

## Extra: Lives Outside the Hospital

# 'The Sky's the Limit' for Passionate Hiker

By Candace Pearson

Standing at 13,828 feet above sea level on the highest pass of the Inca Trail in Peru's Andes Mountains, Ani Yeremian, MSN, RN, PHN, CPN, thought about the dedicated Incas who carried heavy stones up the trail to build the citadel of Machu Picchu in the 1400s.

She also thought about herself and how discovering her love of the outdoors and her resilience had led her to this moment.

"I made myself proud," says Yeremian, a nurse care manager on the heart function and anti-coagulation teams in the Heart Institute at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. "I decided, 'If I can do this, I can do anything really. The sky's the limit.'"

Yeremian's hiking life started in 2016 when a friend who wanted to lose weight invited her on a hike in Altadena's Eaton Canyon. That one hike

led to another and another. "I've done about 100 hikes now," she says. "I've gone international and want to see as much as I can."

Yeremian joined CHLA 24 years ago as a nurse's aide, and a year later signed on as a nurse. "I love it," she says.

Being on a mountaintop in fresh air is her personal therapy. "It makes me feel good." It also helps her think through issues from work—"I have more clarity up there," she says.

She hikes virtually every weekend, preferring moderate-to-intense trails. Having conquered the Inca Trail and the 17,060-foot Rainbow Mountain in Peru in October 2024, she is preparing for her next big adventure in summer 2025—Mount Ararat, once located in her family homeland of Armenia, now part of eastern Turkey.



Ani Yeremian, MSN, RN, PHN, CPN

She encourages others to explore their own passions. "No one else can get you in shape but yourself," Yeremian says. "No one else can make you happy. You have one body, one life. What are you waiting for?" ■

## Nurses in Action

# Transforming Lives Overseas

By Vicki Cho Estrada



(L-R): Julie Remer, BSN, RN, CPN; Jessica Lira, MAOL, MECC, PMP, CCRP; and Laura Tice, MSN, RN, CPN, NE-BC

A passion for helping others is what leads many to work at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. For two CHLA nurses and an administrator, that desire

led to several weeks overseas aboard a hospital ship to help those without access to medical care receive life-changing surgeries and treatment.

Laura Tice, MSN, RN, CPN, NE-BC (5 East); Julie Remer, BSN, RN, CPN (Nursing Resources); and Jessica Lira, MAOL, MECC, PMP, CCRP (Patient Care Services Education and Research), spent last summer on the Africa Mercy, a hospital ship operated by Mercy Ships. The faith-based humanitarian organization provides free surgeries to treat such conditions as severe burns and scars, facial deformities, including cleft lip and cleft palate, and other disfigurements.

Docked in Madagascar, the trio was among a volunteer crew of doctors, nurses, and others living and working on the ship. Tice and Remer performed bedside nursing duties—such as assessing patients and providing post-surgery and wound care—for plastic and maxillofacial surgery patients. Lira's responsibilities included creating

surgery schedules and serving as the hospital's quality manager.

A memorable patient for Tice during her three-month stint was a 16-year-old acid attack survivor. The patient didn't want anyone to look at her, but after reconstructive surgery on her face, she was beaming.

"When she celebrated her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, she said it was one of the best days of her life. That is something I will never forget," says Tice.

"Maxillofacial surgery patients have a heavy burden. ... They are isolated and ostracized—it's a hard life," says Remer, who completed her second tour on Africa Mercy in August. "When they get on the ship, they're hesitant, but after surgery they're so joyful. They would dance up and down the hallways with bandages and drains. It was so beautiful—what a gift to be a part of that." ■

Suzie Parada, RD, CNSC,  
Clinical Dietitian, Clinical  
Nutrition and Lactation  
Department, Newborn and Infant  
Critical Care Unit



Suzie Parada, RD, CNSC

**How do you collaborate with nurses?**

As a dietitian, my role is to optimize nutrition delivery for my patients. This isn't always easy for our complex patients who may have altered or immature gastrointestinal function. Besides the infant's parent, our nurses often have the best insight into a patient's feeding tolerance. It's always helpful to collaborate with nurses on the formula or supplement tolerance or feeding schedule, to ensure the patient is able to get everything they need to grow and thrive.

**What is the best part of your job?**

Building relationships with parents, educating pediatric residents, and watching our babies grow.

**How did you end up in this field?**

I always wanted to work in a hospital growing up. I found the nutrition field by accident, but it offers a fun mix of math, science, and teaching while helping those patients who are under difficult circumstances.

**Can you share a memorable CHLA story?**

When I first started in the NICCU, we had a patient who had esophageal atresia whom I will always remember. He was neurologically well and had a very present parent, so I got to watch him develop, grow, and be adorable over the many months he was admitted.

He finally got his esophagus repaired and eventually went home. His mom was at bedside every morning and was incredibly kind and patient. A few years later, I was walking through the lobby at CHLA and suddenly I see this mom. I also noticed a young boy, maybe 4 years old, running around laughing and playing in the hallway. I gasped! I waved to mom and asked her excitedly if that was the little baby boy I thought it was. She smiled and said yes.

I will always cherish this run-in. I loved seeing this happy, thriving boy. It was a good reminder that although a NICCU stay can be long and treacherous for some, it still can hopefully become only a small moment in their lives. ■

Her Dream Job: Tackling Ethical Issues

By Candace Pearson



Brenda Barnum, MA, RNC-NIC, HEC-C

About three years into her career as a neonatal nurse at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, Brenda Barnum, MA, RNC-NIC, HEC-C, began to encounter the kind of difficult cases that raised ethical dilemmas, prompting her to ask "those common questions nurses often ask," she says, such as: "What are our hopes for this patient? What do we think the outcomes will be? Why are we doing the things we're doing?"

As her questions became more frequent, she dove into a self-study of medical ethics, attending conferences held by the nonprofit Ethics of Caring and joining CHLA's Ethics Resource Committee.

After a few years, Barnum decided to pursue her master's in bioethics and health policy. "I didn't want to help just myself deal with these issues," she says. "I wanted to have the education to help other nurses go through challenging cases and understand the big moral questions we have with some of the care we provide."

Now Barnum is a part-time clinical supervisor in the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation Newborn and Infant Critical Care Unit, where she has worked for three decades ("My home base," she says). She splits her time as a clinical ethicist for CHLA's Center for Bioethics, which was established in 2021.

"It's a huge honor," she says. "A lot of people say, 'Dream jobs don't exist,' but they do. It just took me 30 years to get here."

The Center for Bioethics is open for business 24/7, every day of the year, to support health care teams, researchers, patients, and their families with questions related to children's treatment, research, and policy—even when the source of "moral distress" may be hard to pin down.

Barnum remembers one late-night call from a nurse about a patient's care. "She didn't even know if it involved an ethical issue," Barnum says. But that call led to a sit-down meeting that gave everyone on the team a chance to talk out their concerns.

At least once a week, Barnum does E-walks (for Ethics-Walks) through various units and departments in the hospital, inviting conversations. Sometimes she arrives at a moment when the team is already discussing a tough case.

Often, the Center will include a patient's family and even the patient (if a teenager) in the discussion. "We look for common goals and values that the health care team and the family can align on to ensure the kiddos are getting the best care possible."

Doing double duty as nurse ethicist and clinical supervisor, Barnum hopes to empower more nurses to learn various ethical frameworks they can "keep in their pockets" to discuss cases in interdisciplinary rounds from a nursing perspective. "Nurses are best situated to become that change agent at the bedside," she says, "where they can speak up and say, 'I think we have an issue.'" ■



## Publications

**Hui-wen Sato** (Ahmanson Foundation Pediatric Intensive Care Unit): "The Pitfalls of Being the Nice Patient: A Nurse's Perspective," *Off the Charts, Blog of the American Journal of Nursing*, February 2024; "The Transformative Experience of a Personal Health Crisis," *American Journal of Nursing*, June 2024.

**Kathy Van Allen** (Fetal and Neonatal Institute): "Safe Staffing for Pediatric Patients," Society of Pediatric Nurses (SPN) position statement, *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*, May 2024.

## Presentations

**Sharee Anzaldo** (Surgical Admitting): "De-Escalation of COVID-19 Testing: Implications for Pediatric Preprocedural Health Screening and Education," poster, SPN 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, Phoenix, April 2024.

**Brenda Barnum** (Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation Newborn and Infant Critical Care Unit): "Lessons from the Rearview Mirror," podium closing presentation, 10<sup>th</sup> National Nursing Ethics Conference, Los Angeles, April 2024; "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: Artificial Intelligence and Its Impact on the Nursing Profession," panel participant, American Society for Bioethics and Humanities National Conference, St. Louis, September 2024.

**Erika Cheung and Vicky Olson** (Emergency Management): "Preparing Adult Health Care Facilities for Pediatric Disaster Victims," California Hospital Association Disaster Planning Conference, Pasadena, CA, September 2024.

**Jessica Klaristenfeld** (Patient Care Services Education and Research): "A Nursing Professional Ladder Redesign Reignites Passion for Promotion," poster presentation, Association for Nursing Professional Development (ANPD) Conference, Chicago, April 2024; "Fostering a Brighter Future: Cultivating Psychological Safety," podium presentation at Southern California Association of Pediatric Hematology Oncology Nurses Conference, Palm Springs, CA, June 2024.

**Kimberly Kyle** (ECMO): "Pediatric ECMO Circuit Design," UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine, Specialist Education in Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (SEECMO) Conference, Marina Del Rey, CA, June 2024.

**Niaz Lavaee** (Gastroenterology): "Broadening the Scope: Transnasal Endoscopy in a Pediatric Patient With Medial Trauma, Anxiety and Depression—A Case Report," 2024 Annual Meeting North American Society For Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN), Hollywood, FL, November 2024.

**Ivo Pandjaitan** (Heart Institute): "PC4/PAC3 Data Quality," PC4/PAC3 Spring 2024 Conference, Pediatric Acute Care Cardiology Collaborative, Dallas, TX, May 2024.

**Lynette Ramos** (Nursing Professional Development): "Goals and Tracking in a Nursing Professional Department," poster presentation, ANPD Virtual Symposium, October 2024.

**Edahrline Salas** (Infection Prevention Control): "Infection Prevention & Control Specialty-Specific Competencies," Greater L.A. Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) Chapter Annual Conference, Los Angeles, October 2024.

**Hui-wen Sato** (PICU): "Navigating the Nuances of Professional Grief," American Association of Critical-Care Nurses National Teaching Institute, Denver, May 2024; "Nursing is the Intersection of Stories," keynote address, University of California, Irvine School of Nursing Pinning Ceremony, June 2024.

**Kathy Van Allen** (Fetal and Neonatal Institute): "Building Nursing Social Capital: Developing an Annual Conference," American Organization for Nursing Leadership, New Orleans, April 2024; Van Allen with **Jennifer Baird** (Nursing Leadership): "Safe Staffing Position Statement: New Minimum Staffing Recommendations," keynote presentation, SPN Annual Conference, Phoenix, April 2024.

## Professional Achievements

DAISY Awards/Individual: **Catherine Dickens** (Patricia and John Merrell Bone Marrow Transplant Unit), May 2024; **Hannah McKee** (PICU), June 2024; **Presley Bowman** (5 East), July 2024; **Megan Chapman** (NICCU), August 2024; **Tigran Galadzyan** (Vascular Access Team), September 2024; **Megan Muro** (NICCU), October 2024; **Casey Brown** (Infusion Center), November 2024.

**Jeri Ford** (PICU): Co-host, "Nurse Converse, Season 2," podcast sponsored by Nurse.org, December 2024.

**Edahrline Salas** (Infection Prevention Control): Elected Education Chair of the Greater L.A. APIC Chapter Education Committee, October 2024.

**Audrey Santos** (D6 Rehab), GEM ("Going the Extra Mile") Award, March 2024.

**Hui-wen Sato** (PICU): Judge, American Journal of Nursing Book of the Year Award, "Creative Works for a Public Audience" category, Summer 2024.

**Kathy Van Allen** (Fetal and Neonatal Institute): Recognized by the American Nurses Association in

*American Nurse Journal* article, "ANA on the Frontline: Powerful Peer-to-Peer Networks," May 2024. Serving as Chairperson for the SPN Nominating Committee, April 2024-April 2026.

## Academic Achievements

BSN: **Nicole Ramirez** (6 West).

DNP: **Kathleen Anulao** (Vision Center); **Ale Briseno** (PICU); **Nancy Lavoie** (PICU).

MSN: **Megan Herrera** (6 West); **Kelly Hobbs** (Behavioral Health Clinic); **Maria Medina-Velasco** (PCS Education and Onboarding).

MSN-FNP: **Margaret Lisa Atmodjo** (Wound Ostomy).

MSN Leadership and Management: **Alma Ramirez** (Fetal-Maternal Center); **Mike Rokovich** (Surgical Admitting); **Patrice Starks** (Endocrinology and Gastroenterology).

MSN, Nursing Education: **Katie Maruhnich** (Float Team/Nursing Resources); **Kimberley Collantes** (Float Team).

MSN PMP-AC: **Teresa Renteria** (Wound Ostomy).

Post-Master CNS-Neonatal: **Wendy Barahona** (NICCU).

**Tracy Ono** (PICU): PhD Dissertation Award, UCLA School of Nursing, June 2024; CHLA Institute for Nursing and Interprofessional Research (INIR) Fellowship, July 2024.

## Promotions

NP III: **Elissa Singson** (Infectious Diseases).

NP, Physical Health **Melissa Peterson** (CT Surgery).

NP, Psychiatric Mental Health: **Kelly Hobbs** (Behavioral Health Clinic).

NP II: **Allyson Gomez** (Gastroenterology).

RN III: **Anne Toffoli** (NICCU); **Bethany Elliott** (Radiology); **Cassandra Walsh** (Infusion Center); **Michelle Criger** (4 East); **Arielle Rodriguez** (Maurice Marciano Family Foundation Emergency Department and Trauma Center); **Kayla McKenna** (Infusion Center); **Jenny Bouska** (PICU); **Melissa Imamoto** (5 West); **Claudia McCollum** (Radiology); **Kyla Towar** (Helen and Max Rosenthal Cardiovascular Acute Care Unit); **Parker Bierly** (5 East); **Savannah Rae Hale** (NICCU); **Elizabeth Vidoli** (Infusion Center).

RN IV: **Elysia Weiner** (Cardiovascular Acute); **Irene Aberin** (4 East); **Candice Palmisano** (IV Team); **Judy Ulloa** (BMT); **Christi Avella** (Thomas and Dorothy

Leavey Foundation Cardiothoracic Intensive Care Unit); **Elysia Weiner** (Cardiovascular Acute).

#### Certifications

CCM: **Rowena Zambrano** (Nephrology).

CDN: **Raymond Barajas** (Nephrology).

CMI: **Marilyn Martinez** (Gastroenterology);  
**Rosalina Rivera** (Nephrology).

CPN: **Natalie Goldman-Merrit** (Ambulatory Gastrointestinal).

CPNP-PC: **Megan Herrera** (6 West).

CRRN: **Melanie Banuelos** (D6 Rehab);  
**Dana Biederman** (ICU Float Team).

CPA, Narrative Medicine: **Hui-wen Sato** (PICU).

HACP-IC: **Edahrline Salas** (Infection Prevention Control).

NP-BC, Psychiatric Mental Health: **Kelly Hobbs** (Behavioral Health Clinic).

NP, Physical Health: **Melissa Peterson** (Cardiothoracic Surgery).

PHN: **Natalie Goldman-Merrit** (Ambulatory Gastrointestinal).

RNC-NIC: **Julydeth Macaspac-Valencia** (Float Team).

#### Personal Milestones

##### Babies

**Lynnette Ramos** (Nursing Professional Development).

##### Marriages

**Dana Biederman** (ICU Float Team); **Erika Cheung** (Emergency Management); **Yosemite Olivo** (D6 Rehab).

#### Community

**Savannah Rae Hale** (NICCU): First place in division, CrossFit competition, North Hollywood.

**Ashley Feldman** (4 West): Competed twice in 2024 in competitive ballroom dancing and won each category she entered with her partner.

#### Volunteering

**Allie Dominicali** (Float Team): Teaching yoga and meditation to women and children who escaped female genital mutilation practices and now live in safe homes, Tanzania, Africa, April 2024.

**Jeri Ford** (PICU): Mentor, P.S. I Love You Foundation, working with underprivileged children in South Bay, September 2024.

**Sophia Lim** (Surgical Admitting): Best Friends Animal Society, since 2009.

With thanks to **Gina Kemp** (Nursing Excellence), **Carolyn Kendrick** (Patient Care Services), and **Doris Lymbertos** (Clinical Services Administration) for helping to gather items for this section.

Please send your accomplishments to [DLymbertos@chla.usc.edu](mailto:DLymbertos@chla.usc.edu).

## A Conversation With ...

Sarah Ann Keil Heinonen, DNP, APRN, CPNP-AC/PC

Co-Director | CHLA Pulmonology  
Bronchopulmonary Dysplasia Program



Sarah Ann Keil Heinonen, DNP, APRN, CPNP-AC/PC (left) with her four daughters and adorable dog, Penelope.

#### Favorite day-off spot:

In the ocean or by the ocean or on a trail, but always with my family.

#### Who influenced you to become a pediatric advanced practice provider?

A complex journey that included people, places, and experiences ... my parents, who instilled values of service ... perhaps the loss of our son before he was born, or finding out our firstborn had a heart defect while living in a foreign country. It could have been our second-born having surgery a few hours after birth and experiencing the "NICU life," or five months later being back in the ICU as she had contracted pneumococcal meningitis [she is now a CHLA CV Acute nurse].

#### Why did you select pulmonology as a specialty?

Pulmonology selected me. I fell in love with the heart early on in my career—my firstborn had a ventricular septal defect. Ultimately, pulmonology has created the perfect professional fit, allowing me the clinical practice, program development, research, teaching, and leadership.

#### Tell us about your commitment to the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP):

I have been a NAPNAP member since 2007, not as long as I've been an American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) member (2001). I initially joined NAPNAP as a new pediatric nurse practitioner for the continued support and education it provided. I remain a member and actively involved because I believe in the value and the duty of investing in and supporting the next generation, and NAPNAP is a tremendous platform for that work.

#### What makes working at CHLA special?

From the grace and gratitude of our patients every day, to my colleagues showing up in so many ways, above and beyond. We all love what we do and the people we serve. It is that raw feeling of genuinely caring and the value that comes with it that cannot truly be described.

#### Advice for nurses just starting out?

It is OK to make mistakes. Understand that there is more knowledge and beauty in the humility of owning your failures.



In January 2024, CHLA launched its Pediatric Bariatric "Gastric Sleeve" Surgery Program for youth with obesity. In the first year, the team completed over 62 cases. Gathering to celebrate the moment recently were, left to right: Aimee Kim, MD; Kamran Samakar, MD; Shani Barkhordarzadeh, MSN, RN II, CDCES (Bariatric Program); Genesis Parada (Bariatric Program); Nicole Olsen-Garcia MSN, RN-BC, PNP (6 East); Melina Lacerda, BSN, RN, CPN (6 East); Alaina Vidmar, MD; Harry Wong, MD; Edwin Paras, BSN, RN II, CPN (6 East); Sherrylyn Bolden, BSN, RNII, CPN (6 East); Edward Flores (6 East).



# Setting New Nurses on a Pathway to Success

By Vicki Cho Estrada



(L-R): Students Jasmine Rodriguez, Mikol Warshaw, Morgan Butler, Allyssa Torres, Destiny Gonzalez, Cecilia Rodriguez, Karen Duong and Veronica Pagel.

For Morgan Butler, the time spent at Children's Hospital Los Angeles has been "transformative ... opening doors to experiences that could never be found in any textbook."

Mikol Warschaw echoes that sentiment and says she has gained "valuable insights into pediatric care and the nuances of working with children and their families."

Destiny Gonzalez has seen how CHLA values incoming health care professionals and how far the hospital is willing to go to ensure she receives hands-on learning in a real-world setting "to become the best nurse I can be."

Butler, Warschaw, and Gonzalez are nursing students in the inaugural cohort of CHLA's Pediatric Pathway Program, a new program aimed at creating practice-ready pediatric nurses who will thrive in the workforce upon receiving their nursing degrees.

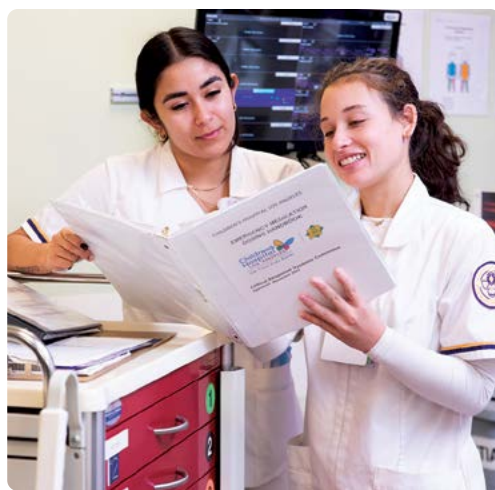
Launched in September, the two-year program recruits nursing students with an interest in pediatrics and exposes them to a curriculum aligned with their academic studies, allowing them to expand their clinical skills and deepen their understanding of pediatric care. The program is unique for its pediatric focus, as nursing pipeline programs typically focus on the adult patient population.

The first group of eight students are in their junior year at Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles. By the program's conclusion, they will have completed rotations with a comprehensive view of the wide range of subspecialties in a pediatric hospital, according to Jean Dougherty,

MSN-ed, RN, CPN, CHSE, CCRN, Nursing Professional Development Specialist (Patient Care Services Education and Research).

"These students will spend two years in the pediatric specialty versus the standard single semester, amounting to over 200 hours at CHLA," says Dougherty, who works closely with Mount Saint Mary's to complement the university's curriculum. She adds that if students choose to apply for CHLA's RN Residency Program after receiving their Bachelor of Science in nursing degrees, they will have the clinical tools and practical experience to "hit the ground running faster."

The Pathway Program closely mirrors the Residency Program, which transitions new nurses to competent and confident practicing nurses. In addition to an application and interview process, the Pathway Program provides the tools and experiences needed to become a successful



(L-R): Students Allyssa Torres and Mikol Warshaw.

pediatric nurse, including stress management and coping skills to help new nurses feel empowered to care for themselves.

The students are at CHLA every Friday for rotations in General Inpatient Care, Bone Marrow Transplant, Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU), and Surgical Admitting. Next semester, they will have rotations in Behavioral Health and Psychiatric Nursing.

"It's not just shadowing—they are developing skills, giving medications, and working alongside CHLA nurses," Dougherty explains, adding that the students also attend skills workshops where they use mannequins to practice inserting nasogastric (NG) tubes, placing IVs, and other tasks.

"The program has truly been a life-changing experience for me," says Warschaw. "It's thoughtfully organized, and its goal of preparing future pediatric nurses is evident in every aspect. I feel incredibly fortunate to be part of a program that equips us to be well-rounded student nurses before we even step foot in a hospital setting with children. The hands-on experiences we've gained are invaluable. ... I can confidently say this program is setting me up for success in my nursing journey."

Gonzalez adds: "The environment is highly supportive and welcoming. The nurses are exceptionally kind and always willing to teach and answer any questions. Every nurse I have encountered at CHLA has been nothing short of phenomenal, not only in their mastery of pediatric care but also in the infectious energy they bring."

Butler also appreciates working closely with CHLA nurses, all of whom have been generous in sharing their expertise and skills and helping students build self-confidence. One example stands out to her. While caring for a 4-week-old infant on 6 East, a Pediatric Med-Surg nurse allowed Butler to not only manage his NG tube, but also entrusted her with feeding him formula in an upright position.

"This small yet deeply significant act of trust spoke volumes," Butler says. "It was not just about performing a task; it was about the confidence she placed in me. ... In that quiet moment, I saw how seemingly simple actions can have profound impact, not only on the patient's care but also on my growth as a nursing student."

She adds, "This program has already shaped me in ways I could never have imagined, and I am excited to see how it will continue to mold me into the nurse I aspire to become." ■

## FloSheet

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### Bedside's Best

## Caring for the Smallest Humans

By Candace Pearson



(L-R): Savannah Rae Hale, BSN, RN III, RNC-NIC, C-ELBW and Kathy Van Allen, MSN, RN, CPN

Within the hushed, dimly lit Small Baby Unit at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, babies born before 32 weeks—and even those as early as 22 weeks—are learning to adapt to life outside the womb while their parents learn how to care for a tiny human with complex medical needs.

Overseeing their bedside care are specially trained neonatal nurses, who have made the extreme preemies their cause. Savannah Rae Hale, BSN, RN III, RNC-NIC, C-ELBW, is one of those nurses who “absolutely fell in love” with the neonatal

specialty during school. “We don't just provide care to the singular patient, we provide holistic care to entire families,” she says.

The Level IV Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation Newborn and Infant Critical Care Unit (NICCU) debuted its dedicated, 13-bed Small Baby Unit in January 2024, in recognition of the demand for its services.

“At Children's Hospital Los Angeles, we don't see your typical preemie population,” says Kathy Van Allen, MSN, RN, CPN, Administrative Director of the CHLA Fetal and Neonatal Institute. “We tend to see a small subset of preemies whose medical complexities can't be managed at their birth hospitals.”

The new unit inspired a multidisciplinary work group to develop evidence-based guidelines to address such concerns as thermal regulation, brain bleeds, cardiovascular issues, skin care, and other secondary diseases. The group included nurses, neonatologists, respiratory, occupational, and physical therapists, dietitians, psychologists, pharmacists, and more.

During the planning phase, Hale and a core group of nurses attended a 40-hour course for nurses who

wanted to earn certification in Care of the Extremely Low Birth Weight Neonate (C-ELBW). They then condensed that 40 hours into an eight-hour, one-day course available on a volunteer basis, starting in September 2023.

“By the fifth class, we had educated over 100 bedside staff members, primarily nurses and respiratory therapists,” says Hale.

The course has now become standardized education for NICCU nurses in the RN Residency and new hires into the NICCU.

Nurses also are helping to implement an evidence-based program developed at USC called SENSE (Supporting and Enhancing NICU Sensory Experiences), which guides parents in understanding the stimulation their infant can handle week to week. “You can see families feel more empowered as they practice it,” says Hale.

For Van Allen, the Small Baby Unit represents more than a nurturing place. “It's our organization's ongoing commitment to make sure the care we provide is evidence-based,” she says, “and individualized for different patient populations,” including the very smallest. ■