# The Nurses' Station

## Ballad Health Nursing Newsletter

Summer 2025

## A Message from Dr. Lisa Smithgall



**Dr. Lisa Smithgall**
Chief Nursing Executive
Ballad Health

As a rural health system - like many others across the nation - Ballad Health has experienced a higher vacancy rate among licensed nurses due to the ongoing shortage and the lasting impact of the pandemic in our region.

New graduate RNs and LPNs represent the largest segment of licensed nursing hires at Ballad Health each year. Over the past three completed fiscal years, we have hired an average of 318 RN graduates annually, which is consistent with our pre-pandemic hiring levels.

However, regional academic nursing programs have seen a decline in enrollment, with 18% fewer graduates available this year compared to 2019, before the pandemic. Ballad Health's ability to maintain - and even increase - the number of new nurse graduates choosing to work here, despite the regional decline in available graduates, is a significant factor in reducing our current nursing vacancy rate.

Ballad Health ended fiscal year 2025 (which concluded on June 30, 2025) with an RN turnover rate of 12.6% - our lowest since 2018. This rate is also lower than the turnover rates of either of our legacy health systems prior to the formation of Ballad Health.

Our leadership team remains committed to improving the nursing work environment by fostering our B Excellent culture, optimizing the Epic electronic health record (EHR), integrating equipment with the EHR to reduce documentation workload, evaluating workload efficiency, and continuing to recruit permanent nursing team members to fill existing vacancies.

All members of our nursing team play a vital role in recruiting nursing students during their clinical rotations in Ballad Health patient care areas. These students are our professional nursing colleagues of the near future.

Thank you for supporting nursing education within Ballad Health and for consistently demonstrating our B Excellent culture and teamwork. I personally appreciate your continued contributions to creating a positive work environment and to delivering the best possible care to the patients and communities we serve.

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## Nurse Recognition

Ballad Health is proud to co-sponsor the WJHL Nurse of the Month recognition program, in partnership with the Tennessee Center for Nursing. This program celebrates outstanding nurses across the Appalachian Highlands.

Be sure to check out the segment airing the first Monday of each month on WJHL, where a local nurse is honored for their compassion, dedication, and impact. It's a great way to celebrate the incredible work nurses are doing in our region - and you might even see someone you know!

To nominate a nurse for this recognition, log on to the WJHL website and search for Nurse of the Month under the "Community" tab.

News Channel
NURSE of the Month
Ballad Health
Tennessee Center for Nursing Excellence

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## Nurse Recognition cont.

Additionally, we're pleased to celebrate two of Ballad Health's nurse leaders who have recently achieved nursing leadership certification through the American Nurses Credentialing Center:



**Alexis Fields**
Nurse Manager
JCMC ICU



**Kristi Bode**
System Director
Nursing Practice & Research

Congratulations to these incredible leaders on their professional achievement and continued commitment to excellence in nursing!

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## Ballad Health Academy - Mentorship Opportunity

The Ballad Health Academy has admitted 200 students from participating regional secondary schools who will begin their healthcare-related education in fall 2025.

We are seeking mentors for the pre-LPN high school students to support and guide them on their academic and career journey in healthcare.

Licensed RNs and LPNs with at least one year of experience are encouraged to consider this opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the development of future healthcare professionals.

Comprehensive resources have been prepared to assist mentors in their role. For nurses working in PACE-eligible acute care environments, this mentorship activity qualifies as an approved PACE activity.

Mentors are expected to commit for the duration of the student's LPN Ballad Health Academy course.

More information about becoming a nurse mentor at Ballad Health is available at:

**balladhealth.org/careers/nursing/nurse-mentor-program**

If you are interested in volunteering for a mentorship opportunity to support a high school student embarking on their health care education (or in serving as a mentor for a new nurse employed at Ballad Health) please apply at:

**balladhealth.jotform.com/team/digital-team/nurse-mentor-application**

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## Bedside Shift Report - Every Time, Every Patient

At Ballad Health, our expectation for patient care handoffs in acute care departments includes the performance of bedside shift report between the outgoing and incoming nursing team members - every time, for every patient. This handoff should include the patient and their family, as desired by the patient.

Since the implementation of bedside shift report across our health system, Ballad Health has experienced the same positive outcomes reported in evidence-based literature. These include improved patient safety and enhanced patient and family experience.

Numerous safety issues have been identified during bedside shift reports, allowing for timely interventions that prevented avoidable harm. Additionally, our patient and family experience scores have shown significant improvement in two key areas when bedside shift report is consistently completed:

- The patient's understanding of their plan of care
- The patient's perception of the quality of care delivery

As of the July Epic monthly upgrade, documentation of bedside shift report is now required for both licensed nurse handoffs and unlicensed nursing team member handoffs. The documentation must include:

- Confirmation that the bedside shift report was completed at the patient's bedside
- The names of both the off-going and oncoming team members involved in the handoff

Thank you for consistently implementing this standard practice during every nursing handoff to ensure we are delivering the best possible care to our patients.

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## Epic Nurse Smart User Classes

Epic launched Nurse Smart User Classes in early May to help nurses improve their understanding and efficiency in using the Epic electronic health record (EHR). These 60-minute virtual classes are led by a live instructor and are designed to enhance your day-to-day workflows in both inpatient and outpatient settings.

While CNE credits are not currently available, this may become an option in the future.

Available Nurse Smart User Class Topics:

- Outpatient Nursing In Basket Quick Wins
- Leveraging SmartTools for Nursing Workflows
- Inpatient Nursing Quick Wins: Personalization
- Inpatient Nursing Quick Wins: Documentation

Download class materials:
**Galaxy – Nurse Smart User All Class Materials (epic.com)**

Register for a class:
**efficiency.epic.com/nursing**

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## Nursing Research and Innovation Committee (NRIC)

Are you passionate about improving patient care and advancing nursing practice? We are looking for dedicated nurses to join the newly formed Ballad Health Nursing Research and Innovation Committee (NRIC).

This is your opportunity to take the knowledge and insights you gain at the bedside each day and use them to drive innovation, shape evidence-based nursing practices, and improve patient outcomes across our system.

As a member of NRIC, you'll have the chance to:

- Collaborate with fellow nurses to explore and address clinical challenges
- Contribute to research projects that may lead to publication
- Help implement innovative solutions that enhance patient care and nursing workflows
- Grow professionally and expand your influence within the nursing community

Participation in this committee is PACE point eligible, making it a valuable way to contribute while also meeting professional development goals.

If you're interested in learning more or would like to join the committee, please reach out to Kristi Bode at Kristi.Bode@balladhealth.org.

Let's work together to shape the future of nursing at Ballad Health!

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## Experienced Bedside Nurses: Become a Peer Support Facilitator

Ballad Health is launching a New Graduate Nursing Peer Support Group to help new nurses thrive emotionally and professionally as they transition into practice. This initiative complements our existing Nurse Residency and Mentorship programs.

We are seeking experienced bedside nurses who are passionate about supporting the next generation to serve as Peer Support Facilitators.

**What you'll receive:**

- Comprehensive facilitator training
- PACE points
- Compensation for time worked
- Travel support (if applicable)

We understand this role requires a meaningful time commitment, and we are looking for nurses who are not only experienced but also dedicated to mentoring and empowering their peers.

**Eligibility:**

- At least 2 years of clinical nursing experience
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills
- Interest in learning how to facilitate peer support groups

If you're ready to make a lasting impact on the future of nursing, please contact Kristi Bode at Kristi.Bode@balladhealth.org to learn more.