

Men at work

Children's above national average in number of male nurses on staff

Not all nurses are women. Some of the 65 male nurses at Children's say correcting that assumption is a frequent part of their work life, even in an age of greater tolerance and diversity.

"We're all professionals, and when it comes down to the male-female thing, even if we have hair on our faces, we're still just as good at nursing," said Kelsey Morott, a surgical nurse.

"Nursing is not just a job for women. It is hard work and I would challenge any man to come in for a 12-plus hour shift and tell me men don't belong."

—Michael "Bo" Jackson
cardiology nurse

Male nurses at Children's make up 8 percent of the hospital's 800-person nursing staff while the national average is 6 percent.

Many of the male nurses surveyed said Children's may attract more men because of better pay, increased chance for advancement and opportunities to work in specialized care areas at a pediatric teaching hospital. Some say pediatric hospitals also draw more male nurses because of the opportunity to work with children and because children are more accepting of them.

The current nursing shortage and soft hiring prospects due to the economy also spur some men toward nursing.

"I had worked as a crane operator for approximately 13 years before deciding to change careers," said Randy Bell, a nurse in the pediatric ICU. "My attitude toward working was to provide expert service which easily transferred to hospital nursing."

Misconceptions

Many believe male nurses are medical school dropouts or aspiring doctors, but those in the Children's ranks take

pride in the nursing profession.

"I wanted to continue to see the patient as a whole versus giving a diagnosis," said Danny Jackson, a variable staffing nurse.

Comparisons to doctors have their rewards, however.

"Oftentimes, despite my telling a family I'm the nurse, not the doctor, they seem to respect me more than an equally skilled female nurse," said Doug

Wieffering, a surgical nurse and the only male nominated for the Children's Nursing Excellence award in 2001.

Qualified and talented

Male nurses say men can be just as skilled at nursing as their female counterparts. And that's true, said Jean Francis, senior vice president for patient care services. In fact, as time passes and more and more men work alongside female counterparts, the skills of both males and females become equally shared by both genders.

"Strengths we might normally attribute to males or females are more individualized instead of gender-based," Francis said.

Some point to unique traits, however, that make male nurses a good addition to any staff — beyond being good at lifting heavy patients.

"Male nurses can help to fill the void in a child who lacks a father, brother, uncle or other male role model," said Joe Don Cavander, clinical manager in oncology. "Additionally, having both male and female nurses allows for privacy considerations."

Being a male nurse shouldn't challenge the image of manhood, either, they say.

"Nursing is not just a job for women. It is hard work and I would challenge any man to come in for a 12-plus hour shift and tell me men don't belong," said Michael "Bo" Johnson, cardiology nurse.

On-the-job humor

Being a male nurse still has its humorous side.

"Most male nurses know how to change a diaper, and feed the child and sometimes that's why the dads or husbands do not want us showing that males can do those skills," said Jackson.

Then there's that ongoing issue. "As a male nurse, you never have to wait in line for the restroom during breaks at conferences," said David Carter, director of transport services and a nurse for 22 years.



One is not such a lonely number on 4G, despite the fact that Michael "Bo" Johnson