

2024

Nursing Annual Report



LEE HEALTH

A Letter from the Chief Nursing Officer and the President & CEO

Dear Friends,

We are very proud to share our 2024 Nursing Annual Report with you. This report features a small sampling of stories and accomplishments that illustrate the unwavering dedication of our nursing team to caring for our patients, families, colleagues and community. At Lee Health, we have an exceptional team of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and advanced registered nurse practitioners—in traditional bedside roles and nontraditional, behind-the-scenes roles, who care for and serve others every day and night.

We hope anyone who reads this Nursing Annual Report feels the pride, appreciation and excitement we feel for our nurses and the nursing profession at Lee Health. Our health system is committed to strengthening nursing professional practice and shared governance. We want our nurses to know that they have a voice and opportunities for leadership at every level.

To all our nurses throughout Lee Health, thank you for being part of our team and for your commitment to and pursuit of the highest standards of nursing excellence every day and night.

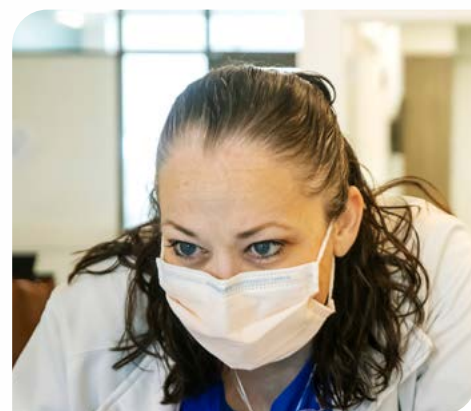
With gratitude and excitement for our future,



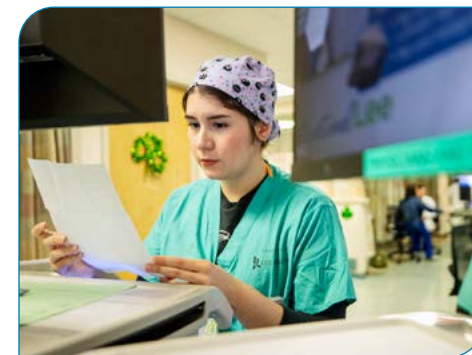
Jennifer Higgins,
DNP, RN, NEA-BC
Chief Nursing Officer



Larry Antonucci,
M.D., MBA
President & CEO



Who We Are



Our Team of Nurses

- » 4,005 Bedside Registered Nurses
- » 837 Non-Bedside Registered Nurses
- » 478 Advanced Practice Nurses
- » 219 Licensed Practical Nurses
- » 87 Case Managers

Professional Nursing Advancement Program (PNAP) Recipients

- » 14 New PNAP Recipients
- » 14 Renewals
- » 1 Level II
- » 27 Level III
- » Total: 28 PNAP Recipients



Our Beds by Facility

- » 303 – Cape Coral Hospital
- » 135 – Golisano Children's Hospital
- » 699 – Gulf Coast Medical Center (includes 75 skilled nursing)
- » 461 – HealthPark Medical Center
- » 414 – Lee Memorial Hospital (includes 19 skilled nursing and 60 rehab)
- » Total: 2,012 beds

Patient Contacts Per Year

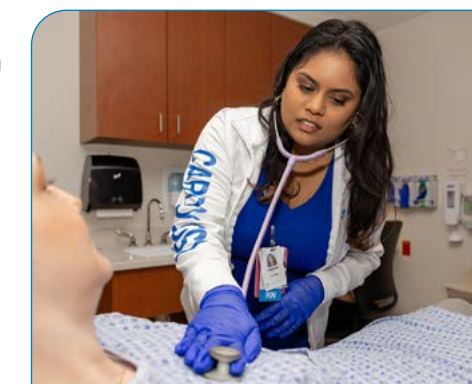
- We treat 1,000,000+ patients each year through:**
- » 103,207 admissions
 - » 334,577 ED visits
 - » 2.6 million outpatient and physician visits

Health Professional Education and Support

In 2024, we hosted 900 students during the spring semester, 765 in the summer semester and 1,018 during the fall semester.

Lee Health collaborates with educational institutions to support training the future healthcare workforce, including nurses and APRNs, as well as other professions, like pharmacists, physicians, social workers, radiologists, lab scientists and more.

Lee Health has contributed a total community benefit of \$22,002,111 with 522,422 staff hours dedicated to advancing professional education and shaping the future of healthcare.



Get to Know Our Nurse Executive Team

Over the past year, our nursing leadership team experienced both transitions and new beginnings. In 2024, we honored the retirement of a respected leader while also mourning the loss of a cherished colleague whose impact will never be forgotten.

Although these losses are deeply felt, we look to the future with optimism as we welcomed new chief nurse executives (CNEs) to our team.

Here is our nurse executive team:



Jennifer Higgins, DNP, RN, NEA-BC
Chief Nursing Officer

What excites or motivates you most about the future of nursing and its evolving role in healthcare?

Nurses are driving the industry. There is not an outcome in healthcare that a nurse doesn't touch or impact. It's an awesome responsibility, but nurses should be confident in their ability to impact patients, their colleagues and communities. Models of patient care delivery are changing and nursing will be on the forefront of that.



Darcy Allen, MBA, BSN, RN
Gulf Coast Medical Center

Can you share a defining moment in your nursing career that shaped the way you lead today?

A defining moment in my career was when I served as nurse lead for the opening of a new hospital. This experience afforded me the opportunity to see hospital operations beyond nursing, and I saw how interdependent we all are when it comes to providing the best care. Every person is part of the team and can affect patient outcomes. None of us can deliver exceptional care without each other. Seeing this interdependence when opening a new hospital stayed with me and impacts how I lead today—in our journey to excellence theme (Power of Us, United in Excellence) and as we integrate other disciplines into shared governance.



Alyssa Bostwick, MBA, MSN, RN, NEA-BC
Golisano Children's Hospital

What do you believe is the most important quality a nurse leader should have, and how do you strive to embody it?

Courage and humility. The right decision, the right answer, is usually never the easy one and it takes courage as a leader to move forward with what may not be popular. Humility is also just as important. Do what you do because you love to do it, because it is the right thing to do, because you have a passion to serve, not because you want the recognition, or to always be right. If you acknowledge that at times you made the wrong decision and allow failure to be celebrated, your team is not afraid to be courageous and creative.



Kristie Huff, MSN, RN, NEA-BC
HealthPark Medical Center

What do you believe is the most important quality a nurse leader should have, and how do you strive to embody it?

As a nurse leader, there are many qualities you can possess that will guide your team and improve patient care, but for me, transformational leadership stands out as the most crucial. It's not just about managing a team or ensuring the day-to-day tasks are completed. It's about inspiring others, creating a vision, and leading with empathy and motivation. I strive to embody transformational leadership by being a role model, empowering others, communicating with purpose, and celebrating growth and successes.

By fostering a transformational leadership style, we can help our teams feel supported, motivated and inspired to not only provide exceptional care but also grow as professionals. That's the kind of leadership that creates lasting change—for nurses, for patients and for the future of healthcare.



Rebekah Jernstedt, MSN, RN
Cape Coral Hospital

Is there a quote or piece of wisdom that guides your leadership style? Why does it resonate with you?

**"For beautiful eyes, look for the good in others; for beautiful lips, speak only words of kindness; and for poise, walk with the knowledge that you are never alone."
– Audrey Hepburn**

This quote has always deeply resonated with me because it highlights the impact our actions have on the world around us. It reminds me that true beauty lies in how we treat others—with kindness, compassion and confidence.

Ultimately, it serves as a powerful reminder that we all have the ability to bring positivity to the world through our words, actions and mindset.

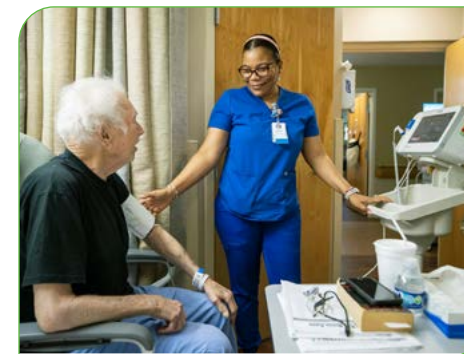


Renee McCauley, RN, MSN, CCRN
Lee Memorial Hospital

Can you share a defining moment in your nursing career that shaped the way you lead today?

In the early 1990s, I began my nursing leadership journey. I became the clinical practice coordinator for critical care, serving at a supervisor level. It was working under "Kathy," my director, in my first leadership role that actually had the greatest effect on how I lead today. When nursing leaders are asked what experience influenced their leadership style, many often speak to a leader who shared their positive experiences. While I did experience many positive lessons on leadership while serving under a few amazing nurse leaders, I was most influenced by a leader who struggled with establishing relationships.

Her low level of comfort with collaborating and building trust with others significantly affected the progress and growth of the entire team. These experiences, while in my first leadership role, solidified the importance of building strong relationships and still shape how I lead each and every day.





In Loving Memory of Candace S. Smith, Ph.D., RN, NEA-BC

Vice President of Operations and Chief Nurse Executive, Cape Coral Hospital

With heavy hearts, we remember Candace Smith—a beloved leader, mentor and friend. Candace dedicated her life to nursing with boundless energy, passion and an unwavering commitment to patient care. Fondly known as our “Energizer Bunny,” she never stopped advocating for excellence, leaving a lasting impact on our health system and community. Her kindness, optimism and courage touched everyone she met. Her spirit will forever be a part of Lee Health, especially Cape Coral Hospital, and her legacy continues to inspire us. Last June, Candace recorded a message for a nursing summit, reflecting on her journey of almost 40 years as a nurse.

[Click here to watch the video.](#)



Celebrating the Legacy of Julia Liebscher, MSM, BSN, RNC

After 35 years of dedicated service to our community, Julia Liebscher, MSM, BSN, RNC, VP of operations and chief nurse executive at Lee Memorial Hospital, retired at the end of July 2024. Throughout her tenure, Julia made countless contributions that strengthened our health system. A leader through major milestones, she played a key role in improving care quality and safety, contributing to top ratings from The Leapfrog Group, Healthgrades, CMS and DNV. Always kind, compassionate, a team player and a servant leader, Julia left a lasting impact on Lee Health, and we wish her the very best in her retirement.

Data: Nursing-Sensitive Quality Indicators (NDNQI)

Percent of Surveyed Patients with Hospital Acquired Pressure Injuries Stage 2 and Above				
NDNQI	Calendar Year 2023		Calendar Year 2024	
	Result	Benchmark	Result	Benchmark
Cape Coral Hospital	0.42	1.69	0.76	1.55
Gulf Coast Medical Center	1.61	1.69	1.36	1.55
Golisano Children’s Hospital	0.23	0.87	0.21	0.77
HealthPark Medical Center	0.76	1.69	0.78	1.55
Lee Memorial Hospital	0.74	1.69	1.07	1.55

Benchmark - Hospital Type

Injury Falls per 1,000 Patient Days				
NDNQI	Calendar Year 2023		Calendar Year 2024	
	Result	Benchmark	Result	Benchmark
Cape Coral Hospital	0.77	0.59	0.64	0.57
Gulf Coast Medical Center	0.77	0.59	0.64	0.57
Golisano Children’s Hospital	0.05	0.59	0.12	0.57
HealthPark Medical Center	1.16	0.59	0.61	0.57
Lee Memorial Hospital	1.17	0.59	0.71	0.57

Benchmark - Hospital Type
GCMC & CCH have the same results for 2023 & 2024

Injury Falls per 1,000 Patient Visits/Cases (Ambulatory Areas)				
NDNQI	Calendar Year 2023		Calendar Year 2024	
	Result	Benchmark	Result	Benchmark
Cape Coral Hospital ED, Endoscopy, Radiology, PACU, Cardiac Rehab, Stress Lab	0.18	0.10	0.07	0.09
Gulf Coast Medical Center 3S PCU Obs, Cath Lab, NI Lab, Cardiac Obs Unit, ED, Endoscopy, Radiology, PACU, Stress Lab, Discharge Lounge	0.24	0.10	0.24	0.09
Golisano Children’s Hospital ED, OP Peds Oncology, Naples Oncology Clinic, Peds Sedation, Peri-Anesthesia	0.02	0.10	0.5	0.09
HealthPark Medical Center CDU, Cardiac Obs Unit, ED, OB ED, Cath Lab, Radiology, Endoscopy, PACU, Stress Lab, Discharge Lounges	0.09	0.10	0.12	0.09
Lee Memorial Hospital 6N PCU Obs, ED, Endoscopy, Radiology, PACU, Stress Lab, Discharge Lounge	0.25	0.10	0.18	0.09

Benchmark - Hospital Type

Our Journey to Excellence

We are all on a journey to excellence. Each of our hospitals is working toward the prestigious Magnet distinction that demonstrates our commitment to nursing staff, the medical community and our patients. Here is an update on where we are:

Cape Coral Hospital

Application submitted in June 2023; document due in June 2025; site visit to be announced.

Golisano Children's Hospital

Theme: Maiden Voyage to Magnet. Application accepted in September 2024; submitting document in June 2025; site visit to be announced.

Gulf Coast Medical Center

Theme: Power of Us, United in Excellence. Application submitted in June 2024; document due in June 2026; site visit to be announced.

HealthPark Medical Center

Theme: Anchored in Excellence. Application submitted June 2023; submitting document in May 2025; site visit to be announced.

Lee Memorial Hospital

Theme: Together, we are building a culture of excellence, innovation and exceptional patient care! Application to be submitted in 2027 with the goal of achieving Magnet designation in 2029 in our state-of-the-art new hospital.

Nursing Professional Practice Model (PPM)

Our PPM complements and encompasses Lee Health's mission, vision and values and brings to life our ExceptionalLee culture. It also outlines the three theories used to provide a solid base for professional nursing practice at Lee Health:

- » Interdisciplinary care.
- » Relationship-based care.
- » Evidence-based care.

Lee Health's 10 Nursing Professional Practice Model Domains

1. Compassion
2. Patient Care
3. Quality
4. Safety
5. Respect
6. Cultural Competence
7. Patient- and Family-Centered Care
8. Leadership
9. Teamwork
10. Commitment to Excellence



Unit-Based Councils Eat Lunch with Larry

Lee Health President & CEO Larry Antonucci, M.D., MBA, hosts one-hour, informal lunch meetings he calls "Lunch with Larry," where he takes the opportunity to have lunch with and listen to small groups of people throughout the health system. The purpose of the lunches is to help him hear directly from team members about their ideas, thoughts, feelings and needs.

In 2024, Dr. Antonucci had lunch with members of our unit-based councils across the health system. Chief Nursing Officer Jennifer Higgins, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, attended the lunches, too, to share her perspective, support and appreciation for shared governance.



Dr. Antonucci and Jennifer are pictured with unit-based council members from across Gulf Coast Medical Center.

Nurses Lend Their Voices in Support of Lee Health's Conversion to a Community-Focused Nonprofit Health System

Throughout 2024, the Lee Health Board of Directors and leadership were working through the process of evaluating the conversion of the health system from a public nonprofit to a community-focused private nonprofit. The conversion required collaboration with and approval from the Lee County Board of County Commissioners to establish a Mission Agreement, which is an enforceable contract establishing Lee Health's continuing commitment to the community in providing high-quality, accessible healthcare as it has for more than 100 years.



Melissa "Lisa" Lynagh-Dorcey, MSN, RN, nursing director of the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at Golisano Children's Hospital, and Diane Spears, RN, BSN, MS, nursing director, 4West, Lee Memorial Hospital, shared their perspectives and support for Lee Health's conversion.

"I recognized that Lee Health's conversion was essential for us to continue providing specialized care to our pediatric patients, regardless of their families' ability to pay," Lisa said. "I was invited to speak at the Board of County Commissioners meeting and gladly accepted. It was important to me to advocate for our pediatric population to ensure we can always care for and provide specialized care to children and their families in our community."

Diane also felt strongly that Lee Health needed to proceed with the conversion. "I truly believe in the direction that Lee Health is taking, and I've seen what Lee Health has done for the community (and my family)," Diane said. "I understood that conversion to a community-focused nonprofit health system solidified the commitment that Lee Health has made to everyone in our community—I have seen that commitment over and over again. I'm very proud to be connected to Lee Health and that's why I stood before the County Commissioners."

Lee Health's conversion went into effect on Nov. 1, 2024.

System Coordinating Council Celebrates Success with Consensus Decision-Making

In October 2023, the Nursing Clinical Practice Council transitioned to the System Coordinating Council (SCC), enhancing shared governance and collaboration among several groups and councils focused on quality, safety, research, evidence-based practice and more. Throughout 2024, the SCC was led by Angela Holmes, BSN, RN, RNC-NIC, C-NPT, who served as chair, and Corine Polanzi, BSN, RN, CPN, who served as co-chair.

The purposes of the SCC include:

- » Empowering direct care team members, in partnership with leadership, with the responsibility, authority and accountability to address practice-based issues and standards to ensure sustainable improvements in patient satisfaction, clinical outcomes and care team member engagement.
- » Integrating and coordinating activities of all Lee Health Shared Governance councils from a system perspective with specific system-level shared decision-making.

In 2024, the SCC celebrated consensus decision-making on the following:

- » Changed verbiage from CHG bathing and cleansing to CHG Treatment
- » PAIN – Charted on the vital sign flowsheet (left in the question “Was the relief acceptable?”)
- » Hourly Rounding Flowsheet
- » Chart Check documentation in Epic (keep task in the required documentation and designated time for chart check at noon and midnight)
- » Switched from Smith, Duell & Martin to Lippincott Nursing Procedures online platform
- » Mixed concentration medication instructions added on MAR
- » Restraints documentation guide (HealthPark Medical Center)
- » Shift change dual rate verification (Peds only)
- » Aggressive Behavior Identification (Broset scoring tool)
- » Heparin calculator
- » A selection was added to the “Site” field to allow for documentation of meds given via feeding tube
- » The date and type of stool will be saved into the MAR for any stool medication
- » Primary tubing labeling



The SCC uses consensus decision-making, which allows members of the group to work together to find a solution that everyone can support and enables everyone to have and share their voices, opinions and insights. Through their commitment to shared governance and consensus decision-making, the SCC ensures that there is “nothing about us (nursing staff) without us (nursing staff).”

The success of the SCC in 2024 will no doubt continue into 2025 as Catrina St. John, RN joins Angela Holmes as co-chair.

Cape Coral Hospital

A DAISY Award Winner Exemplifies Exceptional Care

Marie Patton, RN-Critical Care, ICU, earned the prestigious DAISY Award thanks to her compassion, kindness and above-and-beyond approach to caring for her patients.

Here’s an example via an excerpt from the DAISY Award nomination:

“On Saturday afternoon, my sister and I flew in from Indiana to see our ‘never sick’ mother. It was a moment of shock and fear to see our ‘pillar of strength’ and rock in the condition she was in. We were introduced to Marie, a nurse in charge of caring for our momma. She was amazing with her! She treated my mom with so much love, care and compassion. She never acted like she was too busy or put out by the questions or needs mom had.

Marie was just as kind, caring and supportive to our family. I was struggling, and she offered suggestions and found help for our needs, as well.

Marie has a very gentle, kind and compassionate way about her. She helped to wash my mom’s hair and make her feel pretty. That is above and beyond, in my opinion. Marie’s care level remained the same whether it was a.m. or p.m. or the first or third night of work.... Marie is a nurse who touched our hearts and helped to give stellar care to our precious momma.”



Intensive Care Unit Receives Gold-Level Beacon Award

The Cape Coral Hospital Intensive Care Unit was honored with the prestigious Gold-level Beacon Award for Excellence from the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN). This national award recognizes units that demonstrate a consistent and systematic approach to evidence-based care that optimizes patient outcomes, and Gold is the highest level of recognition.

The Beacon Award celebrates strong leadership structures and systems, appropriate staffing and staff engagement, effective communication, knowledge management, ongoing learning and development, outcome measurement and more.

“This recognition is a testament to our dedication, teamwork and commitment to excellence in patient care,” said Heather Kingery, RN, ICU nursing director. “I am so grateful to every team member for their care and passion—they make an impact every day!”

Nursing Excellence Summits

Cape Coral Hospital hosts two annual Nursing Excellence Summits. These events provide time for team building, sharing new evidence-based nursing practices, and disseminating nursing research and quality improvement projects.

“We are proud to share that our nurses are leading the journey to excellence in patient experience, outcomes, and nursing quality and safety,” said Rebekah Jernstedt, MSN, RN, chief nursing and operations executive at Cape Coral Hospital. “We deeply admire our nurses for their commitment to serving our community and championing shared governance.”

Golisano Children's Hospital



Major Milestones in Autism Care

Certified Autism Center™ Designation

In 2024, Golisano Children's Hospital became the second hospital in the U.S. and the first in Florida to be designated a Certified Autism Center™. This recognition requires specialized training and certification for at least 80% of public-facing staff in autism and sensory differences.

Golisano Children's Hospital also introduced SeaStar, Safety Education Awareness – Sensory Training – Autism Readiness, a first-of-its-kind program for our children's hospital and one that identifies processes, locations and areas that are sensory-friendly to our patients and families.

Additionally, the team added a new sensory-friendly ambulance to ensure the comfort and safety of patients with sensory disorders. Golisano Children's Hospital was the first hospital in the nation to build this kind of ambulance.

"Our community is growing, and with one in 36 children diagnosed with a sensory disorder, a sensory-friendly ambulance was essential for providing safe, comfortable transportation for kids and their families," explained Niki Shimko, MSN, RN, CCRN, CPN, C-NPT, critical care transport team manager.

What Makes the Ambulance Sensory Friendly?

- » Adding extra coating/insulation to diminish siren noise.
- » Replacing the loud generator with a lithium power source.
- » Creating a dim lighting pattern.
- » Providing therapeutic sensory devices to address the specific needs of all children.



"We are proud to earn this IBCCES certification, a testament to our team's dedication. Our public-facing employees completed rigorous training to enhance autism care, reinforcing their commitment to excellence. We are actively implementing IBCCES recommendations to create an even more autism-friendly environment as we strive to be a national leader for hope and healing."

-Dyane N. Rodriguez, MSN, RN, CAHP
Nursing Supervisor Lead, Golisano Children's Hospital

[Click here to watch a short video about these exciting milestones in autism care.](#)

Hurricane Ian's Impact on Pediatric Care: Improving Education and Preparedness

Lee Health partnered with the University of South Florida to study Hurricane Ian's impact on pediatric healthcare visits. Lynnea Marzella, BSN, RN, CPON, clinical research nurse, analyzed electronic medical records and found a 5% increase in visits for children ages 0-5 in the six months after the storm. Further investigation with the Pediatric Asthma Committee revealed gaps in pre-hurricane asthma education. In response, Lee Health is enhancing patient education and collaborating with Children's Specialists of Florida to improve storm preparedness for pediatric asthma patients.

Transforming Care: Studying the Immersion Room's Impact on Pediatric Blood Draws

Lee Health launched a nursing research project at the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Clinic at Golisano Children's Health Center in Naples to study how the Immersion Room impacts pain and anxiety during blood draws. This specially designed space features a 270-degree screen with interactive programs, offering distraction through movies, video games and other engaging content. Led by Clinical Research Nurse Lynnea Marzella, BSN, RN, CPON, Nursing Director Laura Ortiz, MSHA, BSN, RN, CPHON, and two dedicated clinic nurses, the study compares patient experiences in the Immersion Room to standard exam rooms.



Families complete pre- and post-procedure questionnaires to assess changes in pain and anxiety. With data collection nearing completion, final analysis is expected by June 2025.

Enhancing Pediatric Safety Through Standardized Care Practices

Preventing Central Line-Associated Bloodstream Infections (CLABSIs) is a top priority at Golisano Children's Hospital. Guided by Solutions for Patient Safety (SPS)—a network of more than 140 children's hospitals—our nursing teams adopted an "all teach, all learn" approach to share data and best practices. By implementing SPS's evidence-based CLABSI Prevention Bundle, we standardized practices to significantly reduce infection risks for hospitalized children.

To support these efforts, the Golisano Central Venous Access Device (CVAD) workgroup streamlined its policies—condensing more than 100 pages from six separate documents into a single, concise policy.

This simplified approach helps nurses consistently follow best practices for central line care, enhancing safety for our youngest patients.

[Click here to review the new policy](#)

Gulf Coast Medical Center



Schwartz Rounds Put Compassion at the Heart of Healthcare

Ken Schwartz was a 40-year-old healthy nonsmoker who was diagnosed with advanced lung cancer in 1994. During his illness, he realized how important the human connection is between patients and their caregivers. He outlined an organization he wanted to create that would nurture compassion in healthcare and founded the Schwartz Center for Compassionate Care just days before his death.

Gulf Coast Medical Center has incorporated Schwartz Rounds, one of the Center's evidence-based programs that provides a structured forum for healthcare workers to discuss the complex demands of patient care. Schwartz Rounds focuses on the emotional and psychosocial aspects of caring for patients rather than the clinical and is open to all team members. Having this time and space to share provides many benefits, including:

- » Strengthening the caregiver-patient relationship.
- » Reminding the caregivers why they entered the healthcare profession.
- » Improving teamwork, interdisciplinary communication and appreciation for the roles and contributions of colleagues from different disciplines.
- » Decreasing feelings of stress and isolation and increasing openness to giving and receiving support.
- » Increasing insight into social and emotional aspects of patient care.
- » Elevating feelings of compassion toward patients and readiness to respond.

“Studies have shown that 90% of caregivers who attended multiple Schwartz Rounds reported better communication with their co-workers,” explained Michelle Standard, PT, DPT, who helped establish the program at Gulf Coast Medical Center. “We are seeing this effect at Gulf Coast Medical Center already. Many participants have expressed new appreciation for the various roles of other care team members as our diverse panelists have provided such different perspectives.”

Trauma Intensive Care Unit Honored with Silver-Level Beacon Award

The Trauma Intensive Care Unit at Gulf Coast Medical Center earned the prestigious Silver-level Beacon Award for Excellence from the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN). This national recognition highlights units that improve patient outcomes and align their practices with AACN's healthy work environment standards.

The Beacon Award celebrates strong leadership structures and systems, appropriate staffing and staff engagement, effective communication, knowledge management, ongoing learning and development, outcome measurement and more.



Power of Us, United in Excellence

The theme for Gulf Coast Medical Center's journey to excellence is “Power of Us, United in Excellence.” Darcy Allen, MBA, BSN, RN, chief nursing and operations executive at Gulf Coast Medical Center, explained that the theme was chosen by popular vote.



“I think it resonated because it really embodies what it takes to create exceptional care—it takes all of us, from every discipline, committed and working together,” Darcy said. “We can't achieve excellence without all of us. Interdependency helps us provide the best care.”

At Gulf Coast Medical Center, and with Darcy's leadership, shared governance continues to be strengthened with nurses, and it is spreading to other disciplines, like rehabilitation services, Heart Central, EVS/Transport, respiratory therapy, lab and more, so they can drive their practice, too.

HealthPark Medical Center



Early Intervention Saves Lives: Using the Deterioration Index to Improve Patient Outcomes

The Deterioration Index (DI) score, developed by Epic, helps identify patients at risk of decompensation. At HealthPark Medical Center, a dedicated team led a systemwide effort to develop an escalation of care model based on DI scores, enabling nurses to intervene sooner. The approach helped ensure timely provider responses or ICU transfers, reducing the risk of code blue events on floor units.

A pilot unit at HealthPark Medical Center previously averaged four code blues per month. After implementing the model, the unit recorded zero code blues over a three-month period.

Sandra Simmons, ICU nursing director, presented the project at the 2024 National Teaching Institute (NTI) conference, hosted by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. An Epic team also visited Lee Health to discuss the model's successful implementation.

The DI-based escalation model is now in place for adult inpatients, excluding OB, at all Lee Health campuses.

Streamlining Stroke Care: How the OB Emergency Department Improved Rapid Response

In Q1 2024, the Nursing Professional Development (NPD) team conducted 47 Mock MET drills at HealthPark Medical Center, engaging 550 participants across multiple roles. Each month focused on a different emergency: hypotension (January), stroke (February) and respiratory distress (March).

During a Code Stroke drill in the OB ED, the team identified the need for a tailored process, as their triage role differed from both inpatient units and the main ED. This was a unique challenge that required collaboration between bedside nurses, unit managers, ICU/CCO and NPDs to develop a streamlined workflow.



Additional drills reinforced the new process, ensuring staff readiness. **As a result, the OB ED now rapidly identifies and initiates care for stroke patients, significantly reducing delays.** This success highlights the power of interdisciplinary teamwork in improving patient outcomes.

National Recognition for Patient Experience

We are proud to announce that several units at HealthPark Medical Center have received five-star ratings as part of the PRC Excellence in Healthcare Awards—an esteemed honor that highlights exceptional performance and a steadfast commitment to patient satisfaction. This recognition reflects the dedication, compassion, and professionalism that our nurses and care teams demonstrate every day.

Their unwavering focus on providing respectful, safe and high-quality care creates meaningful experiences for our patients and their families, leaving a lasting impression that extends far beyond their time with us. Achievements like these underscore the exceptional culture of excellence at HealthPark Medical Center and inspire all of us to continue raising the standard for compassionate healthcare.

PRC Excellence in Healthcare Awards Five Stars:

- » Emergency Department
- » Cardiac Decision Unit
- » 2W
- » 5W
- » 6W



Congratulations to all the units recognized for their outstanding efforts and for making a profound difference in the lives of those we serve.



Lee Memorial Hospital



An Example of Clinical Excellence: Lee Memorial Hospital Emergency Department Receives Lantern Award

The Lantern Award, presented by the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA), recognizes emergency departments for exceptional performance in quality, safety and innovation. Named after the lantern carried by Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War, the award symbolizes leadership, excellence and compassion in nursing. Congratulations to our team for this outstanding achievement!



Professional Development in Action: Celebrating Our First Cohort of Evidence-Based Practice Mentors

We are proud to recognize the dedicated nurses who completed The Ohio State University EBP Immersion Program and are now EBP Mentors! As the first cohort, they are leading the way in integrating evidence-based practice into clinical decisions—enhancing patient outcomes and advancing nursing excellence. Their commitment to learning and growth reflects our Magnet journey and our mission to empower nurses to drive meaningful change.

Lee Memorial Hospital EBP Mentors:

- » Darnella Adams, MSN, RN-BC, Intensive Care Unit
- » Linda Barrios, RN, Orthopedics
- » Cara Langdale, MSN, RN, 5N/6N
- » Paula Knight, MSN, RN, Nursing Professional Development

2024 Lee Memorial Hospital Nursing Summit

The Lee Memorial Campus Professional Development Council successfully coordinated and hosted the 2024 Nursing Summit, bringing together more than 150 nurses, 12 vendors and a lineup of engaging speakers. The event also featured rewards and recognitions to celebrate an outstanding year.

Nursing summits play a vital role in fostering a culture of excellence, supporting professional growth and enhancing collaboration among nurses—all of which contribute to better patient care and hospital performance. We look forward to 2025! [Visit this page on VirtuaLee for photos of the summit.](#)

Recognitions and Achievements

Lee Memorial Hospital Makes Healthgrades' Top 100 Hospitals List

Lee Memorial Hospital has been named one of the top 100 hospitals in the U.S. by Healthgrades for the third consecutive year. This annual ranking recognizes hospitals that excel in clinical outcomes, including mortality rates, complication rates, patient safety and patient experience. This recognition is a significant achievement that reflects our hospital's commitment to excellent patient care.

Congratulations, team, for this well-deserved honor!

Lee Memorial Hospital Care Management: 2024 Achievements

The Lee Memorial Hospital Care Management team made remarkable strides in 2024, enhancing efficiency, patient flow and community support. Their dedication to innovative solutions and patient-centered care led to several key accomplishments:

- » **Optimized Patient Throughput** – Achieved an 18% reduction in Length of Stay (LOS), ensuring patients received timely, efficient care while improving hospital capacity.
- » **Strong Workforce Retention** – Staff turnover exceeded its goal, reaching an impressive 8% (well below the target of 14%), reflecting a positive work environment and leadership support.
- » **Innovative Technology Integration** – Successfully incorporated AI-driven predictive discharge analytics, streamlining patient transitions and improving discharge planning accuracy.
- » **Community Resource Expansion** – The Social Work team played a pivotal role in connecting patients with essential community resources, enhancing post-hospital support and overall well-being.

Through collaboration, technology and a commitment to excellence, the Lee Memorial Hospital Care Management team continues to elevate patient outcomes and operational efficiency, reinforcing their critical role in delivering high-quality care.



Excellence in Surgical Services

In 2024, the Surgical Services team made significant strides in improving efficiency and patient care. First-case on-time starts increased by 14% compared to the previous fiscal year, ensuring smoother scheduling and better patient flow. Additionally, the team successfully reduced room turnover times from 37 minutes to 32 minutes, with a continued goal of reaching 30 minutes in 2025. Their commitment to process improvement and collaboration is driving greater efficiency, reduced delays and an enhanced surgical experience for patients and providers.

Home Health and Skilled Nursing

Empowering Patients, Improving Outcomes: Nursing's Role in Heart Failure Care

The Lee Health Home Health Heart Failure Program delivers evidence-based care to improve outcomes for patients with heart failure. By promoting self-management, adherence to best practices and integrated care, the program has significantly reduced 30-day readmissions to 10.5%, well below the national benchmark of 21%.



Nurses play a vital role in the program's success through:

- » **Patient Education** – Guiding patients and caregivers on disease management, medication adherence and lifestyle changes.
- » **Care Coordination** – Ensuring seamless transitions from hospital to home.
- » **Quality Improvement** – Using data-driven initiatives to enhance care and safety.
- » **Interdisciplinary Collaboration** – Working with healthcare teams to deliver comprehensive, patient-centered care.

By leading these efforts, nurses drive better health outcomes and patient experiences, reinforcing the program's commitment to holistic, coordinated and evidence-based care.

Honors for Lee Health Skilled Nursing Facilities

CMS 5-Star Facilities

Lee Memorial Hospital Skilled Nursing Unit, HealthPark Care & Rehabilitation Center and Gulf Coast Medical Center Skilled Nursing Unit all achieved CMS 5-Star status. Of the five CMS 5-Star facilities in Lee County, three are part of Lee Health.

U.S. News & World Report Honor

U.S. News & World Report named the Lee Memorial Hospital Skilled Nursing Unit, HealthPark Care & Rehabilitation Center and Gulf Coast Medical Center Skilled Nursing Unit as some of the Best Nursing Homes in the country.



American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL)

The Lee Memorial Hospital Skilled Nursing Unit received the 2024 Silver Achievement in Quality Award from the AHCA/NCAL. All three Lee Health skilled nursing locations are now Silver Quality Award recipients.

Culture of Safety Survey Recognition – PRC Healthcare Leadership Award

Lee Health's skilled nursing locations achieved an overall score of 92.8%, placing them above the 75th percentile. This award honors healthcare leaders who foster a strong culture of patient safety, ensuring high-quality care and improved performance outcomes.

Hospital at Home



A New Opportunity for Nursing at Lee Health

Launched in November 2024, Hospital at Home delivers hospital-level care in the comfort of patients' homes—made possible by the expertise and dedication of our Lee Health nurses. Nurses are at the heart of this program, providing compassionate, high-quality care that enhances recovery and improves patient outcomes.

Focusing initially on five conditions—pneumonia, COPD, CHF, urinary tract infections requiring hospitalization, and cellulitis—this program leverages advanced technology and Lee Health's full range of resources to deliver 24/7 expert care. Our nurses play a pivotal role in every step of the process, ensuring patients receive:

- » In-home assessments and treatments delivered with clinical expertise and a personal touch.
- » Daily virtual visits to monitor progress and adjust care plans.
- » Continuous monitoring of vital signs to quickly address any concerns.
- » On-demand medications, IV infusions, testing, imaging and therapy—coordinated seamlessly by our nursing team.
- » Fresh, hospital-prepared meals delivered to support recovery.

By combining innovation with the compassionate care of our nurses, Hospital at Home offers a safe, convenient alternative to inpatient hospitalization. The program launched at Gulf Coast Medical Center and will expand to our other hospitals—bringing hospital-level care directly to more patients.

See Hospital at Home in Action

[Click here for a video](#) from Dr. Antonucci, Jennifer Higgins and Dr. Gonsenhausner about this exciting and innovative program.

First Patient Vouches for the Benefits of Hospital at Home Program

Wendy Markham, a 69-year-old from Fort Myers diagnosed with pneumonia, was our first Hospital at Home patient. She was happy to take advantage of the opportunity to receive care at home. [Click here](#) to read about Wendy's experience, including a 2 a.m. call from one of our nurses advising her to get back in bed because her oxygen levels had dropped.

Wendy said her recovery was shorter because she was comfortable and could get good sleep. She shared her appreciation for the nurses who she said were "so professional, thoughtful and kind."

Lee Physician Group

Entrusting Our Nurses to Work at the Top of Their Licenses

Lee Physician Group leadership, especially the ambulatory nursing leadership team, has been focused on empowering and enabling our nurses to work at the top of their licenses.

“We cannot produce or recruit enough physicians or advanced providers to keep up with the access demands for our community. Nurses working at the top of their license help to improve access for patients and allow the other healthcare clinicians—the physicians and advanced practice providers—to focus on patients with more complex needs,” said Cindy Drapal, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, associate chief nurse executive.

To that end, there are several examples of nurse-driven protocols Lee Physician Group has implemented to allow nurses to do just that, including:

- » Adult primary care protocols for the licensed nurse (RN and LPN) to place orders for health maintenance screenings, chronic disease monitoring for diabetes and labs for chronic condition monitoring. They also can provide referrals for the Complex Care Center and nurse navigator/Community Outreach services.
- » An RN protocol to treat simple UTI in nonpregnant females between the ages of 18 and 65.
- » An RN protocol for Medicare annual wellness visits.
- » Protocols for the licensed nurse (RN and LPN) to facilitate Warfarin dose management and Enoxaparin bridge in primary care and the Lee Health Heart Institute.
- » Cardiac Assessment-Recommendations & Education (CARE) protocol in the Lee Health Heart Institute to facilitate timely symptom management and information requests regarding antibiotic prophylaxis, testing clarifications, vaccine recommendations, medication-to-medication interactions, medication side effects and non-critical test results.
- » RN protocols for Open Access Colonoscopy for the RN to schedule patients per protocol for colonoscopy without the need for initial office consultation.
- » RN protocols for chronic medication refills.



Empowering nurses throughout Lee Physician Group has been an important focus, and that commitment continues into 2025 as they introduce community-based shared governance.



Cindy Drapal, DNP, RN, NEA-BC
Lee Physician Group Ambulatory Nursing Administration

What makes nursing such a fulfilling career? How can nurses impact access?

Nursing is a wonderful career because there are so many options. Ambulatory nursing is a great option for nurses because the focus is on keeping the patient as healthy as they can be. We cannot produce or recruit enough physicians or advanced providers to keep up with access demands for our community. Nurses working at the top of their license help to improve access for patients and allows the other healthcare clinicians—the physicians and advanced practice providers—to focus on patients with more complex needs.

Staffing Resource Center



Nurses Support Units and Specialties Across Lee Health

A team established over 20 years ago, the Staffing Resource Center (SRC) serves all of Lee Health’s adult hospitals, Golisano Children’s Hospital, the Rehabilitation Hospital and the Lee Health Coconut Point Emergency Department. Today, there are more than 500 members of the SRC team, including registered nurses and certified nursing assistants advanced (CNAA). SRC team members also fill safety tech and virtual patient observation shifts.

Our SRC team members serve 74 units across our health system, floating across emergency departments, vascular access, intensive care units, neonatal intensive care and pediatric intensive care, progressive care, medical-surgical, and labor and delivery units. In fiscal year 2024, our SRC RNs filled 9,804 shifts and CNAAs filled 6,039 shifts! The safety tech (baker acts/nurse criteria) team members filled 19,027 shifts and virtual patient observation requests filled 40,571!

The adaptability, clinical expertise and commitment to providing the safest, highest quality care of the SRC team enables a seamless delivery of services every day and night.

A New SRC Role: Staffing Coordination Specialist

In 2024, in response to the complexity of staffing and financial productivity needs, SRC leaders reviewed staffing flow at all four adult campuses and found a need for a standardized system staffing approach led by an on-campus SRC resource. This review led to the creation of the SRC staffing coordination specialist (SCS) role.

The SRC SCS is the on-campus resource that works closely with SRC centralized staffing to ensure both campus-wide and systemwide plans are created. The SRC SCS ensures the best use of campus-based staff while supplementing with SRC float pool staff.

“Our SCS team members partner with nursing units, EDs and administrative supervisors to understand campus staffing situations,” explained Kristi McMillan, MBA, FACHE, system director of resource management. “With a thorough understanding of staffing needs, the SCS creates staffing plans on a shift-by-shift basis and ensures the proper use of all resource types—core, SRC and premium—across the campus and Lee Health. The SRC SCS role helps give unit and campus staff time back to focus on their core patient-focused responsibilities.”

The Vital Impact of Our Quality Documentation Nurses

Accurate documentation and coding are essential for ensuring high-quality patient care, compliance and proper reimbursement. At Lee Health, we have a specialized team of 31 registered nurses, including one advanced practice registered nurse (APRN), in our Quality Documentation & Inpatient Coding department.

Quality Documentation & Inpatient Coding nurses play a pivotal role in ensuring medical records are precise, complete and reflective of the care provided.



Though no longer caring for patients at the bedside, these nurses use their expertise, clinical background and analytical skills to review and interpret complex medical cases. Through their work, they ensure medical records accurately reflect what happened to the hospitalized patient, the severity of illness, diagnoses and risk of mortality.

Jenna Prisciandaro, RN, BSN, CCDS, manager of the Quality Documentation & Inpatient Coding teams, explained that her team reviews 80-85% of all Medicare inpatient admissions and Golisano Children's Hospital Medicaid cases. Reviews are primarily done concurrently while the patient is still admitted, but she also has quality documentation specialists who focus on retrospectively reviewing charts (for all payers) based on questions and queries from medical coders.

“Our team goes through the chart with a fine-tooth comb, making sure that the documentation is accurate, which is important for patient care and the financial health of our organization,” Jenna said. “When documentation is thorough and precise, patients receive the right care and accurate bills, and Lee Health can optimize diagnosis-related groups (DRGs), ensuring the appropriate length of stay and proper reimbursement. Our team takes pride in our work and its impact on our patients and Lee Health.”

A significant point of pride for the Quality Documentation & Inpatient Coding team is the financial impact of their work on our health system. “From implementation through eight months into the second year of our enhanced quality documentation program, the total incremental net revenue financial impact was approximately \$22.9 million,” Jenna said. “Our work helps our health system have the financial resources to invest in equipment, technology and supplies that help our fellow nurses who work at the bedside provide the best care possible.”

Before joining the Quality Documentation team, a nurse must have at least five years of bedside experience. They also must have a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN). Nurses on the team have varied backgrounds, bringing experience from the operating room, the intensive care unit, the progressive care unit or pediatrics.

Center for Care Transformation Nurse Navigators Provide Personalized Care



Navigation Team Leads Patient-Centered Care and Reduces Readmissions

The Center for Care Transformation has a team of registered nurses who work with community healthcare coordinators and social workers to ensure patients receive care in a manner that is best suited for their individual needs—whether that is via telephone or in-person follow up at their home.

Together the navigation team delivers a patient-centered approach focused on addressing social determinants of health, providing clinical oversight, disease-specific education, medication reconciliation and overall needs assessment.

The team is focused on providing individualized care coordination to assist patients with transitions of care following a hospital stay or admission to a skilled nursing facility with the goal of reducing hospital readmissions, particularly for cohorts of patients including those in the Best Care Collaborative Accountable Care Organization, certain Medicare Advantage plans, the Lee Employee Health Plan and commercial risk-based contracts.



Education as a Key Value

Lee Health and Partners Invest in Nurses' Growth

Educational Assistance Program

Our Educational Assistance Program helps Lee Health team members, including many of our nurses, grow, develop and enhance their careers. In 2024, our employees received \$1.96 million in tuition assistance toward nursing degrees, including:

- » 420 employees pursuing their RN.
- » 366 employees pursuing their BSN.
- » 157 employees working on their MSN.
- » 88 employees working on their APRN.
- » 51 employees working on their DNP.

Visit the [Education Support page on VirtuaLee](#) for more details about our Educational Assistance Program and how to participate.

Education Award Program (Grants)

Lee Health is also proud to offer the Education Award Program. The application period for these grants opens every year from March 1-April 30, and employees, volunteers, family members and community members are invited to apply. In 2024, we awarded \$151,800 to 118 recipients pursuing their nursing education. [Check out Form #0846 for more information, including application details.](#)

\$4 Million Donation Ensures Future of Heart of Caring Scholarship Program

Mark Ain, a former Gulf Coast Medical Center patient, pledged \$4 million in 2024 to the Lee Health Foundation to support scholarships for our CNAs. Since 2016, Mark and his wife, Carolyn, have funded the Heart of Caring Scholarship Program, which covers educational expenses for CNAs pursuing BSN degrees. The 2024 donation secures the program's future for years to come.

[Visit this page on VirtuaLee for more information on this scholarship program.](#)

Lee Health Partners with FGCU, Nova Southeastern University for Nursing Scholarships

In 2024, Lee Health teamed up with Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) and Nova Southeastern University for scholarships that contribute up to \$10,000 toward Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees for current and prospective employees.

Funded by the state's Linking Industry to Nursing Education (LINE) grant and the Lee Health Foundation, the scholarship programs support nurses in advancing their careers at Lee Health while helping fill nursing positions across our health system.

[Click here](#) for more information about the Lee Health Florida Gulf Coast University Nursing Scholarship Program and [here](#) for the Lee Health Nova Southeastern University Nursing Scholarship Program.

Lee Health Receives \$400,000 Grant for Nurse Residency Program

Our Clinical Learning and Workforce Planning & Development teams collaborated to register our Nurse Residency Program as a state-approved apprenticeship, securing \$400,000 in grant funding. The Florida Department of Education's Pathways to Career Opportunities Grant (PCOG) is helping expand our Nurse Residency Program and standardize state-of-the-art equipment across Lee Health's simulation centers.



Mark says he was “blown away by the care” provided by Lee Health’s medical staff during a hospitalization, especially the CNAs who delivered incredibly compassionate patient care.

Supporting the Development of Our Nurses



Student Nurse Apprenticeship Program (SNAP)

The Student Nurse Apprenticeship Program (SNAP) offers PRN positions to current RN students, providing valuable hands-on experience in an acute care setting. This opportunity allows students to deepen their clinical skills while working alongside experienced healthcare professionals. Upon completing the program, student nurse apprentices receive priority consideration for our Nurse Residency Program. In 2024, 113 students participated in SNAP.

SNAP Benefits

- » Competitive pay.
- » Flexible scheduling.
- » Exposure to various units and specialties.

Our Clinical Ladder Program: Professional Nursing Advancement Program

The Professional Nursing Advancement Program (PNAP) was developed to recognize and reward the clinical expertise, contributions and professional career advancements of registered nurses. PNAP allows nurses to highlight critical aspects of their role through the development of narratives and exemplars. As mentioned in the Who We Are section, Lee Health had a total of 28 PNAP recipients in 2024.

Advancing Nurses: 232 Nurse Residents Join Grow Your Own Program in FY2024

The Grow Your Own Program advances nurses from novice to expert through tailored guidance and goal setting. Participants work with a nursing professional development practitioner (NPDP) to gain clinical experience, mentorship and continuing education. The program prepares nurses for roles such as:

- » Clinical coaches.
- » Charge nurse leaders.
- » Members of professional organizations.
- » PNAP recipients.
- » Active members in shared governance, unit-based councils and more.

In FY2024, 232 nurse residents participated in the Grow Your Own Program.

In May 2025, Lee Health launched the Nursing Clinical Ladder Program (NCLP) to recognize RN expertise, leadership and career growth. Replacing PNAP and Grow Your Own, the streamlined, five-level program features updated requirements and expanded eligibility, including nurses without certifications.

[Click here to visit the NCLP VirtuaLee page.](#)

Supporting the Development of Our Nurses

Empowering Nurse Leaders – Charge Nurse Leader Development Program

For staff nurses who wanted to grow their management and leadership skills, Lee Health offered a seven-week, highly interactive course called the Charge Nurse Leader Development Program.

This course was created in 2018 and focused on six competencies, including:

- » Leading others
- » Communication
- » Collaboration
- » Decision making
- » Conflict management
- » Change management

From the introduction of the program in 2018 through the end of fiscal year 2024, 933 acute care nurses participated in the Charge Nurse Leader Development Program. Today, 705 of those nurses still work at Lee Health and more than 160 have been transferred or promoted to other roles within the organization. Of the current nursing leadership team, 89 members have completed the Charge Nurse Leader Development Program. The Charge Nurse Leader Development Program has transitioned into a new, more inclusive, systemwide program called the Aspiring Nurse Leader Program.

Building On Our Success: Aspiring Nurse Leader Program

In January 2024, a workgroup convened to review, redefine, refine and expand the success of the Charge Nurse Leader Development Program. The group wanted to create a more inclusive program, open to nurses outside the hospitals, and they wanted to align the curriculum with the American Organization for Nursing Leadership's competencies.

After months of collaboration, the group established the Aspiring Nurse Leader Program and launched three pilot sessions, starting in October with 25 participants, in November with 28 participants and the final pilot session in December with 28 participants.

The three-week, 28-hour program focused on:

- » Building your leadership brand.
- » The essence of leadership: nurturing relationships for success.
- » Financial acumen.
- » Health equity and social determinants of health.
- » Healthcare economics and policy.
- » Navigating organizational dynamics.
- » Work-life integration – self-care strategies.
- » Mastering critical thinking: the key to strategic problem solving.
- » Change champions: empowering teams to navigate and embrace change.

Post-program surveys found that the variety of topics proved helpful for nurses looking to grow and develop into empowered leaders.

The Aspiring Nurse Leader Program is an official offering through the Leadership & Organizational Development team, and more information can be found at Learn@Lee Health.



Instilling Leadership Competencies, Management Skills, Business Acumen and More

In 2023, Lee Health invested in the American Organization for Nursing Leaders (ANOL) Nurse Manager Transition to Practice Program.

This five-month, evidence-based program is a mix of online micro-learnings and once-a-month in-person sessions. Led by Leadership Development Specialists Elisabeth “Beth” Dowd, DNP, MSN, RN, CEN, and Maryann Windey, Ph.D., MS, MSN, RN, NPD-BC, the program provides education, training and support on important topics, including but not limited to:

- » Effective staffing and scheduling.
- » Budgeting.
- » Work/life balance.
- » Strategic thinking.
- » Managing performance.
- » Facilitating effective meetings.

Thirty-eight nurse managers from HealthPark Medical Center and the Staffing Resource Center were the first cohort to complete the program. Golisano Children's Hospital and Lee Physician Group were next in line to participate. The nurse manager teams from Lee Health's other hospitals followed, too, with Lee Memorial Hospital beginning to participate in the summer of 2025.

Since the start of the program, 99 nurses have completed the training (and 50 more nurses are completing the training at the time of publication). These nurses are more confidently navigating the transition from bedside nurse to nurse leader.

Lee Health Nurse Residency Program

Exceeding Expectations: Residency Program Surpasses Hiring Goal, Achieves 97% Retention Rate

The PTAP-accredited Lee Health Nurse Residency Program offers a personalized and supportive approach to help nurses transition smoothly and confidently into independent practice. Residents collaborate closely with experienced clinical coaches dedicated to their success.

In FY2024, the program set a goal of hiring at least 400 nurse apprentices—and exceeded expectations by welcoming 545 nurse residents, including:

- » 417 RN residents.
- » 97 RN experienced bridge nurses.
- » 6 LPN residents.
- » 25 Temporary Transition to Practice (TTP) RN residents.

The program also achieved an impressive 97% retention rate for resident hires, reflecting the strength and effectiveness of its supportive approach.*

**The retention rate is based on one year of full-time employment from the nurse residency cohort start date, following the ANCC PTAP Accreditation Retention Criteria.*

Stories That Highlight the Ways We Care for Our Nurses and Community

Your Safety is Our Highest Priority

Workplace violence prevention efforts

Nurses devote their lives and careers to caring for others. Unfortunately, due to a complex variety of factors, nurses (and other healthcare professionals) across the country are more likely to suffer a workplace violence injury than employees in other industries. News reports of violence against nurses are becoming more frequent, and that is frightening and infuriating.

To say that Lee Health is committed to your safety seems like an understatement. We take the responsibility of keeping you, our patients and our health system safe seriously and we want you to feel secure and supported every day at work.



Here are some of the workplace violence prevention efforts we have employed:

- » We established a Workplace Violence Committee, made up of representatives from across our health system. Among other activities, the committee reviews all workplace violence incidents reported to identify trends and develop prevention measures directed at violence prevention.
- » Members of the Workplace Violence Committee also developed the system-wide workplace violence awareness and prevention training that is now mandatory for all new and existing employees.
- » We offer De-escalation training, worth 2 CEUs, which equips you with strategies to manage difficult situations safely and the skills to recognize, reduce, and manage aggressive and potentially violent behavior. If you and your colleagues are interested in participating, [click here to visit Learn@Lee Health to find upcoming sessions](#). Following the launch of the program toward the end of the year, more than 120 of our colleagues completed this training before the start of 2025.
- » We continue to invest in technology directly related to risk and violence reduction including cameras, discreet duress buttons/alarms and electronic access control.
- » We instituted the Workplace Violence Reporting Tool in the SafeLee Portal, where all team members can report any threats or concerning behavior. To encourage reporting and reduce the hesitancy to do so we allow reporting parties to remain anonymous. This tool allows us to track incidents and allocate resources where they are most needed.
- » Following a pilot at Cape Coral Hospital (where the concept was established through a project with Nursing, Public Safety, Housekeeping, and Transportation Services), the orange flag is now used across our hospitals to alert every team member of a patient who has exhibited threatening or violent behavior. The Violent Patient Identification – **Orange Flag policy (M03 01 911)** was established to ensure a formalized process and procedure for this safety measure.
- » Triage nurses in our adult emergency departments utilize the Broset Violence Checklist to assess the risk of aggressive or violent behavior. If the patient is found to be at moderate or high risk for violence or aggression, they receive the orange band, and the orange flag is placed on their door (if admitted).

Here are some of the workplace violence prevention efforts we have employed: (continued)

- » We successfully piloted wearable duress alarms at Lee Memorial Hospital that are now being expanded throughout the health system. These discreet, GPS-enabled clips are worn by clinical staff and when activated ensure Public Safety can locate the team member in need. In 2024, there were 134 alarm activations.
- » Our Public Safety officers are highly trained and equipped to respond to and confront threats when necessary. They work directly with our local law enforcement and support investigations related to workplace violence to hold those responsible accountable.
- » We also implemented weapon detection systems at ED entrances and are continuing to explore expanding the use of this technology to enhance security across our facilities. In 2024, the weapon detection systems were installed at Cape Coral Hospital, Gulf Coast Medical Center and Lee Memorial Hospital. In total, there were 602,800 visitors tracked through the system and there were 129,982 alerts with 221 firearms and 2,468 knives detected and confiscated.
- » We also encourage you to download the Guardian mobile safety app on your phone. It has an abundance of security features to help you quickly and easily request assistance if/when you need to.

Remember, if you see something, say something!

If you ever feel unsafe or witness a potential threat, please do not hesitate to contact Public Safety at 239-343-3333 (3-3333 from any Lee Health phone). In an imminent emergency requiring law enforcement, call 911.

Nurses Honoring Nurses

A Year of Service by the Southwest Florida Nurse Honor Guard

In 2024, the Southwest Florida Nurse Honor Guard honored 12 fallen nurses with tributes at their memorial services and provided living tributes to two nurses in hospice care. In February, they entered a float in the Edison Festival of Lights Parade, earning first place!

Co-founders Tonya Raldiris, BSN, RN, RNC-BC, CBC, SANE, a Labor and Delivery nurse at HealthPark Medical Center, and Connie Girgenti also participated in Nursing Week activities at several Lee Health campuses in May. Additionally, the group was featured in the American Journal of Nursing with an article co-authored by Tonya, Connie and fellow nurse Sheri Pieroni. Titled “Nurses Honoring Fallen Nurses,” the article detailed the founding of the Honor Guard and was published on May 25, 2024.



Southwest Florida Nurse Honor Guard members pose for a photo.

Bridging Faith and Health: Faith Community Nursing Makes Significant Strides

Faith Community Nursing (FCN) is a specialized practice that addresses the mind, body and spirit. Serving as liaisons between our health system and spiritual communities, Faith Community Nurses connect clergy, congregations and healthcare providers. In FY2024, they dedicated nearly 10,000 hours to supporting community health and well-being.

In 2024, the program expanded its services and strengthened community partnerships. Key additions included AHA BLS training, spiritual development opportunities and Epic referral education. Monthly meetings featured expert speakers on topics such as health equity, lung cancer screening, mental health and emergency preparedness. The program also supported hurricane recovery efforts across all faith communities and provided health promotion and disease prevention education, screenings, resources and case management referrals to help reduce hospitalizations in our community.



Faith Community Nurses gather at St. Hilary's Episcopal Church.

Recognizing Our Exceptional Nurses



Lee Health Honors Nurses with Awards

2024 Commitment to Nursing Excellence Winners

The Commitment to Nursing Excellence Award recognizes nurses who provide exceptional care, and who excel in practice, research, education and leadership. Nurses are nominated for this high honor during advertised nomination periods each year. [Visit this VirtuaLee page to read excerpts from our exceptional nurses' nominations.](#)

Brynn Bartlett, BSN, RN, CCRN
Cape Coral Hospital

Shannon Burke, BSN, RN, CBC
Lee Physician Group OB/GYN

Pia Cacaes, RN, AND
HealthPark Medical Center

Natalie Colwell, BSN, BSPH, RN
Gulf Coast Medical Center

Amy Drobny, RN, BSN
Home Health

Susan Ellis, LPN
Skilled Nursing

Meleah Febles, RN, BSN, CPN
Golisano Children's Hospital

Dayna Franks, RN
Lee Community Healthcare - North Fort Myers

Stephanie Gatto, BSN, RN
Gulf Coast Medical Center

Amber Hall, RN, CCRN
Lee Memorial Hospital

Melanie Humaran, MSN, RN
Lee Health Coconut Point

Yany Ibarra, RN
Lee Memorial Hospital

Jose Jaime, RN, BSN, CCRN
Gulf Coast Medical Center

Crystal Kalen, RN
Cape Coral Hospital

Michelle Kane, RN, BSN, OCN
Regional Cancer Center

Donna Laikona, RN, BSN, PCCN
Gulf Coast Medical Center

Ashley Magar, RN
Lee Memorial Hospital

Candida Mattson, RN, ASN
HealthPark Medical Center

Nicole McDuffie, RN
HealthPark Medical Center

Dawn Papp, RN, LMT, MMP, HC
Lee Physician Group Endocrinology

Iris Pujols, LPN
Skilled Nursing

Mirta Surges, BSN, RN
Cape Coral Hospital

Gabriella Vazquez, MSN, APRN, FNP-C, CPN
Golisano Children's Hospital

Krystal Walters, BSN, RN, CAHP
Golisano Children's Hospital

Nurses Recognized with Passion for the Promise Award

The Passion for the Promise Award is Lee Health's highest honor and celebrates team members who model the ExceptionalLee Promise each and every day.



Traci Abbasi, DNP, MSN-Ed, RN, VA-BC
Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) Program Coordinator/Educator, Preanesthesia Evaluation Center



Paul Anders, RN
Critical Care, ICU, Cape Coral Hospital



Laurie Beaudry, LPN
Admission Nurse, HealthPark Care and Rehabilitation Center



Ginger Bierdeman, MSN, RN
Nurse Resident Development Specialist, Nursing Internship Program, Cape Coral Hospital



Christina Bryan, RN
Critical Care, Met Nurses, Gulf Coast Medical Center



Lyn Carlson, BSN-RN, CCM
Dip ACLM, Nurse Navigator, LPG Community Care Outreach



Marla Drake, RN
Critical Care, Emergency Services, Lee Memorial Hospital



Kaleigh Koetting, RN, BSN, PCCN
3E - GI SPCU, Gulf Coast Medical Center



Lori Laczynski, RN, MSN
Nursing Director, Orthopedics Center, Lee Memorial Hospital



Lisa Lynagh-Dorcey, MSN, RN, CAHP
Nursing Director, PICU/PPCU, Golisano Children's Hospital



Molly Schmitt, APRN
Advanced Provider II, LPG Cardiology



Patricia "Trish" Willson, MSN-Ed, RN, CCRN
Nurse Manager, ICU, Cape Coral Hospital

Honoring Our DAISY Award-Winning Nurses

We proudly recognize the Lee Health nurses who received The DAISY Award® For Extraordinary Nurses in 2024. Created in 1999 by The DAISY Foundation to honor the compassionate care nurses provided to Patrick J. Barnes during his battle with immune thrombocytopenia (ITP), this award is now celebrated at more than 5,400 healthcare facilities worldwide. At Lee Health, anyone—including patients, families and colleagues—can nominate a nurse for this honor.



2024 Cape Coral Hospital DAISY Honorees

Roanne Gardner, RN
3W Progressive Care

Laura Nunez, RN
4W Ortho - General Surgery

Marie Patton, RN
Critical Care, ICU

Jessica Jansen, RN
Critical Care, ICU

2024 Golisano Children's Hospital DAISY Honorees

Evelyn Barahona, RN
PH6 General Pediatrics

Shaye Curley, RN
PH7 Med-Surg Pediatrics

Sarah Kline, RN
Critical Care, Neonatal ICU

Audrey Collins, RN
Critical Care, Neonatal ICU

Tammy Hanna, RN
Critical Care, Neonatal ICU

Allessandra Tommarello, RN
Critical Care, Neonatal ICU

2024 Gulf Coast Medical Center DAISY Honorees

Dylan Beauchamp, RN
Critical Care, SRC/3W SPCU

Harold Melendez, RN
Critical Care, ICU

Angel Regina, Title
Unit

Dwan Bell, RN
Critical Care, SRC/MPCU

Brenda Njos, RN
Critical Care, TICU

Claudine Reid, RN
Cardiac Med

Chrissy Chase, Title
Emergency Department

Christine Petersen, Nursing Director
Surgical Oncology 7W

Kristin Rodi, RN
Critical Care, Neuro ICU

Joyce Hlywka, RN
Critical Care, Medical Oncology 7E

2024 HealthPark Medical Center DAISY Honorees

Rhonda Brubaker, RN
2W MPCU

Sabrina Gorton, Director
Emergency Services

Jillian Weiser, RN
Critical Care, Labor and Delivery

Nicole Davis, RN
6W Progressive Care Unit

Taylor Rondeau, Advanced Provider II
Cardiothoracic Surgery

2024 Lee Memorial Hospital DAISY Honorees

Yany Ibarra, RN
4W PCU

Roger Martins, Title
4 North

Judy Rogers, RN
N3 PCU

Vanessa Longworth, Intern/LPN
4W PCU

Dreymis Perdomo, RN
Progressive Care Unit B

Jennifer Stufflebeam, RN
N3 PCU

Congratulations to Our High-Reliability Award Winners

The Intensive Care Units at Gulf Coast Medical Center and the 2 South Orthopedics team at Lee Memorial Hospital both earned the Lee Health High-Reliability Award—our health system's top honor for safety and quality.

Presented twice a year by the Chief Officer Leadership Council, this award recognizes teams that demonstrate exceptional commitment to safe, high-quality care and continuous improvement.

Gulf Coast Medical Center ICU

In summer 2023, the ICU teams faced record-high pressure injury rates, prompting a detailed investigation and swift action. They implemented three key changes:

1. CNAs took responsibility for Q2 hour turns.
2. ICU bed education and work orders were introduced.
3. Weekly leadership skin rounding began.



As a result, pressure injuries **DROPPED BY 80%** in the next fiscal quarter!



Lee Memorial Hospital 2 South Orthopedics

The Orthopedics team actively reviewed patient surveys, analyzed daily operations and implemented process improvements, leading to a 50% reduction in falls and a 35% decrease in falls with injury from FY2023 to FY2024.

They also:

- » Improved nearly all HCAHPS metrics.
- » Enhanced collaboration with other departments.
- » Launched a successful shoulder pre-op class.

Each High-Reliability Award recipient received a plaque and a \$500 budget transfer, sponsored by the Lee Health Foundation.



Units Hit New Milestone for Patient Safety

New Certified Zero Award Marks 6 Years without HACs

In 2024, the Certified Zero Awards expanded to include the Sapphire Certified Zero Award (72 months). Congratulations to the two units that reached this remarkable milestone, as well as our other Certified Zero winners from 2024!

3W HFSU, HealthPark Medical Center - Sapphire Certified Zero	5N, Lee Memorial Hospital - Platinum Certified Zero	2N ICU MICU/SICU, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Certified Zero
5E, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Sapphire Certified Zero	8S PCU, Lee Memorial Hospital - Platinum Certified Zero	2ICU, Cape Coral Hospital - Certified Zero
2S PCU, HealthPark Medical Center - Emerald Certified Zero	2 Ortho, Lee Memorial Hospital - Platinum Certified Zero	3N ICU, Cape Coral Hospital - Certified Zero
2T SICU, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Emerald Certified Zero	5 Rehab, Lee Memorial Hospital - Platinum Certified Zero	6W Ortho, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Certified Zero
7N/8N ICU, Lee Memorial Hospital - Ruby Certified Zero	6E Gen Surg, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Platinum Certified Zero	3E GI PCU, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Certified Zero
7W, HealthPark Medical Center - Titanium Certified Zero	3N PCU, Lee Memorial Hospital - Platinum Certified Zero	4 SICU, HealthPark Medical Center - Certified Zero
6 Peds, Golisano Children's Hospital - Titanium Certified Zero	3W MPCU, Cape Coral Hospital - Platinum Certified Zero	6 Rehab, Lee Memorial Hospital - Certified Zero
4W PCU, Lee Memorial Hospital - Titanium Certified Zero	4W Med Surg, Cape Coral Hospital - Platinum Certified Zero	2W CACU, HealthPark Medical Center - Certified Zero
4E Neuro PCU, Cape Coral Hospital - Titanium Certified Zero	5 Peds, Golisano Children's Hospital - Certified Zero	3N PCU/CDU, Cape Coral Hospital - Certified Zero
7 Peds, Golisano Children's Hospital - Platinum Certified Zero	7S PCU, Lee Memorial Hospital - Certified Zero	MICU, HealthPark Medical Center - Certified Zero
2E HH, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Platinum Certified Zero	5W, HealthPark Medical Center - Certified Zero	3W, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Certified Zero
2T Stepdown, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Platinum Certified Zero	7E, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Certified Zero	4N NS, Lee Memorial Hospital - Certified Zero
2 Trauma PCU, Gulf Coast Medical Center - Platinum Certified Zero	PICU, Golisano Children's Hospital - Certified Zero	

