have," she said. Currently, she's nurse manager for the Emergency Department at

Grace Hospital - a long way from obstetrics. Her career path took a turn after she worked during nursing school as a ward secretary at Valdese

on the fourth floor in ICU. "After that, I knew I wanted to be in ICU," she said.

At that time, it was unusual for a nurse with only six

months experience to be assigned ICU. Smith was confident in her abilities, and loved her time on the ICU floor.

She rapidly became staff nurse, head nurse and eventually director of ICU. The emergency department was added to her responsibilities and at one time, the OR came under her domain.

With the merger of Valdese and Grace into Blue Ridge HealthCare, Smith landed at Grace as nurse manager of the Emergency Department. She oversees scheduling of 47 full-time and part-time nurses in addition to a myriad of other duties.

One of her proudest achievements came when the Emergency Department received a rating of 94.5 percent in patient satisfaction for 2006. "It's due to the staff that is out there every day taking care of patients," she said. "They are the ones who have maintained that patient satisfaction."

The hospital has put TVs in each exam room (at the request of patients) and added greeters who assist people coming to the ED. "We call the patients the next day to see how their visit was and how they're feeling," she said. "Lab and X-ray staff also plays a big part. It overlaps. We work hard to make sure every body is working together as a team to keep our patients satisfied and make sure they are receiving the very best care we can give."

The former ICU nurse is able to give hands-on patient care at busy times when she pitches in to help, but she doesn't get to develop the long-term relationships with ER patients like she did in ICU.

"In some ways, it is the same in that we see critical patients," she said. "But in the ER, we see them briefly before they are sent upstairs. You don't develop the relationship."

But both areas deal with life-threatening situations and death.

"In the ER, death can be more sudden," she said. "You have a lot of tragic things you have to deal with. Children and younger people are particularly hard emotionally. It can really make you think about how uncertain things are. It brings it home to you - there are no guarantees in life."

TO SEARCH FOR INFORMATION on a variety of health topics, please visit our web site at www.blueridge-health.org.

ANNA WILSON is a writer and graphic artist in Blue Ridge HealthCare's Marketing and Public Relations Department.

Blue Ridge HealthCare Outreach Calendar

May 12

Prepared Childbirth Class

SPECIAL SATURDAY CLASS

9:00am to 3:00pm

Call for class location

For more information on this class or the series, call 580-6333.

May 14

HOPE Support Group

FREE CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

6:00pm

The Learning Center, Grace campus
For more information about the support group, call 580-6703.

May 16

Lipid Screening

FREE SCREENING

7:00am-10:00am

First Baptist Church, Morganton
For more information, call 580-6220.

May 16

Advanced Directives

FREE CLASS

9:30am to 11:00am

Valdese Hospital, Admin. Conf. Room
This free seminar is about creating a "Living Will" and "Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care."

May 24

Diabetes Support Group

FREE SUPPORT GROUP

7:00pm

Phifer Wellness Center

For more information, call Lisa Bartholomew at 580-6784.

Saturday May 26

Lipid Screening

FREE SCREENING

7:00am-10:00am

Denton's Chapel Methodist Church
For more information, call 580-6220.

Restorative Yoga

FREE CLASSES

Tuesdays

11:30am to 12:30pm

Phifer Wellness Center

This group is open to all cancer patients. Practicing yoga can help ease symptoms, give you more energy, calm your mind, and give you tools to reduce stress. Participants need to wear something comfortable and bring a big towel to sit on. For more information about the program, call 580-6703.

Look Good ... Feel Better

FREE SUPPORT GROUP

Look Good ... Feel Better is a free program to help women undergoing cancer treatment learn to cope with appearance related side effects of treatment. Call 438-4643 to register.

DON'T FORGET!

National Cancer Survivors Day
June 3 - Sypris Technology Park