

It's not hard to tell that the operating room nursing team at the Peace River Community Health Centre really enjoys spending time together.

A wonderful, cohesive group with a proactive focus on teamwork, they are there for each other and their patients. The result is outstanding care for the residents of Peace River and area.

And they also really like working with one another.

"After my third baby, I wasn't going to come back to work because our life was so busy at home," explains Erin Carter, RN, and member of the operating room (OR) nursing team. "And then I changed my mind, just because I work with really good people, and I love my job."

Carter's colleague, Denise Umanzor Escobar, RN, concurs.

"It's such a nice team to be around every day that we're together," says Umanzor Escobar. "I laugh every day at work. Everyday there's something that happens."

There's lots of laughter, but that doesn't mean they don't work hard. Far from it explains Peace River physician, Dr. Karen Lundgard.

I laugh every day at work. Everyday there's something that happens. - Denise Umanzor Escobar, RN

"These women and men have stepped up and they work long hours, they work tired, they take call for a week at a time, so their families' needs go on the back burner."

However, as Christina Kurnadi, RN, explains, it's what the team has signed up for.

"I got called in right after Christmas Mass," explains Kurnadi. "I had to run out of church to come here for a C-section. But at the same time, I know that I'm helping somebody."

Peace River hospital serves a large catchment area, with patients coming from as far as two

hours away. However, having an operating room in Peace River saves patients from an even longer drive to Grande Prairie or Edmonton and it allows them to stay close to friends and family.

The operating room runs three days a week with another day for pre-op. The OR also offers day surgery and Endoscopy. On top of that, nurses take turns on-call 24/7 to ensure that if the operating room is needed for off-hour emergencies, they are ready. The team also boasts a readmission after-surgery rate that is substantially lower than the national average.

There's a long list of other operations that are done here, including C-sections, laparoscopy, tonsillectomies, carpal tunnel and hernias. Over in endoscopy, they perform colonoscopies, gastroscopies, biopsies and more.

Carole Lavoie, RN, OR team nursing lead, loves working with the great staff at Peace River. "You learn something everyday, something new, a variety of operations."

Some of the RNs grew up in Peace River and have worked here a long time. Others, like Umanzor Escobar who came from Toronto, are new to the community.

"We've grown to love it. I love it here," she explains. "I don't think I could do any other kind of nursing again after this. I don't think anything would live up to this experience."

Christina Kurnadi came from the west coast. She appreciates the range of procedures she is exposed to in Peace River.

"[In] Vancouver, I was doing only orthopedics, so that's all we did - was orthopedic surgery. Here, I got to see C-sections, appendixes, and all these different types of surgeries that normally I wouldn't get to see. So, it's been a great experience. I recommend it."

The patients appreciate the laid-back atmosphere among the OR Team.

"They really put you at ease," explains Corrina Williams, a former patient. "They let you know what's going on. They'll talk you through."

"Every time our patients come and see all our nurses, instantly it's like relief and calm,"

adds Umanzor Escobar. “I think this area is really lucky to have a team like this because we’re just so focused on our patients.”

The team’s cohesiveness is readily apparent to the physicians who work alongside the nursing OR team.

“They just look like they have a good time,” says Dr. David Welch, a long-serving physician from Peace River. “When you have a good time, you work well, you organize well. You fill in for each other.”

“They are always happy to come to work. They love their jobs and they really do put their patients first.” - Tara Elliott

Dr. Rob Greidanus, explains that the nurses and physicians “all have each other’s back.”

“We all have the same goal to provide good care to the community, so its been a joy to work with them,” Dr. Greidanus adds.

Dr. Lundgard agrees: “It just makes you confident in what you are doing, because you have a well-trained team.”

According to site manager, Lynn Gaydosh, the secret to the OR team’s success is that they are great communicators.

“They all talk very well with each other, they understand each other, and they can anticipate their physicians. They can anticipate their patients and they can anticipate each other — that’s what makes them strong and solid.”

There is no doubt in Tara Elliott’s mind that if you are coming to Peace River for surgery, you are getting the best possible care that you can get anywhere in the province.

“You can’t ask for a greater bunch of nurses,” explains the unit manager at Peace River Health Centre. “They are always happy to come to work. They love their jobs and they really do put their patients first.”

Congratulations to the Operating Room Team at the Peace River Community Health Centre, an inaugural recipient of the 2018 Rhapsody Health-care Heroes Award.

- *Video and article by Bobby Jones*