

The
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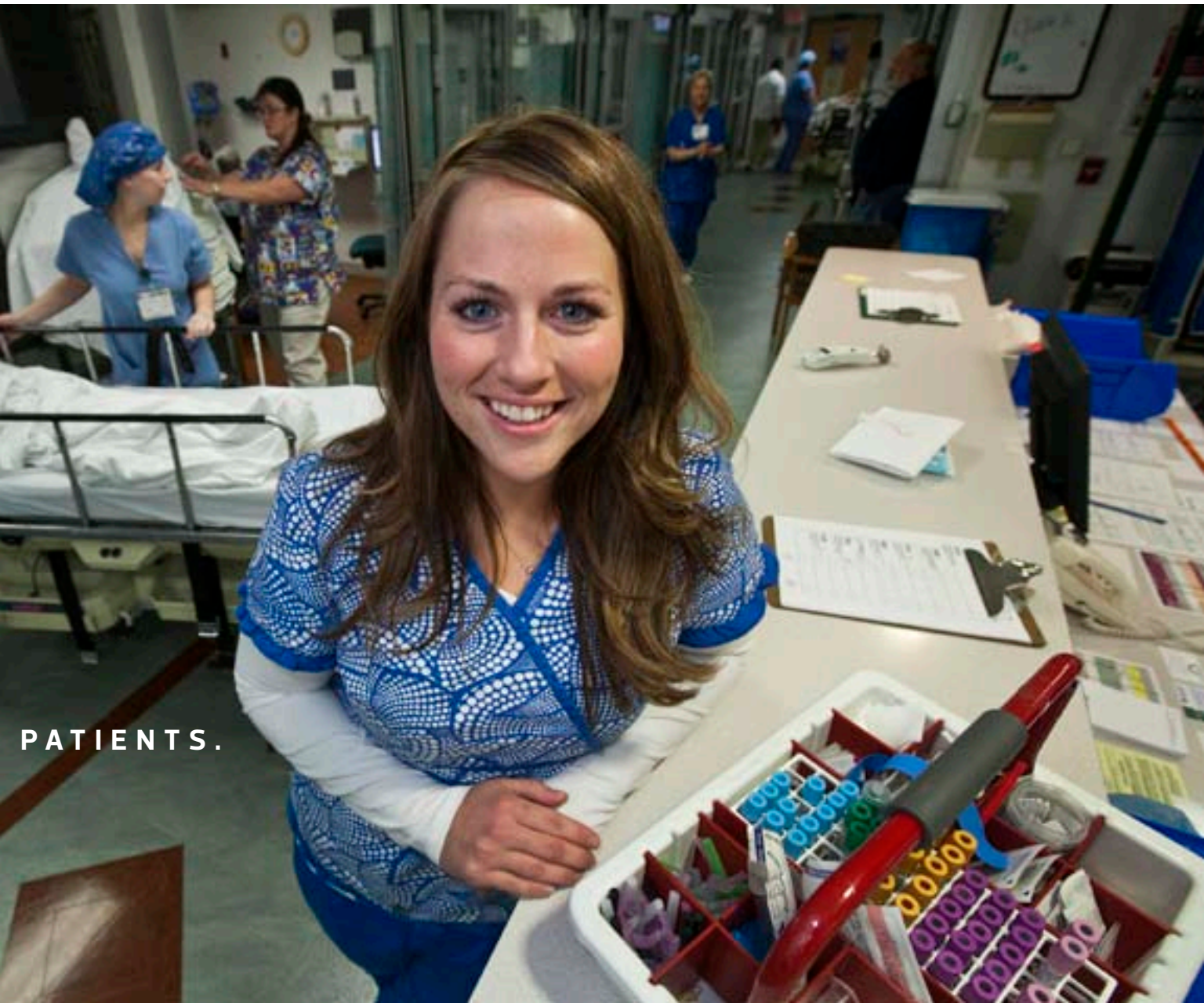
M E D I C I N E

NURSE EMILY MOSER OFFERS SPIRITUAL CARE TO HER

BY KATIE CROFT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TED WILCOX

Emily Moser's heart rate quickened as the conference room began to fill. Settling into their seats, 50 cardiovascular nurses prepared for her continuing-education seminar. The young pre-op nurse considered the years of experience and knowledge represented in the room. *God, why would You have these nurses be my first audience?* In Emily's mind, these particular nurses are the most intimidating. "They are pretty much physicians. They know so much."



PATIENTS.



She was now the teacher. The 45-minute seminar's intent was to equip and challenge these nurses to care for patients spiritually. Not everyone embraced her message.

One frustrated nurse stood up in a huff in the front of the room to push back on Emily's challenge. "Don't you get it? There is a lot on our plates. There is a lot expected of us," she protested.

Emily froze.

She believes that patients, at their core, are spiritual. Sometimes the best medicine does not come from a pill but from the Creator.

Modern medicine recognizes the correlation to a certain extent. Hospital chaplains are hired as a resource for patients experiencing fear, anxiety or deep questions about life and death. But even the best hospitals in the nation have only one chaplain for every 23 patients. At Emily's workplace, Methodist Medical Center in Peoria, Ill., there is one chaplain for every 200 patients.

The lopsided ratio proves to be a window of opportunity. "Who are they going to make their secret fears known to?" Emily had asked during her seminar. "Us, their nurse. The chaplain is not always available."

Statistics from the *American Family Physician* journal indicate that only 10 to 20 percent of health-care providers discuss spiritual topics with patients. Many in the medical field feel uncomfortable with their own spirituality, causing them to shy

away from this role. In stark contrast, up to 77 percent of patients said they would welcome spiritual conversation as part of their medical care.

Emily, who had dreamt of being a nurse since she was 16, loves to infuse her job as a nurse with her faith. "My goal is to reach people for Jesus," says the 25-year-old, one of four nominees for 2008 "Nurse of the Year" at MMC.

Jesus doesn't always come up. Emily only has 30 minutes with a patient before they head to surgery, rarely allowing a complete conversation about sin and a Savior. Emily does what she can. "People are on a spiritual journey from A to Z," she says. "I may only be with them from M to N."

The summer of 2006, after graduation and before her first day as an R.N., Emily attended a whole-patient-care conference hosted by Medical Strategic Network, a partner ministry with Campus Crusade for Christ. (Learn more about MSN at www.gomets.org.)

Knowing that facts are the language of hospital leadership, Emily and a fellow nurse, Caitlin Fitzgerald, soon began a research project on spiritual care. MMC strives to be in the 95th percentile in all areas of patient care, yet Emily and Caitlin's research revealed a hospital-wide deficit in the area of spiritual care.

Tammy Duvendack, vice president of acute patient care, gave their research her stamp of approval right away. She knows how intimidating spiritual care can feel. Though she has followed Jesus for years, Tammy struggled for a long time to bring up spiritual topics or to pray with patients. "It's like giving the prayer at Thanksgiving or Christmas," she says. "You never really feel like you are good enough to do that."

She eventually overcame that feeling, but she knows nurses under her care wrestle with the same discomfort, so Tammy supported the research project. "Emily is such a great speaker and so professional," she says.

Equipping nurses as spiritual caregivers moves the hospital toward its goal of better holistic patient care. MMC defines spiritual care using a spectrum from hugs and empathetic listening to more direct forms, like offering prayer. As of March 2010, hospital leadership asked Emily to offer spiritual care training seminars once a month at MMC. Because Emily is tuned in to the spiritual needs of her patients, she always has a fresh story to tell.

Emily met Dean Eaton and his wife of 35 years in Exam Room 5. She entered with a big smile, introduced herself and launched into pre-surgery questions. The physical details of the upcoming knee surgery were familiar to Dean, but Emily recognized an undertone of fear and anxiety, natural for a patient undergoing such an invasive procedure.

"Dean, I wanted to let you know that I pray for my patients every morning on the way to work," she said, turning from her computer and directing all of her attention toward her patient. He listened to Emily, his head cocked to the left, eyes wide and mouth gaping in pleasant surprise. "I was wondering, would you guys be open to praying right now?" Emily said without batting an eyelash.

Both quickly respond with a relieved "Yes!" Chairs begin to scrape the floor. After

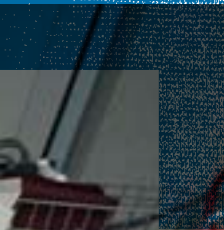
A surgical center nurse's day is never typical. With 30 to 50 patients coming through the floor each day, bathroom runs, escorts to the car, surgery prep and life-threatening emergencies intertwine. Emily's personable nature and warm smile help to counteract the sterile, surgical-center environment. Her patients are not just a name on a chart, so she tries to show the same love, care and compassion with every patient she sees during long shifts on the hospital floor (right).

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Emily tells each patient, "I prayed for you on my way to work," and she does. Prayer is a key part of her patient care. The Surgicare nurse station is command central, where activity rarely subsides. Limited personal space and moments of stress give Emily ample opportunity to be a living witness to other medical staff members (top). Methodist Medical Center employs 3,000. The magnet board is the visual representation of what is happening on the floor—a nonverbal communication device that keeps nurses, techs and doctors informed and in step with each other (left).



the “Amen,” Dean’s wife discretely wipes away a tear.

“That is incredible,” whispers Dean.

The emphasis on spiritual care is changing more than just patients. In the past few months, Emily and many of her co-workers on the pre-op floor have been praying together for patients and each other.

Circling the nurse’s station, 18 men and women dressed in pastel scrubs and white clinical coats stand shoulder-to-shoulder preparing to pray for Leroy, the father of a veteran nurse on the floor.

Yesterday, the 93-year-old had a golf-ball-sized tumor removed from his left lung. Today, Leroy is in critical condition and hemorrhaging blood.

Closing her ocean-blue eyes, Emily lifts her voice, soft and sweet, to her heavenly Father. She petitions Him for comfort, divine healing and skill for the doctor, for whom she prays by name.

The constant hum of the pre-op floor hushes for a few hallowed moments.

“This is normal around here,” says Jim Underwood, lead support tech on the floor. Nurses from other floors have asked Jim to alert them before prayer times so that they can join in.

In November 2009, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked MMC as sixth in the nation for nursing care. Perhaps the world is noticing the difference as well.

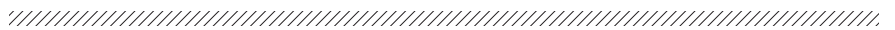
These thoughts were trapped as Emily

stood frozen at the end of her seminar. Before she could find words, an older nurse at the back calmly rose and asked if she could address the frustrated nurse’s comments.

Gently but firmly, the veteran nurse responded to her co-worker. Emily remembers hearing the nurse say that meeting the spiritual needs of a patient is half the battle of healing. She called it the most therapeutic thing a nurse could do.

The nurse in the front row quietly sat back down in her seat. Class was over; the lesson had hit its mark. Emily’s voice had empowered another like-minded nurse to speak up. In her mission, she was not alone.

A relieved smile spreads across Emily’s face as she remembers what she sensed the Lord saying to her earlier that morning: *Emily, I have already accomplished this.* ■

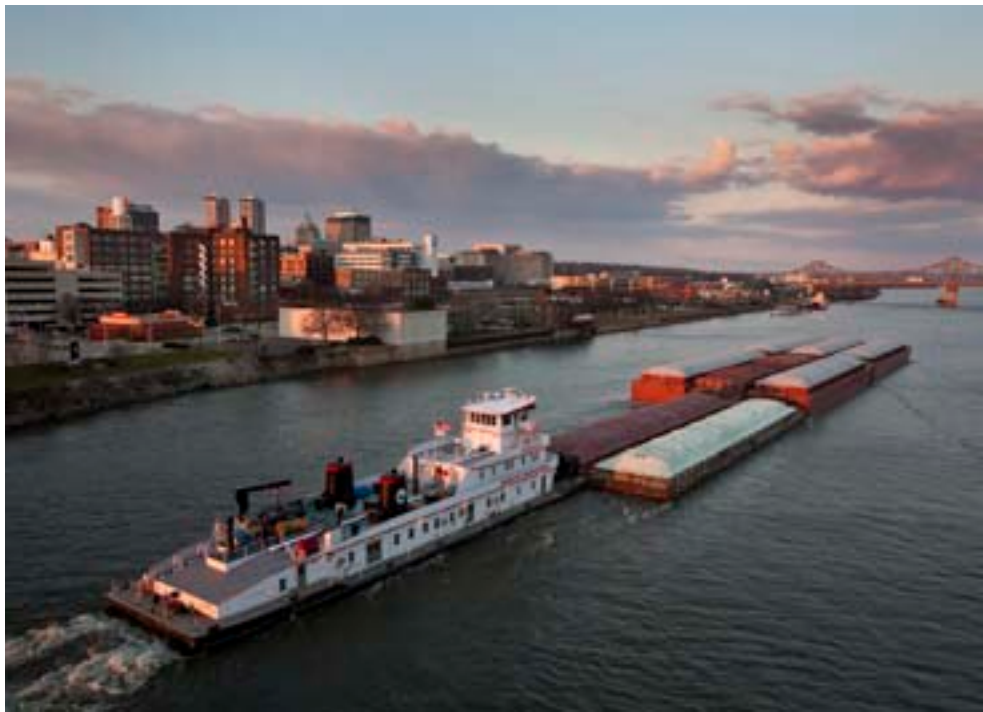


Contact the writer at katie.croft@ccci.org.

ACTION POINT

Where is God going before you, preparing inroads for you to deliver His message of healing in your workplace or area of influence?

Peoria is located halfway between Chicago and St. Louis, on the Illinois River. The city has become famous for representing the average American city and is perceived to embody the quintessential Midwestern culture (below).



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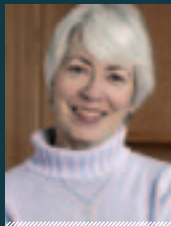
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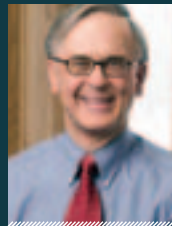
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