



Brigite Line planned her career path early in her high school years. She would train to be an Emergency Department nurse, a job that would equally challenge and reward her for the rest of her career. Her first step, like many others interested in the field of medicine, was to volunteer. She spent much of her free time at Fairfax Hospital.

"I remember really enjoying the fast-paced environment," recalls Brigite. "I felt as though the patient cases resembled detective work, and I started to thrive on the adrenaline rush since time was always of the essence. Although as a volunteer I was really only able to observe, that experience confirmed my initial hunch that nursing is what I want to do with the rest of my life."

Although her determination was clear, she knew achieving her goal would not be as straightforward. Brigite wanted to be in a hands-on role straight out of college.

"I talked to a lot of people while I was in school, and knew that hospitals traditionally did not train nurses in the Emergency Department, instead requiring training in many different areas of care," said Brigite. "It's not just the diversity of cases that come through the ED. Young nurses can get burned out really quick down there. But I knew what I wanted, and I knew what I was signing up for."

Brigite found what she was looking for at Martha Jefferson Hospital. She is one of six nurses who recently graduated from an intense, four-month

Emergency Department internship program, specifically designed to attract and retain nurses like Brigite. After finishing the program, Brigite's first career goal has been accomplished. She is a full-time Emergency Department nurse.

"I'm confident and ready to care for any patient that may walk or be wheeled through our doors. The program created a smooth transition from college to the world of nursing and I am so thankful I had this unique opportunity and full hands-on training. I feel I'm much more prepared than some of my friends at other hospitals who weren't exposed to the learning experiences I received here at Martha Jefferson."

Growing Our Own in a Tough Environment

Like many other hospitals, Martha Jefferson continues to be challenged with recruiting and retaining nurses. This is especially the case when it comes to the Emergency Department, a scenario that plays out in hospitals nationwide.

Overall, a recently released study by the Virginia Department of Health Professions shows a shortage of as many as 12,000 Registered Nurses is expected over the next decade. Although that number is down from earlier predictions, it remains a problem that requires significant strategy and effort to overcome.

Instead of letting the numbers serve as a stumbling block, Martha Jefferson Hospital turned the concern into an opportunity, using in-house expertise to train the next generation of nurses, in effect "growing our own."

"This is a wonderful way to ensure we continue to provide the best clinical care possible to each one of our patients, well into the future," said Kim Lowry, RN, Nurse Manager of the Emergency Department.



2009 – 2010 Graduates (Left to Right): Ellen Smith, Rebecca Hatchel, Robyn Murray, Regina Perkins, Brigite Line, Dana Pflieger.



“Not only are Emergency Department nurses difficult to recruit because of the intense nature of the job, they also handle many specialties including cardiac events, minor trauma and critical care. Thanks to our internship program, nurses are able to quickly build their critical thinking skills, and immediately put them to use in an environment where they wish to build their long-term career.”

Collaboration Leads to Team Success

In order to ensure success among participants, the nurses are involved in a combination of classroom lessons and lectures as well as hands-on training, and from day one they are paired with experienced Emergency Department mentors who help set weekly goals, provide feedback and evaluate progress.

“A big part of the process is making sure the nurses never feel alone,” said Meredith Overstreet, RN, BSN, CEN, Clinical Educator for the Emergency Department. “Someone is with them every step of the way, answering questions and helping to take care to the next level for all our patients.”

For Brigitte, the interaction with more experienced nurses was key.

“My preceptor made all the difference. She was always accessible and if I needed her help I knew I could turn to her. Having such a confident nurse to look up to was inspiring. She served as a constant reminder as to why I pursued a career in nursing,” said Brigitte.

Currently, three classes of interns have graduated from the program. Even more important for our community, 90 percent of those graduates have remained on staff at Martha Jefferson over the past two years.

“That’s really a staggering statistic, virtually unheard of for Emergency Departments given the demand for qualified nurses throughout Virginia and the country,” said Overstreet. “We’re really pleased with the program, our greatest reward being the positive clinical outcomes we see among the patients who visit our Emergency Department.”

Pictured Above (Left – Right): Jeffrey Alberts, MD is one of dozens of physicians who work alongside interns in the Emergency Department program; Lisa Carmines, RN reviews an emergency scenario during a training exercise; Brigitte Line was never alone during the patient care process. Mentors create an environment for them to learn and excel.

Speaking From Experience

Brooke Zoller | Program Graduate

How do you see the internship program providing better care to patients?

The interns are extremely intentional. They want to be attentive to their patients’ every need and give of themselves. The internship program helps the nurses learn to balance what is realistically possible due to the fast-paced environment of the ER, with the importance of the smaller things, such as a conversation and personal favor for a patient that can truly transform their experience. A positive attitude makes all the difference and I think understanding that from the beginning creates a win-win situation for everyone.

What is it like watching the program participants? How do they grow over the course of the internship?

Watching from a birds-eye view it quickly became clear how closely the interns worked with their mentors. At the beginning the interns leaned on mentors for guidance and advice. By the end of the program, the interns were excited to step out on their own, and it was the mentors who were having a hard time letting go. What I’ve personally learned is that even though we eventually graduate, the growing process doesn’t stop. The program teaches us to ask questions and work together, and we then continue to use those skills and collaborate to provide the best possible patient care.

Two years later, what does your experience mean to you?

I am so happy to be an Emergency Department nurse at Martha Jefferson. Although nurses in emergency medicine can burn out quickly, having the opportunity to do exactly what I wanted from the beginning was extremely beneficial and continues to encourage me on a daily basis. Through my participation I also learned how important it is to train future generations. Sometime down the road I hope to have the opportunity to serve as a mentor to others.