



2024 Nursing Annual Report

Caring

nurses
making a
difference



Committed to progress,
inspired by patients

**Our nurses practice at many
AHN facilities including:**

- Allegheny General Hospital
- Allegheny Valley Hospital
- Canonsburg Hospital
- Forbes Hospital
- Grove City
- Jefferson Hospital
- Saint Vincent Hospital
- Westfield Memorial Hospital
- West Penn Hospital
- Wexford Hospital
- Citizens School of Nursing
- West Penn School of Nursing
- Allegheny Clinics
- AHN Ambulatory Surgery Centers

A Message from AHN Nursing Executive Leadership

We are thrilled to unveil “Caring,” Allegheny Health Network’s (AHN) 2024 Nursing Annual Report, a testament to the extraordinary dedication and achievements of our 6,000-strong nursing team. As Chief Nurse Executive and Vice President of Clinical Nursing Operations and Innovation, we are immensely proud to share this report, showcasing a year of remarkable progress and impactful contributions.

Within these pages, you’ll discover compelling narratives of evidence-based practice improvements that have directly enhanced patient care. We celebrate significant accomplishments, highlighting the innovative spirit and unwavering commitment that defines AHN Nursing. You’ll also witness our ongoing commitment to serving our communities, both through direct patient care and impactful community outreach programs. Our strategic investments in advancing nursing clinical practice are detailed, illustrating our dedication to providing our nurses with the resources they need to excel.

A pivotal year, 2024 marked our commitment to empowering every nurse to reach their full potential. We invested significantly in educational programs designed to enhance skills and knowledge, complemented by robust wellness

initiatives focused on mental and physical well-being. This included the expansion of Critical Incident Stress Management and Mental Health First Aid training programs, directly addressing the unique challenges faced by our health care professionals.

Our dedication to reducing administrative burdens and fostering a supportive work environment led to the expansion of the Digital Nursing Program, freeing up valuable time for nurses to focus on patient care and take much-needed breaks. Furthermore, we continued our support for flexible work arrangements and career growth opportunities through our “work your way” programs and dedicated internal staffing team.

This report is a tribute to the compassionate expertise and unwavering dedication of each AHN nurse. Your contributions extend far beyond exceptional patient care; you leave a lasting, positive impact on the lives you touch. We extend our deepest gratitude for your tireless commitment.



Angela Costa
MPM, BSN, RN
Chief Nurse Executive
AHN Executive Nursing



Hope Waltenbaugh
MSN, RN, CNOR, NEA-BC
Vice President, Nursing
Operations and Innovation
AHN Executive Nursing

AGH Achieves Prestigious Magnet® Recognition

By: Chief Nursing Officer Marge
DiDuccio, PhD, RN, NEA-BC

January 18, 2024, was a momentous day in AHN Allegheny General Hospital's (AGH) history. It's when we achieved our first Magnet recognition from the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC). This prestigious designation underscores our unwavering commitment to excellence in nursing and patient care, a commitment that permeates every level of our organization. The Magnet designation is not simply an award; it's a testament to the dedication, expertise, and collaborative spirit of our exceptional nursing staff and the entire AGH team.

The ANCC's rigorous Magnet Recognition Program® evaluates health care organizations across a wide range of criteria, focusing on transformational leadership, structural empowerment of nurses, exemplary professional practice, and new knowledge, innovation, and improvements. To secure this recognition, AGH committed to a sustained, multiyear effort involving comprehensive self-assessment, data collection, and demonstration of best practices.

This achievement is a direct reflection of the tireless work and unwavering commitment of our nurses, physicians, support staff, and leadership. Their dedication to providing compassionate, high-quality care is the cornerstone of our success.

The Magnet designation validates their efforts and serves as a beacon, attracting and retaining top-tier nursing talent.

Looking ahead, we are committed to building on this success. The Magnet designation is not a destination, but a launching pad for continued improvement and innovation. We will leverage this recognition to further elevate our nursing practice, enhance patient care, and solidify our position as a leading health care provider in the region.

The journey to Magnet was challenging, yet the result is a source of immense pride for AGH, and we extend our sincere gratitude to all who contributed to this remarkable achievement. This is more than just an award; it reflects our shared values and a promise to continue delivering exceptional care to our community.

Our journey to Magnet status involved:

Investing in nursing professional development:

We implemented innovative programs focused on enhancing clinical skills, leadership training, and career advancement opportunities for our nurses.

Strengthening nurse leadership and empowerment:

We fostered a culture where nurses have a powerful voice in shaping policies and procedures, directly impacting patient care and the overall hospital environment.

Improving patient outcomes through evidence-based practice:

We implemented data-driven initiatives that demonstrably improved patient satisfaction, safety, and quality of care using nurse-driven quality collaboratives and lean methodology.

Cultivating a culture of collaboration and teamwork:

We built a solid foundation of interdisciplinary collaboration, breaking down silos and fostering a supportive environment for all health care professionals.



**MAGNET CELEBRATION
AHN ALLEGHENY GENERAL HOSPITAL**

Newsweek Rates AHN's Ambulatory Surgery Centers Among America's Best

Newsweek ranked all five of AHN's ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) among the top 25 in Pennsylvania in their "2025 America's Best Ambulatory Surgery Centers" ratings of facilities nationwide. AHN's rankings were:

#1 — AHN Monroeville Surgery Center

#4 — AHN Outpatient Center Westmoreland

#12 — AHN Bethel Park Surgery Center

#15 — AHN Surgery Center at Wexford
Health + Wellness Pavilion

#23 — AHN North Shore Endoscopy Center

"According to Definitive Healthcare, there are over 9,000 active ASCs performing millions of procedures each year," notes Nancy Cooper, Newsweek's global editor in chief.

"This year, over 5,000 ASCs were rigorously evaluated on key criteria, including quality of care, patient experience, performance data, and peer recommendations."

Nancy Cooper

Newsweek's Global Editor in Chief

Newsweek partnered with global research firm Statista to rank the top 650 ASCs in the country by state based on data collected between August 2023 and August 2024. Forty-five percent of the overall score reflected recommendations and quality assessments by ASC medical professionals and staff who completed an online survey at Newsweek.com. Additionally, 45% on Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) scores on these measures:

Measure 1 — Endoscopy/polyp surveillance for appropriate follow-up interval for normal colonoscopy in average risk patients

Measure 2 — Improvement in patients' visual function within 90 days following cataract surgery

Measure 3 — Seven-day risk-standardized hospital visit rate after outpatient colonoscopy

Measure 4 — Normothermia outcome

Measure 5 — Unplanned anterior vitrectomy

Measure 6 — Hospital visits after orthopaedic ASC procedures

Measure 7 — Hospital visits after urology ASC procedures

Measure 8 — COVID-19 vaccination coverage among health care personnel

Measure 9 — Seven-day hospital visit rate after general surgery procedures



A Patient Experience Score, accounting for 7.5% of the overall score, was calculated from responses to the Outpatient and Ambulatory Surgery Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (OAS CAHPS) survey regarding:

- Quality of care.
- Cleanliness of the facility.
- Communication from staff.
- Patient rating of the facility as a whole.
- Whether or not the patient would recommend the facility to others.

An Accreditation Score, accounting for 2.5% of the overall score, was assigned based on participation in these Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC) accreditation programs:

- Ambulatory Accreditation
- Medicare Deemed Status Accreditation
- Advanced Orthopaedic Certification

“The 2025 *Newsweek* rankings validate the commitment to excellence of staff at all of the ASCs.”

Jesse Hixson, MSN, RN, CNOR
Administrator of AHN’s Monroeville ASC

“The 2025 *Newsweek* rankings validate the commitment to excellence of staff at all of the ASCs,” said Jesse Hixson, MSN, RN, CNOR, administrator of AHN’s Monroeville ASC. “In addition, our site has won several patient safety awards from the state in recent years, including the Patient Safety Authority’s I Am Patient Safety (IAPS) Executive Director’s Choice Award in 2023 and the IAPS Ambulatory Surgical Facility Award in 2022 and 2021.”

AVH's Early Mobility Program Decreases Fall Rate

In March 2023, AHN Allegheny Valley Hospital's (AVHs) Unit 3D started an Early Mobility Program to minimize complications of prolonged immobilization, such as decreased ability to perform activities of daily living at the patient's previous level and muscle weakness. These can lead to increased length of stay, readmissions, and the need to be discharged to a higher level of care.

The program's goal is for nurses and patient care technicians (PCTs) to work closely with physical and occupational therapy (PT/OT) to mobilize all patients with appropriate PT/OT orders a minimum of three times a day.

During March 2023, staff were educated on the goals of the program, signage was hung next to patient white boards in the rooms, and placemats were added to patient meal trays to educate patients and families about the program.

At the end of the first month of the program, compliance with the mobilization plan was only 2.6%. However, as time went on, staff became increasingly engaged in using their skills to motivate and mobilize patients. As a result,

compliance with the program a year later in March 2024 was 64.6%. Compliance peaked in July 2024 at 75.5%, and the unit celebrated with a Make Your Own PB & J Bar.

A major benefit of 3D's Early Mobility Program has been a decrease in the unit's fall rate. A year before the program started, the rate was 7.99 falls per 1,000 patient days. At the start of the program in March 2023, the rate was 6.82 falls per 1,000 patient days. At the end of 2024, the fall rate was 4.52 falls per 1,000 patient days.

3D's fall rate (dark green bars) decreased as compliance (medium green bars) with the Early Mobility Program increased. This demonstrates that encouraging patients to get out of bed and mobilize decreases their fall risk.

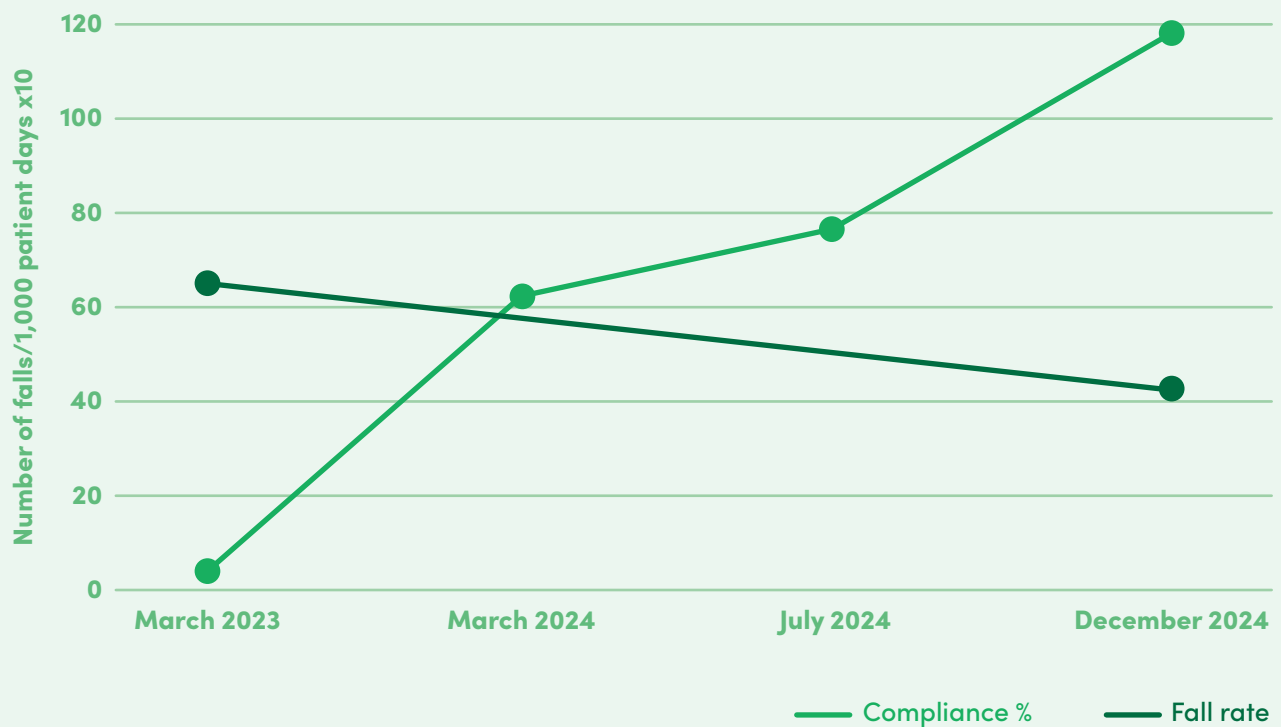
“I am proud of my team for their efforts and commitment to mobilizing patients and minimizing falls. Instead of seeing the Early Mobility Program as an added task, they have made it part of their daily plans for providing the absolute best care to our patients.”

Ashley Vensel, BSN, RN
3D Manager

Reports Quality Manager Marlene Ross, MA, OT, MHA, CPHQ, added, “In addition to improvement in the fall rate, 3D saw increases from 2022 to 2024 in the proportion of patients discharged to home versus a higher level of care.”



**EARLY MOBILITY PROGRAM
AHN ALLEGHENY VALLEY HOSPITAL**





**NEW HOSPITAL PLANNING
AHN CANONSBURG HOSPITAL**

Canonsburg Nurses Help Plan Their New Hospital

During 2024, AHN Canonsburg Hospital's nurse leaders participated with other hospitals, Highmark, local leaders, interdisciplinary colleagues, and vendors in planning construction of the new hospital. Groundbreaking is slated for June 2025, completion in late 2027, and tear-down of the current building in 2028.

"The community loves this hospital, and they want it to be successful," said Canonsburg Director of Nursing Jamie Price, MSN, RN, CCRN. "I've been to several township meetings, and they are extremely positive about the new hospital."

AHN is building a new hospital not just out of necessity, but out of a commitment to delivering exceptional care.

"The current structure rests on a material called pyrite, which is causing the building to shift, making it harder and harder to manage the upkeep," explained Joy Peters, DNP, MSN, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, CNO of AHN Canonsburg and AHN Jefferson.

"The community around Canonsburg is growing, and a new hospital, with a medical office building, allows us to build and protect access to services at an affordable price."

Joy Peters, DNP, MSN, MBA, RN, NEA-BC
CNO of AHN Canonsburg and AHN Jefferson

The new structure will be a dramatic change from the current building, which has 104 patient rooms. "It will have a small inpatient footprint with 48 private patient rooms, because the future of health care is in the outpatient setting," Jamie said.

The team toured two recently constructed hospitals and really liked one design with the bathrooms built between rooms rather than inside each room.

"The larger, rectangular rooms and bathrooms better accommodate equipment such as walkers and allow patients and multiple staff to move more freely for safe care," Joy said. "The design provides cost savings too."

Jamie went on to explain the experience.

"To decide the actual room size, the team built mock medical-surgical, ICU, and doctor's office rooms, each with a cardboard bed and whatever else was needed so we could evaluate if there was enough space. It was really fun."

The number of operating rooms will double to eight, offering easy access for those who need surgery. There will also be a 12-bed clinical decision unit, which will streamline care.

Nurse managers and assistant nurse managers were key in designing the patient care units.

"This was an interdisciplinary process," Joy said.

"All the stakeholders got together to design the space allotted. One department might be asked to give up 10 feet here, but could add 20 feet there. We talked about operational workflows and brought them to the larger group for discussion and resolution."

The final schematic drawings were shared with all AHN Canonsburg Hospital staff at a town hall meeting on Jan. 3, 2025.

"The meeting was standing room only, and everyone was positive and so excited," Jamie said.

Joy added, "There will be a lot of growing pains with parking, construction, and noise. But in the end, it will be a beautiful, new facility with a medical office building on-site. It will be pretty cool for everyone to be able to watch the new facility go up before their eyes."

Allegheny Clinics Inaugurate the DAISY® Award

AHN hospitals have been recognizing their bedside nurses with the DAISY Award for several years. In 2024, the Allegheny Clinics Employee Engagement Council launched their DAISY Award to recognize nurses in AHN clinics and physician offices. The international award honors and celebrates the skillful, compassionate care nurses provide every day.

The DAISY Foundation™ was established in 1999 by the family of J. Patrick Barnes who died at age 33 from complications of the autoimmune disease idiopathic thrombocytopenia purpura (ITP). DAISY is an acronym for Diseases Attacking the Immune System. During his hospitalization, the family deeply appreciated the care and compassion shown to Patrick and his entire family. When he died, they felt compelled to thank his nurses in a very public way.

Each facility that wants to participate in the DAISY Award appoints a DAISY coordinator who follows guidelines of the DAISY Foundation to obtain nominations and select DAISY Award winners from the coordinator's organization.

The coordinator submits the award information and a photograph of the winner to the DAISY program, which confirms the award information,

registers the award winner, and creates the winner's DAISY Spotlight page. The program sends the link to this page to the facility's DAISY coordinator, who shares it with the nurse.

“The benefits associated with being a DAISY honoree last a lifetime. Even if you change organizations or roles, you are entitled to honoree benefits throughout your career.”

DAISY Foundation

“Nurses receiving a DAISY Award join a worldwide community of extraordinary nurses, nursing faculty, and students,” notes the DAISY Foundation.

These benefits include discounts for costs of certification/recertification by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), Competency and Credentialing Institute, or American Association of Critical-Care Nurses Certification Corporation; access to compete for up to \$2,000 toward conference expenses for continuing education; discounted subscriptions to well-being activities, such as ANCC's StressPal; and discounted memberships in some professional nursing organizations.

Anyone at a participating facility can nominate a nurse at that facility for a DAISY Award.

“We've prepared and disseminated marketing materials and nominations have begun to roll in,” said Julianne Markovich, PMP, senior project manager, AHN Pediatric Institute and AHN Clinics DAISY Coordinator. “We hope to recognize the initial AHN Clinics DAISY Award winner in Q1 2025.”



**INTRODUCTION OF THE DAISY® AWARD
ALLEGHENY CLINIC**



**AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS
AHN HARMAR NEIGHBORHOOD HOSPITAL**

AHN's Neighborhood Hospitals Demonstrate Excellence

AHN Emerus is the nation's leading developer of small format neighborhood hospitals. It manages AHN's four neighborhood hospitals, which provide Emergency Care 24/7 and inpatient and observation overnight services to residents of communities south, north, and east of Pittsburgh.

The locations are:

- AHN Brentwood Neighborhood Hospital, 3290 Saw Mill Run Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA 15227
- AHN Harmar Neighborhood Hospital, 2501 Freeport Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15238
- AHN Hempfield Neighborhood Hospital, 6321 Route 30, Greensburg, PA 15601
- AHN McCandless Neighborhood Hospital, 8950 Duncan Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Each of these hospitals is proud to report on their 2024 initiatives that promoted excellence in patient care and service and nursing professional development.

AHN Brentwood's Inpatient Care Unit went over 365 days without a patient fall.

“These national awards and recognitions reflect the hard work and dedication of our staff and leaders to keeping our patients safe and providing the best possible experience.”

Julie Ference, MSN, RN, CNML, BCEN, PHRN
Pittsburgh Region Chief Nursing Officer,
AHN Neighborhood Hospitals.

AHN Harmar's Inpatient Care Unit went over 365 days without a patient fall. In addition, Press Ganey (PG) recognized Harmar with a 2024 Guardian of Excellence Award® for patient experience in the Emergency Department category. The 2024 PG Human Experience Award winners were recognized at HX25, a conference held Feb. 3 – 5, 2025, in Orlando, Florida. Among the 41,000 health care facilities that work with PG, the Guardian of Excellence Award is given annually to those that rank in the 95th percentile for patient experience. This is PG's second consecutive year recognizing AHN Harmar.

AHN Hempfield's success story is partnering with its local emergency medical service providers to quickly treat and transfer acute myocardial infarction (AMI) patients to their partner. “We led the market in efficiency, achieving the top 5% Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services quality standard in 2024 for Door to Transfer of AMI patients,” reports Regional CEO, AHN Neighborhood Hospitals, Cynthia Dorundo. “Our average was 34 minutes.”

AHN McCandless met their sepsis care metrics for 100% of their patients 100% of the time.

Forbes Telemetry Unit Pilots Digital Nursing

AHN Forbes Hospital's Telemetry Unit took a step into the future of nursing and digital innovation and were astounded at the outcomes.

From April 8 to July 8, 2024, Randy Geiselhart, MSN, RN, PCCN, nurse manager of 3 North (3N), and his staff piloted AHN's Digital Nursing Program on their 47-person unit from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week.

To prepare for the pilot, secure voice and video telecommunication technology from care.ai was installed in each 3N patient room. On each day of the pilot, one member of AHN's Digital Nursing team worked remotely to conduct admissions, discharges to home, and rounding (one round per patient per day) for the patients who agreed to use the technology.

AHN's digital nurses have access to the electronic medical record system (Epic). When a bedside nurse determines that a patient is appropriate for digital nursing services, the nurse communicates this to the digital nurse via Epic Secure Chat. When the patient is approved for digital rounding or admission or discharge, the digital nurse establishes the digital encounter via the care.ai equipment and asks the patient for permission to turn the camera on.





**DIGITAL NURSING PROGRAM
AHN FORBES HOSPITAL**



While the digital nurse is interacting remotely with that patient, the 3N nurse is free to perform tasks, such as the head-to-toe assessment, specimen collection, or wound care.

During 3N's pilot, digital nurses "touched" 748 patients and completed more than 2,300 tasks, including 1,552 rounds, 392 admissions, and 372 discharges. Only 3% of eligible patients declined a digital nurse encounter, and the total of 355 hours the digital nurses took to complete their tasks saved 4 hours a day for the 3N team and roughly 25 minutes per nurse.

Comparing averages for 10 months before the 90 days of the 3N pilot, Digital Nursing showed a 20% increase in early discharges, a 30% decrease in missed lunches for clinical staff, and a 19% increase in nurse engagement.

"Before implementing the program, we considered its ethical implications, especially for patient privacy," Randy said.

"And we needed a shift in mindset — to embrace continuous learning and adapt to rapidly evolving technologies."

"Communication and collaboration were key, as was active engagement from the bedside nurses and nursing assistants in the build of the digital nurse pre-pilot and in critiquing the workflow day by day during the pilot."

Patient outcomes include decreased knowledge gap at discharge, decreased falls, increased good catches on the after-visit summary related to medication discrepancies and follow-up appointment discrepancies, and increased patient satisfaction scores. For staff, the program improved nurse satisfaction and workflows and



communication, which led to cost savings and increased productivity and increased collaboration across our multidisciplinary team.

"With the help of 3N staff, Forbes is implementing digital nursing on additional inpatient units, with rollout network-wide after that," Randy said. "We have incorporated interpretive services within the digital nurse platform, using a live interpreter, and plan to add additional artificial intelligence tools such as ambient fall sensing and virtual sitting. Digital nursing is a change in thinking in the delivery of health care.

"By embracing the opportunities presented by digital tools, nurses can create a more equitable, efficient, and patient-centered health care system for all."

Randy Geiselhart, MSN, RN, PCCN
Nurse manager of 3 North

Dysphagia Screening Helps Transform Grove City's Stroke Care

In March 2022, AHN Grove City embarked on a transformative journey to significantly enhance its stroke care capabilities. During 2022, leaders assessed existing practices for stroke care; developed a strategic, multifaceted plan for improvement; adopted a standardized stroke program using evidence-based clinical practice guidelines and a Stroke Alert Protocol; established a designated Stroke Team led by nurses and physicians; and provided stroke awareness education hospital-wide and to the community. In 2023, their initiatives earned them the American Heart Association (AHA) Get With The Guidelines® (GWTG) Silver Award.

During 2024, the hospital achieved 100% compliance with screening their stroke patients for dysphagia (problems swallowing) and earned the AHA's GWTG Gold Plus Award.

Dysphagia screening is essential for stroke patients because it affects more than half of stroke patients. Most recover swallowing function within a week, but during that time, and for those with longer-term dysfunction, care measures must be implemented to decrease the risk of complications, such as pneumonia, dehydration, and malnutrition.

Another group of patients that can experience dysphagia is those with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The exact numbers are unknown, but because of the close relationship between breathing and swallowing, dysphagia occurs with the interruption in the coordination of those two functions.

Grove City already had in place a nurse-driven COPD Dysphagia Protocol², developed in collaboration with the Speech Therapy Department and Medical Staff at Grove City that applies to all patients admitted to the hospital. This helped them quickly implement dysphagia screening as a standard of practice for stroke patients.

Grove City's achievements are documented in their dedicated stroke patient database where they track key performance indicators for high-quality stroke care. Leaders regularly review the data to identify areas needing further attention.

"From 2022 through 2024, we have seen a 50% increase in the number of patients with stroke," said Grove City's Stroke Coordinator Brenda Palmer, RN. "And during this same period, we dramatically improved our quality metrics, as demonstrated by our two consecutive AHA GWTG Stroke awards — a Silver Achievement Award in 2023 and the prestigious Gold Plus Achievement Award in 2024. The latter is the highest level of recognition, a testament to our unwavering commitment to providing exceptional stroke care."

"Our success testifies to the strong interdepartmental collaboration at Grove City, with nursing playing a pivotal leadership role."

Brenda Palmer, RN
Grove City's Stroke Coordinator

Grove City also celebrated these milestones:

- Over 70% reduction in the time between patient arrival and Stroke Alert activation to an average time of under 9 minutes for 2023 and 2024.
- A 25% reduction in door-to-needle time for thrombolytic therapy from 2022 to 2023.

Brenda said, “The dedication of the nursing staff has been exceptional. These recognitions underscore the transformative power of a strategic, data-driven approach to improving patient outcomes. Our strategic goal is to achieve Primary Stroke Center certification from The Joint Commission (TJC) by April 2025. We are committed to sharing our best practices across the health network and welcome collaborative efforts to continually enhance stroke care system-wide.”



**ENHANCED STROKE CARE
AHN GROVE CITY**

Nursing's IST Brightens Holidays for Women's Shelter Families

In December 2024, AHN Nursing's Internal Inpatient Staffing Team (IST) celebrated its second consecutive year of brightening the holidays for clients of the Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh (WC&S).

The WC&S is a comprehensive domestic violence program that serves more than 7,500 adult and child survivors of domestic violence in the Greater Pittsburgh area each year.

More than 10 years ago, the WC&S started its Adopt-a-Family program to create happier holidays for survivors of domestic violence, and in 2023 the IST took part in this program for the first time.

To participate in the Adopt-a-Family program, individuals or groups donate to the Reed Smith Adopt-a-Family Fund. Every donation is used to purchase gift cards that WC&S clients can use to shop for their children during the holidays.

In 2023 and 2024, the IST's generosity helped raise more than \$2,960, providing joy to 21 families of four.

At the end of the 2024 holiday season, the WC&S thanked all of the Adopt-a-Family donors publicly for their support:

“Thanks to the kindness and generosity of our donors, \$50,250 in gift cards were distributed to over 1,000 adult and child survivors this holiday season.”

“WC&S is so grateful to all of our generous donors who participated in the 2024 Adopt-a-Family gift card drive. Your heartfelt contributions have brought an abundance of comfort and joy to survivors of domestic violence. By giving to our Adopt-a-Family drive, you helped create moments of respite and empowerment during a time that can be especially challenging for those rebuilding their lives. Your belief in our cause not only offers tangible support, but also reaffirms the resilience and worth of every survivor. Thank you for being the beacon of hope that fuels our efforts to create a world where every individual affected by domestic violence finds solace and strength. Your kindness creates ripples of healing and hope that extend far beyond the holiday season.”

The Inpatient Internal Staffing Team is a group of over 250 RNs that was started in 2022 who work in the Emergency Department, ICU, and Medical-Surgical/Telemetry areas.

“They are deployed throughout all of our AHN hospitals to help support staffing,” said IST Director Staci Saunders, MSN, RN, NE-BC. “In addition to me, the team is led by Laura Hunsberger, MSN, RN, PCCN, manager, and Jessica Clark, program coordinator. A special shout-out to Jessica for serving as point person for the WC&S Adopt-a-Family project — she did such an excellent job.”



**ADOPT-A-FAMILY PROGRAM
AHN INTERNAL STAFFING TEAM**

Jefferson's Quality Initiative Improves Patient Safety

AHN Jefferson Hospital concluded a successful quality improvement project in 2024 that resulted in dramatically improved patient safety, enhanced quality of care, and a significantly smoother survey by The Joint Commission (TJC).

The initiative, launched by Jefferson's Director of Nursing Jim Monack Jr., DNP, RN, MSN, NE-BC, proactively addressed high-risk areas and bolstered data literacy among nurse leaders. The exceptional results included reducing TJC's inpatient nursing findings from 24 in 2021 to two in the 2024 survey.

The project's core objective was multifaceted: strengthen patient safety, monitor critical areas of opportunity, identify expert nurse leaders in each high-risk area, prepare for TJC's 2024 survey, and improve data literacy and Epic reporting skills among nursing management. Ten high-risk areas were identified as needing focused attention:

- **Restraints:** Ensure appropriate documentation of restraints.
- **Suicide risk assessment:** Ensure accuracy and thoroughness of these assessments.
- **Level 2 sitter documentation:** Ensure complete, accurate documentation for patients requiring Level 2 sitters.
- **Critical result documentation:** Ensure timely and accurate documentation of critical lab results.
- **Titratable medication administration:** Adhere to protocols for titratable medications.
- **Pain assessment, reassessment, and medication appropriateness:** Ensure pain management aligns with patient-reported pain levels.
- **Individualized care plans:** Develop and implement comprehensive, individualized care plans.
- **Expired supplies:** Prevent the use of expired medical supplies.
- **Compliance with ventilator order sets:** Adhere to established ventilator order sets.
- **Blood administration documentation:** Ensure accurate and complete documentation for all blood administrations.

A structured approach to improvement

Each high-risk area was assigned to a nurse leader, who conducted a monthly compliance review in collaboration with Jim; Amy Sofranko, MSN, RN, manager, Regulatory Readiness South; and Courtni Lorah, MSN, RN, manager, Data and Reporting Clinical Informatics, AHN Information Technology Division.

These reviews involved analyzing Epic data and identifying areas of noncompliance. The findings were then disseminated to other nurse managers, who followed up with their staff, providing education and support for improvement. Where noncompliance was identified, each manager developed a targeted single-point lesson to educate staff.

"Amy, Courtni, and I regularly discussed trends and challenges. The process was efficient as the time commitment for each nurse leader was only 15 to 60 minutes per audit," Jim said. "The impact of this



QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE AHN JEFFERSON HOSPITAL

proactive approach was evident in Jefferson’s 2024 TJC survey, with only two inpatient nursing findings in 2024 compared to 24 in 2021. This significant improvement underscores the effectiveness of the project in enhancing patient safety and quality of care.”

Continued focus on quality

Building on this success, Jefferson Hospital plans to extend its focus to the two areas of noncompliance identified by TJC in 2024. The first is monitoring compliance with documentation that shows that non-English-speaking patients were offered language interpretation services. The other is improving oversight of verbal order entry.

“This extended focus demonstrates our ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and maintaining the highest standards of patient care at Jefferson.”

Jim Monack Jr., DNP, RN, MSN, NE-BC
Director of Nursing

“The success of this 2024 project serves as a model for future quality improvement initiatives at our hospital.”



**SMOKE-FREE OR
AHN PERIOPERATIVE SERVICES**

AHN ORs Going Smoke-Free for Patient and Staff Well-Being

Committed to patient and employee safety, AHN perioperative services is transitioning to smoke-free operating rooms (ORs) in 2025.

“This initiative is a crucial step toward creating a safer, healthier, and more efficient surgical environment that benefits both patients and staff.”

Ann Miller-Burke, DNP, RN, CPPS, NE-BC
Vice President of Perioperative Services at AHN

“Smoke-free ORs dramatically improve air quality, minimizing exposure to harmful airborne pathogens generated during surgical procedures. This reduction in exposures translates to a healthier work environment for our surgical teams and a lower risk of infection for patients.”

AHN has made a substantial investment to equip every operating room with state-of-the-art smoke evacuation technology, including advanced smoke evacuation electrocautery pens and specialized

suction filtration systems designed for optimal smoke removal during open, robotic, and laparoscopic procedures. This comprehensive approach ensures a consistent, smoke-free environment across all surgical settings.

AHN Jefferson Hospital was the first AHN facility to go smoke-free and achieve the Association of Perioperative Registered Nurses (AORN) Go-Clear Award. Kimberly A. Saluga, MSN-RN, CNOR, nurse manager of Jefferson’s ORs, Cardiovascular OR, and GI Lab, as a new leader, wanted to kick off a project to energize and engage the staff. The team collaborated on a literature review of the dangers of smoke and recognized that Pennsylvania was on track to achieve regulations for smoke-free ORs.

The team’s needs assessment found that at baseline, the department had three smoke evacuation systems. They formulated a plan, consulted with vendors, and secured additional equipment to supply all 10 ORs and two CVORs with evacuation units and to provide a unit on a mobile cart for their hybrid GI4/OR 11 room if needed. Surgeons were engaged in selection of the devices, and nurses, technologists, and surgeons participated in education and hands-on training to trial the equipment. The team drafted a policy, the new smoke evacuation equipment was installed, and the team applied to the AORN for its Go-Clear Award.

On April 11, 2024, the AORN awarded Jefferson its prestigious recognition as a Center of Excellence. This was based on the team’s needs assessment, education, and the results of 12 weeks of audits to demonstrate compliance with the facility’s policy for smoke-free ORs.

“Jefferson’s commitment to a smoke-free environment reflects AHN’s dedication to providing the best possible care, starting with the health and well-being of our invaluable staff,” Ann said. “We believe the expansion of this initiative will significantly improve overall health, safety, and efficiency within perioperative services across AHN. Congratulations to AHN Jefferson Hospital as one of only 48 recipients of this award worldwide and the only facility recognized in Pennsylvania in 2024.”

AHN Schools of Nursing Celebrate a Year of Successes

The AHN Schools of Nursing (SON) — Citizens in Tarentum and West Penn Hospital in Bloomfield — had a very productive 2024.

“We launched our part-time program option at Citizens, aligned the curriculum at the two SONs, and inaugurated the AHN Chill Project™,” said Amy Stoker, PhD, RN, director of the AHN SONs and of West Penn Hospital SON. “The biggest win was that 100% of our 2024 graduates passed the licensure examination on the first try, and we hired 88% of those graduates into the AHN family.”

Part-time program launched

Citizens SON started its new part-time program in January 2024 with 22 new students. A year later, enrollment in the program had more than doubled to 50 new students.

The curriculum for the part-time program is identical to the school’s 22-month full-time program. However, classroom learning is conducted in the evenings and hands-on clinical experiences are led by highly qualified faculty members on the weekends over a 36-month period. This program provides flexibility and convenience for students. It’s particularly helpful for anyone who wants to obtain their nursing diploma while continuing to work or caring for a family.

While the 36-month part-time program is set at a slower pace than the 22-month full-time program, both options allow students to finish earlier than standard four-year collegiate programs.

Curriculum aligned

In the Fall of 2024, the AHN SONs launched their new aligned curriculum consisting of 65 total credits of both nursing and general education courses. The aligned curriculum, philosophy, and end-of-program learning outcomes were designed and developed through collaboration of the Citizens and West Penn SON faculties, and the curriculum was approved by the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing and the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN). This success truly exemplifies the AHN Core Behavior of “trust working together.”

AHN Chill Project kicks off

Also in 2024, the AHN SONs, in partnership with the AHN Chill Project, launched a behavioral health support program for students and faculty. The initiative is funded by a donation from Mary Hartley, a West Penn SON alumna and retired nurse. The program aims to help nursing students develop coping mechanisms, identify burnout triggers, and build resilience, equipping them with skills applicable throughout their careers. The project provides a dedicated behavioral health school educator at both campuses for ongoing support and referrals to outpatient services when needed. In addition, each SON offers a Chill Room for students to have a safe space during the day to meet with the behavioral health educator or simply decompress from a stressful day.

NCLEX-RN Pass Rates Achieve 100%

In 2024, both Citizens and West Penn SONs achieved a 100% National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) pass rate. A total of 74 AHN SON program graduates were successful passing the exam the first time. This exceeds both state and national averages for performance on the licensure examination. AHN hired 88% of our students after graduation.



**NURSING SIMULATION LAB
AHN SCHOOLS OF NURSING**

Saint Vincent's Cardiac-Neuro ICU Elevates Care for Shock Patients

In 2024, the Cardiac-Neuro ICU (CNICU) at AHN Saint Vincent embarked on a transformative journey to elevate care for their shock patients. These are patients with heart conditions that were preventing their vital tissues from receiving enough oxygen to survive without extraordinary measures, such as an intra-aortic balloon pump (IABP), extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), or an Impella® device — a temporary heart pump to boost left ventricle function.

“With a rise in open-heart procedures at Saint Vincent, the number of patients needing these advanced devices was also increasing.”

Sallie Piazza, MS, BSN, RN, CNML, CNOR
Saint Vincent CNO

“It became clear that we needed to step up to meet these growing demands, and together we committed to advancing our skills and enhancing collaboration to deliver the highest level of care to our critically ill patients.”



Laying the foundation through education

The first step was to send CNICU nurses to AHN Allegheny General for specialized ECMO training. The Saint Vincent nurses gained valuable insights into ECMO management, Impella, and IABP and participated in innovative simulations for cannulation and mobility practices. This experience equipped them with advanced technical skills and also fostered a strong collaborative relationship with AGH's expert teams, enabling ongoing dialogue about improvements and support for the program at Saint Vincent.

Building a culture of teamwork and expertise

The CNICU team then worked closely with Saint Vincent surgeons and cardiologists to refine the shock program. Lunch-and-learn sessions fostered improved rapport and created opportunities for shared learning, as did further hands-on training and review of competencies, focusing on hemodynamics, Swan-Ganz catheters, and IABP management.

“One of our greatest achievements this year was the expansion of our team’s capabilities,”

“CNICU nurses are proud of the strides they’ve made in education, collaboration, and patient care in 2024.”

Sallie Piazza, MS, BSN, RN, CNML, CNOR
Saint Vincent CNO

“In 2023, we had five nurses trained to manage the care of patients undergoing open-heart procedures and those with left ventricular assist devices. By the end of 2024, that number had grown to 12 nurses specializing in open-heart surgery care, 16 nurses proficient in Impella management, and 18 nurses skilled in IABP care. This remarkable growth has made the CNICU stronger, more adaptable, and better equipped to care for high-acuity patients.”

Breaking new ground in patient care

Saint Vincent’s shock team achieved a groundbreaking milestone in November 2024 — successfully helping a patient with an Impella device get out of bed.

“Mobilizing Impella patients is more than just a clinical success,” said CNICU Nurse Manager Brianna Gallaher, MSN, RN, SCRNP. “It symbolizes hope and improved quality of life for these patients. It’s a testament to our dedication to providing the best possible outcomes, no matter the complexity of the patient’s care.

“They’re looking ahead to expanding their capabilities, training more team members, mobilizing more patients with device support, and continuing to innovate and strengthen our program. The CNICU’s journey in 2024 reflects our shared belief that with teamwork, dedication, and a relentless drive to improve, we can achieve incredible outcomes for our patients.”



**CARDIAC-NEURO ICU
SHOCK PROGRAM
AHN SAINT VINCENT HOSPITAL**

AGH Responds to Tragedy with Strength and Compassion

The warm July evening in Pennsylvania was shattered by the sound of gunfire at a presidential rally. What began as a beautiful Saturday — children splashing in pools, families grilling, and a music festival in the park — ended with a chaotic scene and a mass casualty incident.

Within minutes, AHN Allegheny General Hospital (AGH) was transformed into a command center, a whirlwind of activity as dedicated staff prepared for the influx of patients. It was initially thought that there were only minor injuries — bumps, bruises, and heat exhaustion — but the reality was far more grim with multiple gunshot wounds.

Social media began to report the chaos, and simultaneously, a crisis alert was sent to AHN leadership. AGH, the level one trauma center for AHN, sent out an emergency operation call. AHN and AGH leadership stopped their summer activities and quickly communicated and organized a response.

The team had to prepare for the worst-case scenario. AGH's ER, already busy, braced itself. The nursing shift change coincided with the crisis, yet the outgoing nurses selflessly stayed, bolstering their colleagues as the first Life Flight helicopter landed, carrying a patient requiring immediate surgery. A second patient followed swiftly, also

needing emergent operating room (OR) intervention. The atmosphere was a blend of controlled chaos and unwavering determination.

The OR leadership team sprang into action, securing over a dozen additional nurses, scrub techs, and surgeons. Some arrived without even being called, driven by a powerful sense of duty. Some of the OR staff was celebrating at the music festival across the street from AGH. They heard one helicopter, then a second immediately following. The second helicopter got their attention, and they quickly called and showed up at the OR. The team's swift and efficient coordination resulted in the preparation of nine fully staffed ORs, a testament to their skill and preparedness.

An AGH OR nurse who was at the site and witnessed the shooting firsthand recounted. As her voice trembled, she said, "We knew immediately those weren't fireworks," and she joined the team on the ground. Her experience provided invaluable insight at the scene and to AGH's command center.

Two victims were flown to AGH and immediately taken to the OR. The care provided was like a symphony, many different professions working together to identify the injuries and provide lifesaving treatment as quickly as possible.

While the AHN team provided care to two victims, the loss of Corey Comperatore at the scene remains a profound sorrow. Corey held a special place in the AGH family. His daughter is one of our valued nurses. His memory serves as a constant reminder of the profound impact each patient has on our lives and the responsibility we carry each day to treat every patient as we would our own family.

That night revealed the incredible strength, collaboration, and dedication of the AGH team. It highlighted why AGH is a leading trauma center and reaffirmed our commitment to providing exceptional care, regardless of the challenge.



**TRAUMA RESPONSE TEAM
AHN ALLEGHENY GENERAL HOSPITAL**

West Penn's Bedside Shift Reports Improve Patient Safety

In December 2023, AHN West Penn Hospital's (WPH) Chief Nursing Officer Julie Mazur, MHA, BSN, RN, established the Nursing Quality Outcomes Committee (NQOC) to focus on nine nurse-specific quality projects to positively impact overall WPH performance and goal achievement. The NQOC Bedside Shift Report (BSR) team celebrated outstanding success during 2024 in their mission to identify best practices and implement change to enhance WPH's culture of evidence-based, safe, high-quality patient care.

BSR is a communication process that involves the off-going nurse reporting to the oncoming nurse at the patient's bedside. Its purpose is to improve communication between patients and staff, encourage patient involvement in their plan of care, reduce patient safety events/improve patient outcomes, and promote accountability and teamwork among the staff.

WPH's BSR team was led by Nursing Director Anna Marie Pozyski, MSN, RN, NE-BC; Laura Hunsberger, MSN, RN, PCCN, (at that time) assistant nurse manager, T3/N3 Rehab; and Jenn Marafka, MSN, RN, CBC, manager, E6 Postpartum. They started with a literature review to determine best practices for BSR. Next steps included nurse leader/educator training, staff training, creation of BSR checklists, staff competency validation, and BSR video and PowerPoint presentations for new hire RN orientation.





**BEDSIDE SHIFT REPORT TEAM
AHN WEST PENN HOSPITAL**

In March 2024, Laura led the education initiative for managers of WPH's inpatient nursing units in the process of BSR, which involves these steps:

- Introduce the oncoming nurse to the patient.
- Briefly report the patient's pertinent history, plan of care, upcoming tests/procedures, and discharge plan.
- Update the communication board with date, names of caregivers, plan of care, patient questions, and anticipated discharge.
- Perform safety checks of:
 - Environment: emergency equipment, call bell, and belongings.
 - Alarms: activated.
 - Lines, drains, tube: clean, intact, labeled, confirmed rates, and emptied drains.
 - Skin: wounds, sequential compression devices, and bed pumps.
- Ask the patient about any needs prior to leaving the room.



WPH's Nursing Professional Practice and Education (NPPE) team developed a general BSR Competency Checklist and the BSR Team with feedback from the unit managers developed individualized checklists for E5 Labor & Delivery/T6 Antepartum, E6 Postpartum, Neonatal ICU, E7/T7, E8 Medicine, T3/N3 Rehab, T2 Burn, and T4 ICU.

Next, managers ensured that their staff attended an interactive skills lab to learn and demonstrate their ability to successfully perform BSR, identify the critical elements of BSR (checklist), and identify the value of BSR to patients and staff. The education/validation sessions began the first week of May 2024 and were completed by July 15.

"Once staff are validated, the completed validation tool is kept in their employee file," Laura said.

"We also created a video and a PowerPoint presentation to educate newly hired RNs before their preceptors validate them in giving BSR during their orientation period."

"Bedside shift report is a marathon, not a sprint. Even after competency sign-offs, nurse leaders need to be visible and present during change of shift, validating regularly, celebrating great catches, and coaching in real time to be sure bedside report is completed correctly."



**BEDSIDE SHIFT REPORT TEAM
AHN WEST PENN HOSPITAL**

Alignment of AHN's Workplace Violence Initiative

Workplace violence (WPV) affects U.S. health care workers at five times the rate of workers in all other industries combined.

“Our WPV team was formed when we recognized that to combat this serious threat to the welfare of AHN caregivers, our greatest strength lies in working together rather than as individual hospitals or clinics or offices,” said Kathy Sikora, director of Emergency Services at AHN Allegheny General Hospital and a member of AHN's Leadership Team Integration project to standardize policies and procedures across the network.

“Our multidisciplinary WPV team's process and plan resulted in mechanisms to fight WPV in a way that is consistent and thorough and the formation of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams across AHN.”

Kathy Sikora

Director of Emergency Services
at AHN Allegheny General Hospital

The process

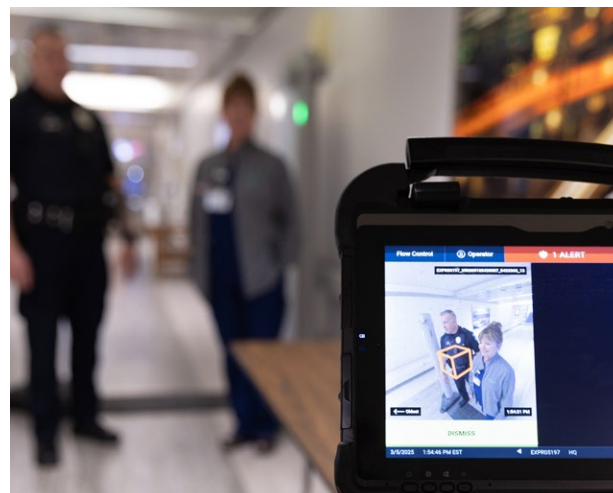
The team identified these needs:

- Educate to prevent violence by identifying potential threats before they cause harm.
- Create a culture where all WPV is reported.
- Respond to WPV with swift action.
- Follow up with support.
- Review incidents for commonalities and opportunities to prevent future incidents.

How it was executed

We created a project plan to:

- Standardize policies.
- Improve how WPV can be reported.
- Deploy to hospitals/clinics/offices the tools they need to form WPV work groups at each site.
- Encourage every employee to take the Crisis Response in Healthcare class for WPV prevention.
- Improve signage telling patients and visitors our expectations of a violence-free environment.
- Create an easy-to-follow algorithm for any team member who experiences WPV.
- Create within Epic a way to identify patients at high risk for causing WPV.





WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION TEAM ALLEGHENY HEALTH NETWORK

CISM teams

In 2025, we will be training more than 100 people across AHN in CISM. Each location's CISM team shares the mission statement instituted when AGH began its CISM program in April 2023:

The Critical Incident Stress Management team is a multidisciplinary team of AHN employees and medical staff that volunteer to serve our AHN Staff and EMS colleagues confidentially by providing emotional support for any affected staff and colleagues, during or soon after an incident has occurred in or around our workplace. The CISM Team will also provide information on coping mechanisms and offer to assist with referrals.

Each CISM team includes a cross-section of staff of the hospital/clinic who have an interest in supporting their colleagues affected by WPV.

The team responds in a confidential way to help lessen the impact of traumatic stress that may be caused by WPV, either physical or verbal, or other stresses such as loss of a colleague, loss of a patient that the staff built a relationship with, verbal abuse or physical assault of a colleague, medication errors that profoundly affected a staff member, domestic abuse by a colleague's family member that troubled them at work, or the pain of dealing with the care of a critically ill child.

"Everyone reacts differently to the challenging situations that occur at our hospitals and offices and clinics," Kathy said. "The goal of our Leadership Integration WPV team is to support the formation and activities of CISM teams across AHN so that when colleagues really need someone to be there for them, trained co-workers are ready to come right alongside."

Wexford Hospital Nurses Strive for Excellence in 2024

In 2024, AHN Wexford Hospital's nurses' unwavering commitment to exceptional patient care was recognized in remarkable ways. Their efforts didn't go unnoticed, earning them well-deserved honors that reflect not just their hard work, but also the profound impact they make every day.

"Nurses at AHN Wexford Hospital consistently strive for excellence in all aspects of patient care and nursing professional practice, and their achievements have earned the hospital countless recognitions," said CNO Lisa Graper, MSN, RN, NE-BC.

Wexford's recent awards include Press Ganey (PG) Guardian of Excellence Awards® for both inpatient and emergency department (ED) patient experience scores. In January 2025, PG awarded Wexford its second consecutive ED award, based on the ED's 2024 scores, and its first award for its inpatient patient experience scores in 2024. This is the fourth consecutive year PG recognized Wexford for achieving patient experience scores in the top decile or higher.

In the 2024, the Cameos of Caring® Program recognized **Elizabeth Higley, RN, Unit 5 South Medical-Surgical** with the hospital's Cameos of Caring Award for serving as a role model within the facility and beyond, for demonstrating excellence in nursing care, for serving as an advocate for patients and families, and for embodying the essence of the nursing profession.

In addition, the 2024 Cameos of Caring Program selected two Wexford nurses to receive awards from among program-wide nominations:

Kristen Ronosky, MSN, RN, SCRNP, CNRN, ASC-BC, manager of Wexford's Stroke Program, was selected by the University of Pittsburgh School of Nursing and the Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE) to receive the Cameos of Caring Donate Life Award, which recognizes individuals advocating for organ and tissue donation.

Sharon Undereiner, MSN, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, Director of Nursing at Wexford, was selected to receive a Cameos of Caring Advanced Practice Award, commending nurses who hold a master's degree and are engaged in elevated patient care roles.

Wexford has been recognized with numerous women's choice awards for 2024, including top 1% of hospitals in the country for outpatient experience; top 100 hospitals in patient experience (in bed size category); and top 1% of hospitals in bariatrics, minimally invasive surgery, emergency care, and stroke care. Wexford also received "very good" to "excellent" scores in all patient experience categories.

AHN Wexford Hospital is the only hospital in western Pennsylvania to receive a CMS 5-Star Award in 2024 from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. This is CMS's highest possible rating for overall hospital quality, based on Wexford's excellent scores compared to its peer group in mortality, safety, readmissions, patient experience, and timely/effective care.

Also in 2024, Wexford was one of fewer than 80 hospitals nationwide to receive both the Healthgrades Patient Safety Excellence Award® for being among the top 10% in the nation for preventing 14 patient safety events and the Healthgrades Outstanding Patient Experience Award™ for being top in the nation for overall patient experience.

Finally, in its first year of eligibility to receive a grade from The Leapfrog Group, Wexford earned a Leapfrog® A Grade for how well it protects its patients from medical errors, injuries, accidents, and infections.

"Our nurses' passionate engagement in doing their best for our patients is what earned our hospital these stellar awards," Lisa said. "Every day brings new recognitions. I'm so proud of our nurses and their achievements!"



**YEAR OF EXCELLENCE
AHN WEXFORD HOSPITAL**

Westfield Nurses and Physicians Collaborate on Cancerous Polyp Research

AHN Westfield Memorial Hospital (WMH), located in Chautauqua County, NY, offers outpatient cardiovascular, diagnostic, general medical, surgical, telemedicine, and rehabilitation services and 24/7 inpatient and emergency care. During 2024, WMH nurses and physicians collaborated on research to investigate the occurrence of cancerous polyps among their patients undergoing colonoscopy.

“We have an established ‘direct scope program’ that allows a Westfield primary care provider (PCP) to refer a patient needing a colonoscopy for placement on our OR schedule,” said Hospital Administrator Rodney J. Buchanan, DNP, RN, CFRN. “This program makes scheduling easy for the patient, the PCP, and the surgeon, and has resulted in improved patient compliance with this cancer screening procedure.”

“As part of our monitoring of quality metrics in the OR, we report various types of data quarterly to our Surgical Audit Committee,” Rodney said. “This includes the chief of surgery, facility medical director, anesthesia, pathology, nursing leadership, and administration. Across New York state, the prevalence of colorectal cancer screening is about

67%, and the overall incidence of this cancer is about 36%. After an interdisciplinary discussion with physician partners, I and Westfield’s OR Nurse Manager Kathy Walczak, RN, and Chief of Surgery Kevin Schattner, DO, formed a team to see how the percentage of cancerous polyps removed at colonoscopy at Westfield compares to the state cancer rate.”

Data collection

The team developed a manual process to collect data, reviewing each polypectomy pathology report and recording if the removed polyps were cancerous. They gathered data from 2024 to ensure an adequate sample size. The monthly rate fluctuated (the lowest was 50%, the highest 91%). However, over the course of the year, an average of 75% of the individuals undergoing colonoscopy at WMH had cancerous polyps — much higher than the statewide incidence of colorectal cancer.

The team shared their findings with WMH’s Surgical Audit Committee and with the Chautauqua County Health Department.

Next steps

The team decided to drill down on the cancerous cases at Westfield by looking for factors that might contribute to the higher cancer detection rate, such as geography, gender, and comorbidities. They will be looking specifically for risk factors because Chautauqua County is largely agricultural where many types of fertilizers, pesticides, and insecticides are used and where most residents obtain their water from wells.

“It’s important to determine if there’s any relationship between the cancer rates and environmental or clinical factors,” Rodney said.

“This project exemplifies the importance of collaboration between nurses and physicians in the care of a community. Often, small populations are forgotten about when looking for risk factors — not intentionally, but because resources are scarce. However, nursing’s focus is to keep patients at the center of all we do — that’s priceless for our community.”



**COLLABORATIVE CANCER RESEARCH
AHN WESTFIELD MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

Language accessibility and nondiscrimination

Allegheny Health Network (AHN) complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex in its health programs and services. In order to treat individuals in a nondiscriminatory manner, AHN provides free communication aids and language assistance services.

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