

THE Importance of Caring

AUGUST 2020

my journey into nursing



Heather Elton, BSN, RN, CHPN
 HOME HEALTH AND HOSPICE RESOURCE NURSE

Heather Elton, BSN, RN, CHPN, wasn't supposed to be a nurse. She was supposed to work in marketing and advertising. But one college assignment led her in a different direction.

Elton was a sophomore at the University of Nebraska at Kearney when her advertising professor gave his students a survey. The goal was to find out what the students didn't like and then make them write a marketing campaign about it. The assignment was an eye-opener for Elton.

"In working through that, I realized I would never want to be put in that position," she said. **"I knew I didn't want to continue with marketing."**

To keep her scholarship though, Elton needed to have a declared major. Elton didn't know what major she wanted, so she left it up to chance. She had a book with all the majors listed in it, flipped through it and stuck her finger in at random. Her plan was to do whatever she landed on until she figured out what she actually wanted to do.

She landed on nursing – and never looked back. It only took a few months for Elton to realize she loved nursing. She applied to nursing school the next semester and that's what led to her becoming a registered nurse.

"I always say that God had a hand in choosing my career," Elton said.

It's been a very diverse career. Elton has worked in obstetrics, public health, emergency care, occupational health, hospice and more.

"I love the idea that across the course of my career, I've been able to take care of people from when they first come on to this earth to when they pass away," Elton said. **"I've been able to see the entire lifespan which has really been an honor and a privilege."**

Elton is currently a staff registered nurse and resource nurse with Columbus Community Hospital's Home Health and Hospice. She has worked with Home Health and Hospice since 2013, but her first experience with CCH was in 1997.

For three years, Elton worked in obstetrics and floated to the med/surge floor. During her last two years with CCH, Elton was also working a second job with what was then the Platte Colfax County Health Department. She made the switch to working with the health department full time the next year and worked for there for 11 years.

Elton served in a variety of roles with the department, including director of the reproductive Title X program, director of maternal childhood programs, assistant director and chief operating officer. During this time, the health department changed drastically – growing from seeing 100 patients a year to between 5,000 and 6,000 patients a year.

In 2010, Elton decided she wanted to explore another area of health care. She applied for a position as director of CCH's Occupational Health Services. Elton would go on to serve in that role for three years until she resigned to spend more time with her family and return to hands-on nursing. She is able to do both with her current role in Home Health and Hospice.

In her resource nurse role with Home Health and Hospice, Elton works on quality projects, checks for compliance issues, keeps up with new regulations, helps update policies, reviews charts for accuracy and takes referrals for the office. As a registered nurse, Elton also sees patients in their homes or nursing/care facilities about two days each week, providing home health and hospice care.

"I would have never thought about working hospice," she said. **"But what I learned about hospice is that it is really more about quality of life than it is about death. It's more about that process and the support you can provide to that patient and their family."**

Hospice nurses help patients get through their "bucket lists" if they have them and help patients and family members cope, while keeping patients as comfortable as possible.

"I saw this quote the other day that said 'We're all just walking each other home. Let me hold your hand some days.' That's what this job is really about," Elton said.

Though Elton hadn't initially planned on going into hospice care, she enjoys working with the department – just as she has enjoyed all of her other nursing positions.

"Nursing in particular is not one thing. I'm probably about halfway through my career and I have had a wide variety of experiences," she said. **"There are so many opportunities for people to use their talents and find their niche and something that they love."**

For more information on Elton or nursing jobs available at CCH, visit columbushosp.org.