



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 22, 2024

One-on-One Training with AdventHealth Zephyrhills Nurses Proves Invaluable To Saint Leo University Nursing Students

The Saint Leo University nursing program's unique Dedicated Education Unit partnership with AdventHealth Zephyrhills provides hands-on training, prepare a nursing pipeline for hospital

ST. LEO, FL – For Saint Leo University's nursing program students, having one-on-one training with nurse preceptors (mentors) at AdventHealth Zephyrhills is invaluable. Thanks to a partnership between the university and AdventHealth, an innovative Dedicated Education Unit was created to prepare train future nurses and possible employees.

"This is our first Dedicated Education Unit model that we have followed at AdventHealth Zephyrhills, and we are hoping to make a pipeline for our new nurses," said Kim Friedmeyer, nursing education manager at AdventHealth Zephyrhills, in an interview with Spectrum Bay News 9.

Saint Leo's first group of nursing students just completed their first clinical rotation at the hospital on March 20 and March 21. Thanks to the DEU, they received intensive hands-on experience in multiple areas and specialties.

In the typical clinical model, a nursing instructor in the hospital mentors eight nursing students, and each student initially is assigned to one patient. The instructor rotates from student to student each shift. But with the DEU model, because the student is paired with their mentor, the student actually works alongside that nurse, who usually is assigned a caseload of patients.

Saint Leo students worked side-by-side for 12-hour shifts with their mentors and university nursing instructor Paige Porter for 12-hour shifts. The students were divided into two groups with one working on Wednesday and one on Thursday. That first 12-hour shift was a little tough, nursing student Kim Cotal said, but she quickly got used to it. "I've really liked it," she said of her DEU experience. "Monica is a very good teacher and a good role model," Cotal said.

She looked at her nurse preceptor Monica Mitsch and said, “I want to be like you when I grow up.”

Coming into the DEU at AdventHealth Zephyrhills, Saint Leo nursing student Martina Encomienda said she was focused on becoming an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurse. But thanks to her experience this semester and the training she has received from nurse preceptor Crystal Barnwell, she now is interested in becoming an orthopedic nurse. “It’s just been an opportunity to learn and get a look at what it is like. Crystal is an amazing preceptor. I’m learning how to chart, how to do patient care, everything.”

For Barnwell, the experience also is rewarding. “This is a great way to teach future nurses,” she said. “They see the reality. What it is like being a nurse. I wish I had it when I was in nursing school.”

Nursing student Nathanael Allen finds value in the fact that the DEU training will continue for two years. “I really like that we will build and be able to have a relationship with our preceptor [mentor nurse],” he said.

The AdventHealth Zephyrhills and AdventHealth Dade City DEU will pick up again for the next academic year, providing the students with new experiences and training.

Porter, the Saint Leo nursing instructor, tried to make sure that each student had the opportunity to experience different aspects of nursing so they could explore areas in which they are interested. “They are very engaged and good representatives of Saint Leo,” she said of the nursing students.

Saint Leo University and AdventHealth share a focus on growth and health of the body, mind, and spirit. And just as Saint Leo’s nursing program emphasizes the well-being of the clinician/nurse, so does AdventHealth, making it a great partnership, Porter said. “AdventHealth has such a culture of care, for the employees as well as the patient,” she added. “This pairs with the core values of Saint Leo.”

The DEU also could help ease the nursing shortage for AdventHealth Zephyrhills (and AdventHealth Dade City) as the Saint Leo students will be prepared and ready to work.

“This collaboration with Saint Leo University is not only shaping the future of health care but also addressing the need for skilled nurses in our community,” said Gwen Alonso, Chief Nursing Officer of AdventHealth Zephyrhills. “Together, we are cultivating a generation of

compassionate and highly trained health care professionals who will make a lasting impact on the well-being of our community."

As for the nursing students, they're enjoying the "real world" experience. "We're seeing the reality," Alexis Musser said. "The good, the bad, and the ugly. And we know what we to expect when we walk on a shift, and we're welcomed and a part of everything."

-30-

Photo captions/cutlines

Photos by Caroline Jorgensen, Saint Leo University

Saint Leo University nursing student Grace Lundfelt, a junior, listens to the heart of "patient" Kim Manning, clinical nurse educator, at AdventHealth Zephyrhills

Nurse preceptor (mentor) Bianca Cook listens to "patient" Kim Manning's lungs while nurse preceptor Amber Chin explains to Saint Leo University nursing students Emily Gray.

Nurse preceptor Amber Chin; Saint Leo nursing faculty member Paige Porter; student Martina Encomienda; student Kim Cotal; student Nathanael Allen; student Alexis Musser; student Grace Lundfelt; student Emily Gray; nurse preceptor Bianca Cook; and nurse preceptor Crystal Barnwell

Saint Leo nursing student Alexis Musser is gowned and ready to observe a C-section at AdventHealth Zephyrhills as part of her clinical training.

About Saint Leo University

Saint Leo University is a Catholic Benedictine university dedicated to helping learners of all backgrounds and ages gain the competence and courage to be more. Offering 57 degree programs to more than 14,190 students each year, the nonprofit university is known for providing a values-based education in the liberal arts tradition and a community of belonging for those who seek a greater purpose in life. Saint Leo is regionally accredited and offers a campus in the Tampa Bay area of Florida, regional education centers, and several online programs. The university is home to more than 104,000 alumni. Learn more at saintleo.edu.

Media Contact: Mary McCoy, Senior Editor & Media Relations Manager,
mary.mccoy02@saintleo.edu, (352) 588-7118 or cell (813) 610-8416