



2020 Pathway Nurse of the Year Award™ winners

By Maggie McCright, MSN, RN, NE-BC, and Maricon Dans, MSN, RN, NE-BC

When nurses are recognized for the vital role they play and their contributions to a positive work environment, it helps organizations create and sustain a culture of excellence. Meaningful recognition, a critical component of the Pathway to Excellence® framework, is positively related to nurse job satisfaction and intent to stay.^{1,2} The American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) is excited to launch the inaugural annual Pathway Nurse of the Year Award™ program. The award recognizes the outstanding contributions of one direct care nurse and one nurse leader, globally from a Pathway organization, who positively impact the practice environment and exemplify at least two of the Pathway Standards by demonstrating remarkable skills in working collaboratively with team members and integrating clinical expertise with compassionate patient interactions. (See *Pathway Nurse of the Year Award eligibility criteria*.)

The ANCC's Pathway to Excellence program recognizes organizations that create positive practice environments and a sustained culture of excellence where nurses thrive. To achieve the credential, organizations must demonstrate the integration of criteria essential to an ideal nursing practice environment as defined under six Pathway Standards: shared decision-making, leadership, safety, quality, well-being, and professional development.

The shared decision-making standard creates opportunities for direct care nurses to network, collaborate, share ideas, and be involved in decision-making. The leadership standard supports a shared governance environment by ensuring that leaders are accessible and facilitates collaborative decision-making processes. The safety standard prioritizes patient and nurse safety and fosters a respectful workplace cul-



ture free of incivility, bullying, and violence. Quality is central to an organization's mission, vision, goals, and values, and is based on person- and family-centered care, evidence-based care, continuous improvement, and improving population health. Fostering resilience, well-being, and promoting a workplace culture of recognition for staff contributions are the principal foci of the well-being standard. The professional development standard ensures that nurses are competent to provide care through mentoring opportu-

nities, leadership support, and lifelong learning.

Pathway Nurse of the Year (direct care nurse)

Donia Till, MSN, RN, CGRN, CNL, a direct care nurse on the special procedures unit at Pathway-designated VA Southern Nevada Health Care System in Las Vegas, Nev., is the direct care nurse winner of the 2020 Pathway Nurse of the Year Award. Till is recognized for her exemplary contributions and commitment to shared decision-making and the organization's shared governance structure, leadership, and professional development. She lives the Pathway Standards every day.

Till was nominated for being the driving force behind her organization's pursuit of Pathway designation. According to CNO Jennifer Strawn, DNP, RN, NE-BC, "Donia's enthusiasm for and dedication to adopting and living the Pathway Standards were essential to achieving VA Southern Nevada's designation. As a result, current and future nurses at VA Southern Nevada will benefit from an organizational culture of sustained excellence, as well as a positive practice environment that supports, empowers, and engages staff." Strawn further adds that Till put together a cadre of nurses who rounded from unit to unit, informing staff about the Pathway to Excellence framework and its benefits, including why it's suitable for the organization.

Pathway Nurse of the Year Award eligibility criteria

The ANCC invites Pathway-designated organizations to submit a nomination to the Pathway Nurse of the Year Award that recognizes the outstanding contributions of one direct care nurse and one nurse leader globally who've positively impacted the practice environment by demonstrating remarkable skills in working collaboratively with team members and integrating clinical expertise with compassionate patient interactions.

Nominations for direct care nurses or nurse leaders from a Pathway-designated organization, regardless of size, setting, or location, are accepted with a stipulation that an individual winner can only receive the award once in a lifetime. The direct care nurse nominee must be a nurse whose primary responsibility is to provide direct patient care at a Pathway-designated organization at the time of submission. This includes nurses at every level who provide direct patient care at least 50% of the time. The nurse leader nominee must be an RN responsible for the supervision of RNs and other healthcare providers who deliver nursing care in an inpatient or outpatient area at the time of submission. As long as the nominee's unit/area is part of a Pathway-designated organization, they may have a range of tenures, hours worked, and locations of employment.

The NursingWorld.org website further details all nomination requirements and instructions, including the submission process step by step. The next call for nominations will open in the first quarter of 2021.

These types of nurse-led efforts are critical in the success of an organization's designation because they allow nursing staff to be engaged with the Pathway to Excellence journey and the benefits that come with it.

Pathway Program Director Gregory Clark, MS, RN, CNOR, commended Till for her involvement in developing the organization's shared governance education team, which evolved into the steering committee for Pathway to Excellence: "Her passion inspires nurses' eagerness to have their voices heard, highlighting a knowledge gap for establishing a structure that supports unit-based councils." Clark further added that Till is an advocate for direct care nurses and, as a certified nurse, was directly involved in writing the Pathway Standards Document. She was instrumental in the organization's "Let's Get Certified" campaign by providing education and leading the shared governance education team and steering committee as cochair and chair. And with her pursuit of advanced education, Till fosters the foundation

of leadership and provides safe and effective patient outcomes. In summary, Clark said, "She exemplifies what a Pathway champion looks like."

Till commented, "As a direct care nurse, 'Living Pathway' is the ability to make a difference at the lowest level that impacts practice and outcomes and be the change agent to improve processes. The need for change within the organization was identified and being given the chance to rise to the occasion was a blessing. As a novice nurse with the shared governance structure, incorporating shared decision-making, and enculturating the Pathway Standards, I was excited to attend the Pathway to Excellence Conference in 2017 to acquire more information about the Pathway Standards. It was important to see the Pathway journey and to witness the positive impact it could have on the organization. The VA Southern Nevada leadership team was an inspiration in my individual journey and encouraged me to go above what I thought was obtainable. Shared

decision-making provides direct care nurses with an opportunity to take ownership, lead, mentor, guide, grow in professional development, and collaborate with other disciplines. It can never take place if leadership isn't on board. Leadership and nurse managers remain as the guiding light to help direct care nurses grow, learn, and apply their knowledge and ideas into practice. As an advocate in health and wellness, the current COVID-19 global pandemic has caused a tremendous amount of stress on frontline workers, emphasizing the need for nurses to take care of themselves first so they can take care of others. Furthermore, physical and mental health during these times must be at the forefront, and learning coping techniques remains imperative. 'Living Pathway' and shared decision-making allow nurses to improve their personal well-being and use evidence-based practice to improve health. Additionally, VA Southern Nevada has shown how frontline staff is valued. Several nurses have made significant contributions within their shared governance unit-based councils that have positively impacted patient outcomes. The Pathway designation demonstrates quality and value within the organization. Once designated, the Pathway journey doesn't stop; it improves. The journey endures as nurses continue to strive to make a difference."

Pathway Nurse of the Year (nurse leader)

Julia Powers, MSN, RN, NE-BC, director of cardiovascular services and adult health at Pathway-designated Inspira Medical Center Mullica Hill (IMC-MH) in Mullica Hill, N.J., is the nurse leader

winner of the 2020 Pathway Nurse of the Year Award. Powers is recognized for her contributions to leadership, shared decision-making, safety, and quality as an exemplary leader who's highly engaged and transformational. She integrates "Living Pathway" into her daily leadership practices.

Powers was nominated by Pathway Program Director Sami Abate, MSHS, MSN, RN, CCRN, and endorsed by CNO Terri Spoltore, DNP, MSN, RN, CCRN, of IMC-MH. Powers leads nine departments, including inpatients and outpatients. During the merger of her hospital with a more extensive health system in 2012, she led the integration of her inpatient units into the three-hospital system, including reviewing and updating more than 75 critical care policies. She oversaw the move of her units and services into a brand-new hospital that opened in December 2019. According to Abate, "In addition to her transformational leadership style and organizational-level accomplishments, Powers remains an accessible and engaged leader whose focus on patient care quality and safety has resulted in decreased falls, lowered infection rates, and improved patient satisfaction scores." Spoltore added, "Her passion for excellence in nursing practice is second only to her dedication to her patients and staff. We're so proud, especially during this challenging time, to have Julie's accomplishments recognized at such a high level."

Powers commented, "Leadership is learning what motivates one's team to achieve goals and then taking action to operationalize that success. Understanding the barriers facing our direct care nurses is realized when we observe, listen, and collaborate. In today's ever-changing environment,

it's more important than ever to be visible and approachable and let nurses know they're valued. During our new hospital design, I supported our nursing leadership team and involved our direct care nurses from every unit in the decision-making process, from the location of the gloves to the types of beds purchased. Empowering unit leaders to facilitate enhanced and structured huddles every day on all shifts improved communication with a focus on reducing the uncertainties pertaining to the hospital move. Leadership doesn't come from a title; it comes from being present on the units. To be present, especially in challenging times, requires collaborative problem solving, shared decision-making processes, and being emotionally present and showing support, encouragement, and appreciation for the team. As a high-reliability organization, IMC-MH provides nurses with tools and behaviors to support efforts geared toward ensuring that patient safety is a priority. Nurses are encouraged to pay attention to details by utilizing peer checks and the STAR tool (Stop-Think-Act-Review). Additionally, they're supported when applying a questioning attitude and using validation and verification in their nursing practice. Patient safety is influenced by nurse safety; whether burnout, injuries, or violence, keeping nurses safe is equally a priority. The same safety tools can be applied to both nurse safety and patient safety. Upholding the culture of patient and nurse safety by fostering a respectful and healthy workplace culture is crucial. Recognize nurses who ask a question, seek evidence, request a change, communicate a concern, and use the chain of command. Promote person- and family-centered care, a questioning

attitude, and using evidence-based practice in ways that are replicable and sustainable. It's through quality care that we're able to fulfill our promise to prevent harm, to heal, and to wow our patients and families. As a leader, the responsibility to ensure that quality is enculturated into our organization using evidence-based practice in a way that's repeatable and viable is essential."

Living the Pathway Standards

When the Pathway Standards are deeply embedded in an organization's culture, nurses feel valued and are inspired to go beyond their call of duty. This is clearly evident with the 2020 Pathway Nurse of the Year Award recipients. These nurses' contributions exemplify how their organizations live the Pathway Standards, which is further demonstrated by their leaders' commitment to nominating their nurses. Meaningful recognition is an important factor in fostering a positive practice environment at both award-winning organizations. **NM**

REFERENCES

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Acknowledgment: The authors would like to acknowledge Donia Till and Julia Powers for their contributions. The quotations cited in this article were granted permission for use.

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DOI-10.1097/01.NUMA.0000731972.28321.b2