Self-proclaimed multitasker excels in brand new role of CAPO

by Matt Westerfield

ost mornings, Dr. Kristi Henderson is up at 5:15 to squeeze in a five-mile run before heading into work. And it’s important for her to keep her endurance up, especially after taking on yet another role in a career defined thus far by an ever-expanding range of responsibilities.

AN EXPERT MULTITASKER. Henderson’s professional life has evolved from working as a staff nurse in the University of Mississippi Medical Center’s Emergency Department to helming the Rapid Track Minor Care, serving as director of Telehealth and, most recently, assuming the brand-new title of chief advanced practice officer.

“It’s very new across the country,” she said of the position designed to represent the nearly 250 advanced-practice providers credentialed at the Medical Center. That corps, spread throughout the diverse clinics and departments at UMMC, includes nurse practitioners, physician assistants and certified registered nurse anesthetists (CRNA). Henderson said the Medical Center has seen its advanced-practice workforce grow steadily in recent years but with little cohesive direction.

“There’s a chief nursing officer, a chief medical officer and now there’s someone to help represent advanced-practice providers,” she said. “My focus is to find innovative ways to use advanced-practice providers to accomplish our goals and the mission of the Medical Center.”

Physician assistants and CRNAs are both trained at the master’s-degree level. PAs are trained on the medical model while CRNAs build upon a nursing degree. Nurse practitioners also are prepared at the master’s level, but Henderson said there is a push to raise that standard to a doctor of nursing practice. Henderson earned her DNP last year from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

IN HER DUAL ROLE as director of Telehealth, Henderson said she’s looking at a number of different areas in which to implement outreach or health initiatives combining the Telehealth programs and advanced-practice providers.

Dr. Scott Stringer, associate vice chancellor for clinical affairs, said that in order to meet the challenges of more demand for higher-quality health care at a lower cost, everyone in the health-care system will have to work at the top of their license capability.

“We simply have not done a good job in the past of making sure that we were fully utilizing the advance-practice providers to their full capabilities,” he said. “Kristi will help with the unique aspects of hospital staff issues regarding advanced practitioners. However, one of her largest contributions will be to help us organize and deploy this valuable resource in the most efficient manner.

“Her leadership will provide a strong voice representing the unique needs of this group at all levels of the institution to assure that they are recognized as valued team members and leaders.”

SINCE TAKING ON HER NEW JOB description in June, Henderson’s priority has been to meet with advanced-practice staff in different areas of the Medical Center to assess their needs and obstacles and how she can help them better serve patients.

“It’s really been a cataloguing of who’s here and what innovative ideas they have — because they have a ton of them,” she said.

Addressing certain needs of the NICU has been one focus so far.

“We’ve been able to staff them with additional positions and have worked out a plan for staff coverage that we think will ensure optimal patient care. It’s an incredible group of nurse practitioners.”

Somewhere in there, Henderson still finds time to teach and practice, helping staff at Rapid Track, which is now under the direction of Kristi Goodson.

Henderson said her involvement with UMMC dates back to 1991 when she got her first job proctoring exams in the Department of Anatomy and volunteering in the ER.

Emergency medicine has been a passion ever since.

“Emergency medicine was probably the most consistent with my personality,” she said. “The pace, I love the change and the chaos. I do like change. If something gets stagnant, then it’s time for me to find another challenge.”

For the moment, working to fully integrate the advanced-practice providers into the health-care team and improve efficiency is challenging enough.

“I’m focused on improving health-care through improved access to care, improved continuity of care and improved utilization of resources,” Henderson said. “Maximizing the use of advanced practice providers is one step to accomplishing this goal. The medical staff has been extremely supportive of this transition.”

CENTREVIEW | September 12, 2011