

MCC nursing students, from left, Jagger Carigon, Gage Schall and Noah Gager practice a simulated exercise on a manikin in the college's nursing lab.

Men in nursing

MCC works to meet increasing demands for health care professionals

By Shelly Springborn

As a male in the predominantly female profession of nursing, Jagger Carigon said he used to feel intimidated due to his lack of clinical experience and his age.

Now, he believes the differences that he first thought would limit him actually help him stand out.

A 2021 graduate of Saranac High School, the 19-year-old is finishing his second semester in the nursing program at Montcalm Community College. Becoming a nurse has been his longtime dream.

"I decided on nursing because I have always wanted to work in the medical field," Carigon said. "I've found that nursing satisfies both my need to always learn new things and to help people who need it most."

Carigon is among a number of men entering the nursing profession as the demand for male nurses continues to grow.

The U.S. Census Bureau found that in 1970, male nurses represented just 2.7 percent of all nursing professionals. By 1990, that number increased to 5.7 percent, then 8.9 percent in 2006 and 11.5 percent in 2019.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 13.3 percent of registered nurses in 2021 were men, up from 7 percent in 2008.

Currently, 17 percent of the 125 students in MCC's nursing program are male, a historic all-time high for the college.

Danielle Anderson, MCC Dean of Nursing and Health Careers, said there are many factors contributing to this trend.

"Men help increase diversity in the profession," Anderson said. "Sometimes men and women look at things differently, and some patients may have a preference about the gender of their nurse."

“Just as women often prefer to share personal health information with other women, men often prefer to talk with other men,” she said. “This diversity will ultimately help us better serve patients.”

With 27 years’ experience in the profession, Anderson said “It’s refreshing to see that men want to be in a career caring for patients.”

Joseph Normand, of Morley, has worked in health care for more than 12 years. Initially, he worked as a phlebotomist. When he wanted to get out of the lab, he moved on to a position in the emergency room.

“It’s a whole different animal – organized chaos,” the 34-year-old said. “On any given day, you can go from zero to one hundred in a matter of minutes. You just never know what’s coming through the door next. It keeps you on your toes.”

When making the decision to return to college, Normand knew he didn’t want to go back to a university.

“MCC just made sense,” he said. “I know I have gotten a better education here because of the smaller class sizes. I’m not just a number, and I know my professors on a first-name basis,” he said. “I feel like there’s a stigma that community colleges are less than a university and I don’t feel that’s true.”

Normand qualified for the Michigan Reconnect program, which helps pay the costs of tuition or training for eligible adults who want to pursue an associate degree or skills certificate.

“This helped me a lot,” he said. “At this time in my life, I don’t qualify for financial aid, and this really made the difference for me to be able to go back to school. Without the scholarships, it would be really hard to make it doable.”

Noah Gager, of Greenville, is a hands-on learner. He, too, found difficulty with the university culture and said the format of MCC’s nursing program is exactly what he needs. The environment has allowed him to work part-time while attending classes full-time.

“The connection I have with my classmates has been a huge highlight for me. We all have an interest in helping people. That common interest helps us be connected. We hold each other accountable, study together and support each other,” said Gager, who is in his final semester at MCC.

Gager said he appreciates the experiences he has had in the clinical setting – from long-term care and surgery to psychiatric and OB and everything in between. These experiences have helped him narrow his focus.

The 24-year-old said he chose nursing as his career track “in part because of the wonderful care I have received from nurses when I am in need. Nurses are really what make a hospital visit for a patient as they spend the majority of time with them.”

At age 23, Gage Schall works as a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) while attending classes full-time at MCC. He said he appreciates the experience he has gotten as a CNA, as well as in class and through clinicals, which is helping him chart his course for the future.

“As a CNA, I have learned that I much prefer to work in smaller locations where I can get to know my patients more. I really like building relationships with patients,” he said.

It’s one of the reasons Schall chose health care for his profession.

“I have always wanted to help people to the best of my ability,” he said.

While he is unsure if he will have an advantage as a male nurse, Schall said, “I do like the idea of more roles being open to more people. I believe anyone can do anything they want to do.” ■

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Apply for Fall Admission

Montcalm Community College’s nursing admission cycle will be open May 1-15 for fall admission. The college will use an electronic method for submitting applications using Canvas. Students interested in applying must email healthcareers@montcalm.edu so they can be added to the Canvas application course. The admission application course will be available for access to all applicants on May 1 at 8 a.m.