

## **Nurse anesthetists — when you're under, they're on top of it**

### **Sauk Prairie chosen for UW training program**

**By Marlene Harris**

In 2008 Franciscan Skemp Healthcare School of Nurse Anesthesia, located in La Crosse, chose Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital & Clinics as its sole training facility in south central Wisconsin for certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNA). Sauk Prairie was selected for its advanced technology, exceptional staff, and welcoming environment.

Many people worry about the safety of anesthesia. But today, anesthesia is very safe. This is due, in great part, to the high degree of skill and rigorous training required of the CRNA, an advance-practice nurse with graduate level education and clinical training.

“Sauk Prairie offers students substantial exposure to pain management that they don't receive elsewhere. They gain experience as independent practitioners in a highly professional and skilled environment — this is critical for patients,” said Barb Jochman, program director of the School of Nurse Anesthesia, the only CRNA school in Wisconsin.

Sauk Prairie uses anesthesia techniques that decrease complications and offer improved postoperative pain management. Patient comfort is a priority.

“We’re frequently the first rural hospital to offer state-of-the-art anesthesia, such as the femoral (thigh) nerve block and interscalene block. We’ll soon be using the new ultrasound machine that guides placement of regional anesthesia, which improves patient safety,” said Thomas Murphy, CRNA, director of anesthesia. He’s been with SPMHC since 1975.

A CRNA, in Wisconsin and many other states, is qualified to provide anesthesia services as an independent practitioner and without supervision by an anesthesiologist. Still, many facilities only have CRNAs that work under a physician’s supervision.

It’s different at Sauk Prairie. The CRNAs work as independent medical professionals. This requires an advanced level of expertise, which makes this hospital ideal for training.

The nurse anesthetists at SPMHC are responsible for all the hospital’s anesthesia services. They provide care for patients before, during, and after procedures.

### **A student’s experience**

“My time with Sauk Prairie’s CRNA team was truly phenomenal. I learned new skills and observed a professionalism rarely seen,” said Renee Roloff, BSN, RN, SRNA, (student registered nurse anesthetist). “I was taught the profound responsibility involved in working as an independent practitioner.

“I was also pleased to spend time in the obstetrics department, learning how to place and manage epidural catheters. The hospital’s CRNAs are very experienced. This gave me the rare opportunity to learn regional anesthesia (blocking pain in a large part of the body without altering consciousness). Their proficiency is impressive.”

Franciscan Skemp School of Nurse Anesthesia is a joint program between University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and Franciscan Skemp Healthcare, a health care network serving an 11-county area in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa.

Nurses have significant experience in critical care settings prior to acceptance into the anesthesia program at Franciscan Skemp. They’re awarded a master’s degree in biology after completing a demanding curriculum.

The new training program at SPMHC increases the number of qualified, self-directed anesthesia professionals in communities across the state. People living in rural areas will have greater access to quality health care without travelling to a larger city.

“At Sauk Prairie, I learned about anesthesia options not available to a lot of CRNAs. It broadened my skills and will help me give patients what they need. You can’t ask for more than that,” said Roloff.

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