



2025
Chapter Award
Recipients

AMERICAN
ASSOCIATION
of CRITICAL-CARE
NURSES



About AACN Circle of Excellence Awards

At AACN, we believe that acute, progressive and critical care nurses deserve recognition for all they do every day for patients, families and our profession. That's why we created the Circle of Excellence awards: to honor and inspire our members through programs focused on excellence and innovation. This booklet showcases the exceptional efforts of our 2025 Chapter Circle of Excellence award recipients. These chapters deserve recognition for all they have achieved, which exemplifies our mission, vision and values.

We hope the achievements detailed in this booklet inspire you as much as they inspire us. We also hope they motivate you and your chapter to apply for next year's awards.

For details, please visit **<https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/excellence-awards/circle-of-excellence-chapter-award>**

Thank you for everything you and your chapters do to further AACN's mission. We are a community of exceptional nurses!

Honorable Mentions

All chapters are vital to the success of AACN, and your work in our community of exceptional nurses helps achieve our mission. Although the following chapters were not selected to receive a Circle of Excellence award this year, we want to acknowledge them and share our appreciation for their continued commitment to excellence.

Atlanta Area Chapter
Region 6
Georgia

Inland Empire Chapter
Region 17
California

Central Indiana Chapter
Region 9
Indiana

Metropolitan Orlando Chapter
Region 7
Florida

Greater Richmond Area Chapter
Region 4
Virginia

Piedmont Carolinas Chapter
Region 5
North Carolina

Greater Washington Area Chapter
Region 4
District of Columbia

Susquehanna Valley Chapter
Region 3
Pennsylvania

Heart of Acadiana Chapter
Region 12
Louisiana

Triangle Chapter
Region 5
North Carolina



Excellence in Chapter Collaboration



Sacramento Area Chapter California

In the nursing profession, collaboration is a daily event and goals often cannot be achieved without it. Our most successful events often come from working with others.

This year, the Sacramento Area Chapter of AACN (SAC AACN) was invited to collaborate with the Northern California Chapter of the Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM). The president of the SCCM chapter reached out to SAC AACN and proposed a joint journal club event. We had never hosted a journal club before and as we had just returned from NTI, we were full of courage to try new things. We agreed on the joint venture.

Our two chapters met biweekly to work on the agenda and acquire speakers and sponsors. Our small task force determined that temperature management was an interesting topic that appealed to a range of critical care health professionals. We secured two speakers, one discussing the history of targeted temperature management and the other discussing controlling temperature in burn patients. Two very different strategies for two very different temperature targets.

Once speakers were identified, we moved to the additional task of finding a venue. Our initial venue fell through as the restaurant was closing. Neither chapter

had a large-enough budget to secure other spaces. We collaborated with BD, the current owner of Arctic Sun, one of the temperature controlling devices. They agreed to purchase food for the event.

One of our chapter members secured event space at a local school of nursing. The after-hours event did not interfere with their instruction time, and we were able to use the room for free. As a school of nursing, it was equipped with all the AV technology we needed. Since SCCM's Northern California Chapter covers Sacramento to basically the Oregon border, we agreed to host a hybrid event and added a Zoom option for attendees.

By using all these resources, we put together a fabulous event. The journal club event drew in people who had not previously attended a SAC AACN meeting and were looking for clinical ladder points. At the event we advertised our upcoming pediatric conference, gaining interest and new pediatric nurses for the chapter, an area we wanted to grow. We embraced Courage to Soar as we worked through our challenges and came out flying!

In addition, our chapter is passionate about providing education on hands-only CPR to the community. We often go to farmers' markets to demonstrate the

technique. At our fall farmers' market event one of our booth attendees asked us to come to her event too. She was the local organizer for Walk for Apraxia. We posted the volunteer community event on our website and set up our booth in a Sacramento area park. We were one of 20 booths at the event, where many adults and children stopped by and practiced hands-only CPR. We also handed out magnets displaying the steps and resources for local certification classes. All it takes is one person to remember what we showed them to save a life.

SAC AACN is currently working on a collaboration with Grand Canyon University (GCU). Chapter members will travel to their campus in Arizona in the spring to learn more about what they can offer the chapter and what

we can offer them. GCU has been a consistent sponsor at our events, and we look forward to collaborating with them.

Collaboration with others really does take courage and even risk. Not every event will work out, but there is always something to learn. We build character in the struggle. As our current AACN president, Jennifer Adamski, says, "A day - even an hour - without each of us changes the face of healthcare for the worse. Together, we have the Courage to Soar."



Excellence in Chapter Collaboration



San Antonio Chapter

Texas

The nurses of AACN's San Antonio Chapter (SAAACN) demonstrate their Courage to Soar by embracing true collaboration as an ongoing process to improve the lives of patients/families, nurses and our community. For more than four decades, the chapter has shown its commitment through collaboration with local nursing organizations, hospitals, schools of nursing and charitable organizations. We are proud to share our collaborative spirit by keeping the mission, vision and values of AACN alive in the San Antonio community. Collaboration is woven into all we do to help the people we serve.

PROGRAMS/EDUCATION COLLABORATION

A principal example of SAAACN collaboration is our outreach efforts with professional organizations, hospitals and nursing schools.

Our collaboration with San Antonio Nursing Consortium (SANC) continues to strengthen our advocacy for the needs of patients, families and nurses in various care settings through co-sponsorship and joint projects. We co-hosted the annual patient safety conference titled "Safer Together: The Intersection of Nurse Well-Being, Healthy Work Environment, and Patient Safety," emphasizing the crucial link between nurse

well-being, a supportive and healthy work environment (HWE) and the overall safety of patients. Our keynote speaker, Rebekah Marsh, AACN president-elect, helped the community learn how to establish and maintain an HWE. We believe that the well-being of healthcare professionals is foundational to providing safe, high-quality care. Attendance increased 25% with greater multihospital involvement with speakers, attendance and sharing best practices. Profits from the conference, shared with us directly, support NTI scholarships.

We co-hosted the Best 25 Nurses of South Central Texas celebration, raising awareness of the nurses' contributions to patient care, patient safety, research, leadership, education and community service contributing to HWEs. This year, another special award category was added, Innovation in Nursing. There was a record number of nominations - more than 300 compared with 100 last year - increased organizational participation and excitement among participants.

As an organizational member, we supported SANC's City of San Antonio Climate Dissemination Grant. We participated in educational programs, community events and public awareness campaigns for the San Antonio Climate Ready Plan. We also recognized nurses involved in environmental health and sustainability

efforts in their practice during the Best 25 Nurses of South Central Texas program.

Collaborating with SANC has increased chapter membership by 10% and helped maintain more than 30 attendees at each chapter meeting/education compared with past fluctuations. Chapter members feel more supported, and advertising increased with 16 nursing organizations sharing information. We also reduced event duplication and had more effective knowledge sharing. It was discovered during our collaboration that SAAACN has the best practice for strategic planning; therefore, an initiative was established to mentor all 16 nursing organizations for successful planning.

CERTIFICATION COLLABORATION

For the past 10 years, through partnering with local hospitals, specialty nursing organizations and pharmaceutical companies, successful certification celebration dinners and educational programs are planned and built around the AACN theme. This event recognizes certified nurses from all specialties. It's open to members and nonmembers. Certified members are invited to motivate others and encourage certification. Last year's certification event gained support from 14 additional nursing organizations with the highest participation of certified nurses recognized (more than 90), non-certified members and leaders. CCRN/PCCN reviews with national speakers are offered biannually. Additionally, the chapter reviews CCRN/PCCN questions at monthly meetings and in newsletters, and we display certification information at every event to provide an ongoing certification focus.

COMMUNITY SERVICE COLLABORATION

Our members are involved in community volunteering. One special collaboration is with the Texas Nurses Association District 8 and ChildSafe. This charitable organization dedicates itself to providing focused care for children and adolescents traumatized from abuse, neglect or exploitation. One in 10 children in the U.S. will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday. With 650,000 children living in Bexar County, it means 65,000 of them will be victims of sexual abuse. San Antonio continues to have the highest rate of confirmed child abuse cases among all major metropolitan Texas cities.

Our members help to bring joy during the holidays by donating their time to collect toys and wrap gifts for Santa's Workshop. Another collaboration is with the Stop the Bleed program, in collaboration with the University Health Trauma Program and San Antonio Chapter of the Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses, to train community members to respond to trauma; 15 chapter members were trained. We volunteered at the San Antonio Asian Festival, providing first aid for more than 300 participants, built a house through Habitat for Humanity, worked at Mission San Juan farm fields to grow food donated to the food bank, functioned as judges in the biannual Future Health Professions for the region and supported the Theta Eta Scholarship Program providing scholarships to nursing students throughout San Antonio.

Through true collaboration, our chapter's journey has the Courage to Soar and reach new heights in creating positive change and keeping AACN's mission alive. Only by working together can we be flexible and resilient amid a rapidly changing healthcare landscape.



Excellence in Chapter Collaboration



West Michigan Chapter

Michigan

Collaboration is defined as working with others to produce or create something that achieves a shared goal. In the spirit of Courage to Soar, AACN West Michigan Chapter (AACN-WMC) works together with both new and experienced members of the board of directors to explore new ways to empower nurses and create a brighter future for critical care nursing in West Michigan.

We exemplify collaboration in many aspects of the chapter's operations, with intentional inclusion throughout the greater West Michigan area, supporting continuing education (CE) for nurses, and working with various organizations to achieve our common goal of driving excellence in acute and critical care for the community of nurses we serve, our patients and their families.

The first step in creating a successful programming plan is to thoroughly understand what nurses in our area find meaningful so we can direct our educational offerings. We send an annual needs assessment. This year, we purposely reached out to each hospital in our area to collaborate with as many nurses as possible. These efforts increased our response rate from 210 in 2023 to 913 this year! We are thrilled to have this level of engagement and diverse input to create our programming plan for the year. To deepen this sense of

belonging, we are collaborating with presenters from all hospitals in the area for our spring conference. This event occurs annually on March 19, Certified Nurses Day, as an opportunity to give back, honor and recognize our certified nurses.

We support nurses who work in various settings, from rural hospitals to level one trauma centers. Our educational offerings include content that is applicable to all. To increase accessibility, we offer a variety of settings and time frames for our community. Representation from subspecialties, including neonatal, pediatrics, oncology, cardiac and advanced practice, influences our choice of speakers and furthers collaborative efforts. We invite non-critical care nurses to attend our events, including our fall kickoff presentation on implicit bias, a topic required for our state licensure. By casting a wide net for input, we expand opportunities for our chapter to collaborate.

Our relationships also extend to the broader community. We recognize the challenge that food insecurity creates for many patients and families, and the negative impact it can have on health outcomes. AACN-WMC coordinates a food collection drive instead of requiring a registration fee for an upcoming educational program. By forming relationships with our community partners who address

food insecurity, we can better understand the needs of patients and families while making a significant contribution to improving health outcomes. Additionally, AACN-WMC routinely collaborates with corporate partners to provide exceptional educational programs. This year, corporate partnerships provide us with the opportunity to bring national nursing experts to West Michigan. It allows our local nurses to learn from experts without incurring significant travel expenses. These interactions empower nurses with expert knowledge to embrace and advance change at the bedside.

It is our privilege to collaborate with other AACN chapters in Minnesota and Nebraska; we are partnering with them to provide educational Zoom events and CEs. Joining together to support and learn from each other offers valuable insights, networking opportunities and collaboration to further build on this year's theme of Courage to Soar and strengthen AACN as a whole.

AACN-WMC also recognizes the value of collaboration outside of AACN. By working with a local university's Pharmacy Residency Program, we develop logistical details, objectives and an educational credit plan to produce an outstanding program. This collaborative work promotes relationships between pharmacy and critical care nursing to transform care at the bedside,

and it helps nurses embrace and champion the constant changes in pharmaceutical knowledge and management. Also, this is a way to support our advanced practice nurses in the form of pharmaceutical CEs, which are applicable to a variety of specialties.

AACN-WMC partners with nursing faculty from a local university to discuss staff well-being, one of the most requested topics in our needs assessment. This partnership helps meet the needs of our critical care nurses who have asked for more information on promoting well-being and improving mental health, while we simultaneously support the grant to expand education on suicide prevention throughout Michigan. Our presenters' passion for this topic creates a welcoming environment to encourage our community to learn from the presenters' expertise and overcome adversity.

We know the landscape of critical care nursing and our chapter is constantly changing, and we embrace these evolving opportunities. Collaborating with a variety of individuals and organizations allows AACN-WMC to drive transformation as we are courageously soaring together to improve and advance critical care nursing in West Michigan.



Excellence in Chapter Community Education and Public Service



AACN Chapter at UCLA

California

“It takes courage to be a nurse ... It takes so much courage to keep showing up. Doesn't it? Every day ... Together, we have the Courage to Soar.” - AACN President Jennifer Adamski

Courage has been and continues to be the theme of our chapter. We are a group of courageous members who inspire one another to promote nursing excellence through shared experiences, collaborative learning and a deep commitment to the mission, vision and values of AACN.

This chapter highlights the crucial importance of community education and public service in enhancing the health and well-being of our communities. Our initiatives center on two key areas: (1) empowering nurses through education, networking, mentorship and professional growth, and (2) encouraging volunteerism to create a meaningful impact beyond the walls of the ICUs.

We offer educational activities throughout the year to support our community of nurses, as education is a vital part of our chapter. Our board members, experts in their fields, regularly share their knowledge of evidence-

based practice during monthly meetings. Additionally, vendor-sponsored dinner events provide educational and networking opportunities for both members and nonmembers.

Over the past 12 months, we organized six educational dinner events covering advances in critical care technology and pharmacology. Our recent EKG Bootcamp Live Webinar, hosted by Chapter President Daisy Samonte, MSN, RN, CCRN, was a significant success. The evaluations were overwhelmingly positive, reflecting the hard work and dedication of our organizing team, the speaker and the participants.

The UCLA chapter is dedicated to supporting the next generation of nurses through networking, mentorship and education. We collaborate with local nursing schools to raise awareness about AACN's resources. We also connect with student liaisons to discuss their needs and develop a plan to address gaps. In the last cohort, students expressed interest in two critical care-specific topics: arterial lines and code medications. Several board members organized a simulation session that provided students hands-on practice in sizing up and managing arterial lines, and calculating and drawing

code medications. Feedback from the session was overwhelmingly positive, with students reporting that they gained new knowledge and a better understanding of the critical care environment.

The annual School of Nursing Networking event is another chapter initiative to help nursing students transition to practice. Our board comprises nurses from various organizations, bringing together experience, perspective and expertise. The board's versatility enriches our discussions, and it is a unique experience where students learn about each organization's hiring processes and onboarding practices. Board members provide interview tips, review resumes and give feedback virtually or over the phone.

As part of our commitment to serving the community, we have partnered with several organizations to improve quality of life and enhance health and well-being in underserved communities.

Volunteering is a meaningful way to support our community and make a positive impact. On Oct. 19, 2024, our volunteers helped with sorting and packaging 42,520 pounds of produce for meals for hungry children, seniors and families in Los Angeles County. The chapter's partnership with Los Angeles Food Bank has been a rewarding experience and provides a great opportunity for networking and collaboration, not only among chapter members but also with community members.

Our chapter is actively involved with Hearing Their Voice: Advance Care Planning for the Homeless, a nationally recognized program that provides advance healthcare directives and other resources to unhoused and at-risk individuals. Chapter members partner with Jeannie

Meyer, clinical nurse specialist for palliative care at UCLA Health, to educate homeless people about advance care planning. Volunteering with Hearing Their Voice is a profound way to contribute to meaningful change in the lives of those who are homeless, empowering them to make informed decisions about their healthcare.

The partnership between our chapter and Highly Favored: A Blessing to Others has been a godsend for our chapter and a powerful example of how nurses, as healthcare professionals, can extend a positive impact beyond critical care settings. Founded by a critical care nurse, it is a charitable organization with a mission to improve the quality of life for impoverished individuals by providing them with essential items and resources. Our chapter continues to sponsor the backpack event by donating funds and assisting with distribution of backpacks filled with warm clothing, hygiene products, water, non-perishable food and blankets for homeless individuals in Los Angeles.

The chapter has been supporting the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS) to address cancer by donating funds and participating in fundraising events such as Light the Night Walk. Our members report a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment through their involvement with LLS.

The AACN Chapter at UCLA strives to promote AACN's mission, vision and values through education, leadership and public service. Our courageous members are passionate and highly motivated; they contribute to the health and well-being of our community through outreach and volunteerism.



Excellence in Chapter Community Education and Public Service



Denver Chapter

Colorado

The Denver Chapter of AACN takes great pride in our commitment to community engagement. We believe that fostering strong connections with our local community is essential to our mission. Through various outreach initiatives, educational programs and collaborative events, we aim to support nursing professionals and the communities they serve. Our efforts focus on promoting health equity, enhancing professional development and advocating for policies that benefit both nurses and patients. By actively participating in community activities, we not only strengthen our network but also empower others to have the Courage to Soar and achieve their full potential. Together, we strive to make a meaningful impact on the lives of those we serve.

During our first chapter meeting of FY25, we set a goal to increase our number of community service activities from FY24 and community awareness of the Denver Chapter. As our members come from many different hospitals in Denver metro and surrounding communities, we wanted to identify areas of service for a vast array of communities. We identified several matters relevant to all communities served by our members, including child abuse and neglect,

human trafficking, food insecurity, firearm injuries, substance abuse, homelessness and mental health crises. The impact of each of these matters has made lasting impressions on our members, the hospitals where we work and the communities we serve and live in. Although the task of addressing these issues seemed daunting at first, we decided to rise to the challenge together.

For August and September, we continued our annual collaboration with Denver Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC). Our chapter was able to fundraise and collect filled backpacks for DCAC not only for back-to-school purposes, but also for children who are removed from their homes at a moment's notice due to domestic violence or unsafe situations such as human trafficking.

In October, our members volunteered at the More Than Pink Walk, an event put on by the Susan G. Komen Foundation. This walk is dedicated to raising money and awareness of breast cancer and related diseases.

In November, we will volunteer at our local food banks to provide meals and services to those in need.

In December, we will fundraise for the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless with a goal of ensuring that the most basic human needs are met.

In the spring, we plan to team up with the Girls on the Run organization to support their mission of encouraging girls to be joyful, healthy and confident, using a fun, experience-based curriculum that creatively integrates running.

We are brainstorming and researching more opportunities. Other opportunities we hope to achieve during FY25 include providing education to various

members of our communities on topics such as Narcan administration, how to Stop the Bleed and hands-only CPR. We have goals to ensure our voices are heard on issues that matter to our community. We have been in discussions with Rocky Mountain Poison Control regarding ways our Denver Chapter can assist. We have identified potential opportunities to be involved in the process of grant writing and legislation advocacy. We will continue to have the Courage to Soar as FY25 continues. We are excited to see what we are able to accomplish in the next few months.



Excellence in Chapter Community Education and Public Service



San Fernando Valley Chapter California

Since 1972, the San Fernando Valley Chapter has continued its mission to empower local acute care nurses and the public with educational and clinical support. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted global unity among nurses, and AACN's collaborative initiative with Dear World underscored the importance of connecting nurses with both local and international communities.

The chapter embodies AACN's values. Since 2020, as active members of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses and the Society of Critical Care Medicine, we have engaged in discussions not only locally but also to support international opportunities. Our chapter members come from diverse backgrounds and are dedicated to making a difference, expanding their influence by supporting communities in other countries with our personal connections, addressing global health challenges and supporting each other.

For years, our chapter has supported the public through community events, such as volunteering at food banks, distributing food and warm clothing to unhoused people in downtown Los Angeles, caring for those on the streets

who are injured, offering Stop the Bleed training in local churches and providing sidewalk CPR classes.

This year, our chapter discussed additional ways to make a positive impact, both locally and internationally. Our members' rich diversity and cultural backgrounds inspired us to expand our outreach efforts. Locally, we have decided to continue assisting the community by organizing food packaging events at the Los Angeles Food Bank, supporting Thanksgiving events at Los Angeles Skid Row, distributing warm clothing to people who are unhoused, providing first-aid nursing support at the Los Angeles Marathon (as we did this past spring) and training local high school students at Oak Park Independent High School with Stop the Bleed initiatives.

From an international perspective, we supported a chapter member in establishing nursing care in a new hospital in Zambia. He provided postoperative care to heart surgery patients and trained over 100 local staff members — including residents, nurses and ancillary staff — in ACLS and BLS, vital skills in a country lacking a national EMS system. Another chapter member traveled to Ukraine, where she delivered educational

and humanitarian support in crisis zones. This included Stop the Bleed hands-on training for a local police department, donating new scrubs to a small hospital, and conducting wound care and dressing application training for local nurses at a rural hospital.

These significant contributions have brought a sense of accomplishment to the San Fernando Valley Chapter and highlighted the importance of compassionate

care. Our members are committed to continuing these projects, and we're planning further educational and humanitarian trips to Zambia and other regions. As a chapter we are devoted to having the Courage to Soar and supporting nursing communities and the public.



Excellence in Chapter Educational Programming



Greater Phoenix Area Chapter

Arizona

The Greater Phoenix Area Chapter is proud to receive the Excellence in Chapter Educational Programming award, reflecting our unwavering commitment to advancing nursing education and professional development. As healthcare evolves and changes, continual learning is crucial to ensure that nursing professionals continue to provide high-quality care. Through the assessment, strategic planning and evaluation of our chapter, we have developed and implemented a series of educational opportunities to meet the diverse needs of our members and the communities we serve.

After monthly discussions and performing a needs and educational assessment of our members via an electronic survey in March 2022, we determined that our chapter members were interested in kinesthetic learning that allowed for both demonstration and hands-on experience with the equipment and materials we use daily when providing care to our critically ill patients. There is an understanding that not every facility in the Greater Phoenix area uses the same equipment or materials, but we are all familiar with the general devices and indications for use. By creating opportunities for members to understand the why, with support from literature and evidence-based practice, we support our members' educational needs, so they can

advocate for our patients and provide more innovative and effective treatments. There were also requests for support and resources for the CCRN exam that help more members become certified.

We are busy individuals and wanted to find a way that would entice members to attend our meetings regularly, but also keep them engaged during the meetings. While working on planning and implementation, the chapter board determined that partnering with some of our medical device representatives from local facilities would allow for a formal presentation leading to the hands-on opportunities that many of our staff were looking for. Our chapter president communicated with a variety of vendors to see if they would host our chapter for a dinner and presentation, where they could explain the why behind the equipment we use and how it improves patient outcomes. These partnerships have proven to be important for both parties, allowing for dialogue and promoting patient care.

In addition to our monthly meetings, we have promoted educational opportunities by sponsoring two members to attend the annual National Teaching Institute & Critical Care Exposition (NTI). Interested members submit a one-page essay on why they should be sponsored to attend the conference. Those essays are

then blinded and voted on by the board to remove any bias. After the members attend NTI, they give a short 10- to 15-minute presentation at our next monthly meeting on something they learned. In addition to these opportunities, the board found an outside party to provide a workshop for the CCRN exam.

Evaluation is paramount to the success of education for our chapter. We want to ensure we are continually improving and meeting the needs of our members. We evaluate in a variety of ways, including informal discussions after meetings and annual surveys about the education they liked and didn't like. Some of the metrics measured include member satisfaction, knowledge gain and hands-on involvement. Analysis of the feedback helps the board determine whether education was helpful for patient care and helps us adjust future programming.

In the last year, we have had 10 dinner meetings hosted by a variety of vendors. Some of our topics include the use of smart pumps and how they affect patient safety and improve documentation, how to prevent right heart failure and the use of balloon pumps, optimizing fecal

management, AKI recovery and survivorship, pressure injury prevention, fluid management and many more. In these meetings, presenters have effectively applied theories and studies to the everyday care we provide while also tending to adult learning principles. Members have been incredibly pleased with the variety of topics and hands-on experiences afforded to them.

In summary, the Greater Phoenix Area Chapter has exemplified excellence in educational programming through a structured approach to assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation. Our commitment to providing high-quality, relevant educational opportunities has not only enhanced the skills and knowledge of our members but also fostered a culture of lifelong learning in our nursing community. These educational meetings also create invaluable networking opportunities and allow for the connection of members with expertise in different specialties and various levels of experience. We are proud to provide learning opportunities for our members and will continue to promote education as we adapt to the learning needs of our members and the evolving needs of our community.



Excellence in Chapter Educational Programming



New York City Chapter

New York

The New York City Chapter was founded in 1972, aligning our core mission and vision with those of the national office of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN). The theme of our chapter this year is Courageously Soaring Beyond Limits, which we have incorporated while developing our educational programs.

Our chapter's mission is to foster excellence in nursing by promoting diversity, inclusivity and continual education. The AACN NYC Chapter is dedicated to advancing the professional development of our members through innovative learning opportunities, advocacy for best practices, and a commitment to the highest standards of care.

This year, the chapter awarded scholarships to registered nurses for NTI attendance and leadership conferences. Additionally, scholarships were awarded to New York area nursing students from various schools to attend the Challenges in Critical Care Conference. Attendance, which was robust with engaged participants, included students, registered nurses, advanced practice nurses and nurse leaders. The keynote focused on healthy work environments and improving teamwork. Other topics included current

healthcare issues such as workplace bullying, sickle cell disease and improving the organ procurement process.

The post-conference evaluation provided positive feedback and included suggestions for next year's chapter conference. Some quotes included "attending the conference enhanced my clinical and critical thinking skills and time management." Another was "it will help me ... expand my clinical [skills] and enrich my expertise." One self-reflection shared was "I will make more of an effort to adhere to clinical guidelines." In response to the workplace bullying presentation, one attendee stated, "I will change my attitude toward my co-workers ... it was a great motivation and an inspiring presentation." A student nurse stated, "I can utilize the insights shared ... and strengthen my skills ... when I [enter the workforce]." Suggestions for next year's presentations include interactive case studies, hemodynamic management and professional development.

By soliciting member input by using the Learning Needs Assessment tool, discussions of current practices during in-person and Zoom meetings, and honoring special requests for education from members and nursing students, we have offered relevant educational opportunities throughout the year.

In collaboration with our healthcare partners, we improved our educational dinner programs by hosting monthly events, and offering interactive classes and Zoom education events, all of which covered a wide variety of topics. These topics included disparities in healthcare, caring for patients with tattoos during imaging, and vascular access. We have seen a significant increase in attendance at chapter events from the previous year.

Local community education included breast healthcare awareness, stroke awareness, cholesterol management and blood pressure screening. Internationally, chapter members participated in missions to Nigeria and Ghana, where they offered education on CPR, hemodynamic monitoring and infection control prevention. We also trained local professional nurses on best nursing practices in cardiac surgical care and gave them first-aid kits, BP machines, wound care supplies, hand sanitizers, etc.

By implementing new strategies to improve our reach and visibility through online and social media platforms, we reviewed our assumptions on the impact of maintaining the original use of regular mailings to reach our membership. A multipronged approach of bulk mailing, handouts, advertising on Nursing Network and other social media outlets has worked to our benefit. The exposure catapulted nursing engagement to new levels, which has resulted in improved distribution of educational information. We have also seen an increase in registration and attendance at our various programs, expanded membership and a return of former members.

The chapter will facilitate a health fair in November with a local church community focusing on BP screening, stroke awareness and a lecture on men's health. Evening educational events every other month will be held over the next eight months. A health awareness fair is planned for late spring 2025. We continue to encourage members to apply for scholarship awards to attend NTI 2025 and other continuing education programs.

The chapter will continue to emphasize the critical importance of ongoing educational opportunities for nurses as a means to enhance nursing care and professional development. Continuing education not only keeps nurses updated with the latest medical practices and technologies but also fosters a culture of lifelong learning in the healthcare environment.

By investing in education, our chapter can help empower nurses to improve their skills, adapt to evolving challenges, and ultimately contribute to better patient outcomes. As the healthcare landscape continues to change, setting priorities for our educational programs will be pivotal to ensure that our nurses remain confident and competent in their ability to meet the needs of their patients. We will continue to provide structured programs that promote mentorship and access to resources that highlight the advancement of the nursing profession and overall quality of healthcare.



Excellence in Chapter Educational Programming



Sacramento Area Chapter California

Critical care nursing is similar to gymnastics in some ways. Titrating norepinephrine and propofol while trying to achieve a RASS of negative one can be as difficult as the vault skill “Biles I,” which consists of a roundoff onto the takeoff board, a back handspring with a half-turn onto the table, followed by a double-twisting somersault. Every move is elemental and tells a story. Simone Biles shares her story and challenges in her autobiography “Courage to Soar: A Body in Motion, A Life in Balance.” Biles is vulnerable about her failures while navigating the intricacies of gymnastics and her life as a decorated Olympian. Similarly, critical care nursing presents us with obstacles we must face courageously while soaring from gray to living color.

AACN’s Sacramento Area Chapter (SAC-AACN) nurses had some triumphs last year while rising together, but we identified opportunities for improvement for this year. During NTI 2024, AACN President Jennifer Adamski challenged us to do something courageous; this is precisely what the SAC-AACN nurses did. As tradition dictates, the chapter pivots at the end of each year at the transition meeting and lays out our strengths and also our weaknesses to improve for the upcoming year. In our annual membership survey, we inquired about

what educational topics our nurses wanted to explore this year. While tradition does have its place, innovation indeed propelled us forward. Adamski assigned us the work, and we leaped into action.

With our annual member survey, we recognized that our chapter lacked educational opportunities for pediatric nurses, so we had the courage to host our very first pediatric event, the Courage to Soar Pediatric Conference. We invited a mix of local experts, including Aida Benitez, Michelle Donahoo, Michelle Foster, Kristine Strohbinn and national AACN speaker Tiffany Mullen. They discussed topics such as pediatric airway, delirium, trauma, ingestions, brain death, ECMO and the successful separation of conjoined twins at UC Davis Medical Center. Most of our members are adult critical care nurses; this conference’s main audience was pediatric nurses and nursing students interested in pediatric nursing. The SAC-AACN board advertised this conference on all our social media platforms, and it reached our local critical care nurses and nursing students who attended and had the opportunity to learn that children are not just “little humans.” This conference offered attendees 5 continuing education credits after completing the course evaluation.

The evaluation taught us that some of our members would like to see more focused topics and themes such as pediatric trauma or pediatric burns. Our members mentioned our audiovisual (AV) difficulties and rocky transitions between speakers. Based on the feedback for the upcoming year, we will implement more pediatric topics at our conferences, including congenital heart defects and pediatric cardiology insights. We are now more aware of our AV challenges and will be mindful of our execution when assembling our spring symposium, as our nurses are seeking more in-person educational events.

The board members continue to provide quality educational programs to our members. From the annual membership survey, we also learned that our nurses wanted opportunities to meet local vendors and learn about the products used by most hospitals in the area. We hosted the Coloplast educational dinner at Cafeteria 15L, where we learned how to build an acute care bathing program focused on the nuances of critically ill patients. Another educational dinner event will occur this fall at Ella Dining Room & Bar, discussing the antibiotic Fetroja. Fetroja (cefiderocol) is promoted as a unique siderophore cephalosporin for treating complex infections due to susceptible gram-negative pathogens.

Our educational dinner events allow our nurses to network with other local healthcare professionals and earn continuing education credits, all while indulging in local cuisine. For our upcoming conferences, we will offer vendors space to educate our nurses about their products and help them stay updated on current products that could help their units better care for critically ill patients.

From local farm-to-table restaurants to our critical care units and community marketplaces to learning centers, SAC-AACN nurses are overcoming challenges and achieving educational goals. Although we had some twists and turns this year, like Biles on vault, we balanced our educational program goals and stuck the landing by ensuring our nurses had access to various educational opportunities. As we look forward to the 2025 Spring Symposium featuring national AACN's president, Jennifer Adamski, and other esteemed speakers, we are filled with optimism and hope for the future. SAC-AACN nurses are choreographing courage, one educational event at a time, and we are excited about the educational opportunities that lie ahead.



Excellence in Chapter Leadership Development



Broward County Chapter

Florida

Over the last four years, the Broward County Chapter (BCC) has certainly felt the reality of a pandemic, canceling an annual spring seminar twice and losing that in-person connection during monthly meetings. The leadership at the time was experienced but not in a way to meet the evolving needs of the chapter, including the transition to Nursing Network with a not-so-techy board. Nonetheless, the president at the time sought a board member who could be mentored for a succession plan with the goal of a smooth transition; however, that too was not successful due to limited support based on contact restrictions.

The Broward County Chapter soon discovered that what we were doing was not enough and did not help grow the chapter or its leadership. Currently, the president and board members have actively engaged in meaningful ways for succession planning and leadership transition while rebuilding the chapter:

- When a new president and president-elect are recruited, a group chat is created with local leadership for quick questions and accessibility. Those individuals are also added to the regional group chat to connect them with other chapter leaders to share and discuss best practices.
- The job description of each position was reviewed and discussed before the start of the term, and all members signed a pledge of their accountability to serve.
- The chapter strongly encourages and offers scholarships for the yearly Chapter Leadership Development Workshop to build those members for the next step.
- Since June, our chapter has developed a different structure for the monthly board meetings, always starting with reviewing the expectations set out by national, and having agenda points to discuss ambassadorship and the subcommittees to recruit new members and leadership succession. The meeting ends after reflecting on what went well and opportunities to improve. This new structure has fostered more participation and improved communication among board members.
- The Broward County Chapter created volunteer opportunities for local members in the annual spring seminar committee, where the volunteer is paired with a board member as a mentor. This way the board member is able to develop that one-on-one

relationship with the volunteer and groom them for a leadership position.

- Currently, the chapter has developed presentations to deliver at a local nursing unit's staff meeting on the value of membership nationally and locally. It is focused on getting involved and sharing the vast resources of the chapter and AACN.
- The chapter board voted to have new Instagram and Facebook accounts to invite nurses to the monthly education dinner meeting, where one of the board members will briefly speak on membership and educational opportunities, and share their own personal experience in the chapter.

With all these activities and strategies from June to October, the chapter has recruited 12 new members, renewed 19 members, and secured more points of contact in local facilities through member engagement at monthly educational dinners. Internet visibility is present with a quick search once the website settings

were fixed. The annual spring seminar committee recruited five volunteers (three of whom are new nurses, which the chapter is excited about). The chapter ambassadors continue to provide brief presentations at new nurse onboarding orientations on getting involved in the local chapter. One valuable component of these presentations is the feedback received, which is discussed and addressed at each monthly board meeting.

The Broward County Chapter continues to grow courageously, while pivoting to meet the needs of local nurses to engage and educate them in accordance with AACN's mission and values. The chapter is focused on reaching as many nurses as possible to share the mission and values of safe patient-driven care and healthy workplaces in all our facilities. Even with the positive responses the chapter has received so far, the chapter's board members continue to proactively discuss and implement strategies for even more engagement and leadership recruitment as part of succession planning.



Excellence in Chapter Leadership Development



Oklahoma City Area Chapter

Oklahoma

Since 1973, the Oklahoma City Area Chapter has been committed to fostering excellence in critical care nursing. Celebrating our 50th anniversary, we continue to champion our mission: “Patients and their families rely on nurses at the most vulnerable times. Acute and critical care nurses rely on AACN for expert knowledge and support to fulfill their promise to patients.” This commitment to excellence now extends beyond our board to our membership and our local hospitals.

In June, when selecting our new leadership, job descriptions are discussed in detail. The board has an open discussion and members are elected. Our president-elect, Erica, has a two-year term. We believe this is going to cultivate a culture of growth and success in our board and community. In her two-year term, Erica will form long-lasting relationships with our membership as well as the multiple vendors we use for educational events. Several of our previous presidents serve on our board of directors in various ways and offer continual mentorship not only to our president-elect but also to our membership of 97 nurses. Having such rich experience on our board of directors ensures success for our membership.

Our treasurer will also serve a two-year term, ensuring that neither the treasurer nor the president-elect is new to the group. This process guides a seamless transition into these roles, as one is never new to our group in the same year. We believe this process benefits our group, as the treasurer will be an expert at keeping our records and a major asset to training the future treasurer.

As a chapter, we believe that education is key to growth and success. We sit down as a board in the summer and plan our key events. Annually, we host a CCRN/PCCN review with Nicole Kupchik. We also host Slice of NTI and a spring symposium. We vote on dates for the key events and plan educational dinners around them. Our goal as a chapter is to host an event monthly. We plan throughout the year to hold events to expose our community of nurses to education we believe is important to the critical care community, as devices and data are ever-changing. This plan includes various dinners with device representatives (abiomed-impella, capnography, mindray/flotrac monitoring devices) and pharmacologic education. We believe in creating a welcoming environment and a culture that fosters growth and boldness in nursing. Most of all, we want our

membership to be at the forefront of excellent patient care.

We ensure these events happen by maintaining relationships with previous leaders and previous vendors. We always encourage members to attend our board meetings to expose them to what it is like, but also so our board of directors can learn what our membership needs. At the end of each meeting and each event we encourage open discussion and questions; we ask our attendees what they would like to see us host next. Fostering open discussion allows our committee to plan and prepare for more events and the needs of our community.

Strategic planning and collaboration are the cornerstones of our success. As we close one group of events, we look forward to the next with renewed energy and dedication to our mission. Thanks to our leaders, past and present, and our strong vendor partnerships, our chapter remains a pillar of excellence in nursing. We welcome all nurses, both seasoned and new, to join us in advancing patient care and professional growth.



Excellence in Chapter Leadership Development



West Houston Chapter

Texas

When discussing this year's chapter goals during our transition meeting, the board of AACN's West Houston Chapter (WHC) committed to fostering a high level of membership engagement. The board determined that the AACN theme, Courage to Soar, would be integral to the pursuit of this objective.

WHC transitions its officers at the end of each fiscal year. All officers and board members introduce themselves. Officer job descriptions are reviewed and discussed, with all board members signing the Chapter Board Contract. As part of strategic planning this year, the board discussed concerns relating to membership activity in our chapter. The discussion overlapped with the challenges facing succession planning. The board took the comments and suggestions seriously and decided to formulate an action plan that would produce favorable results. Committees were designated with specific assignments.

Taking up the challenge, the board acknowledged WHC had the necessary structural components but at the same time sought chapter bylaws for a stronger foundation. A committee was established to develop bylaws incorporating building blocks to leadership

succession planning consistent with meaningful messaging of chapter initiatives. The proposals were reviewed, discussed and approved by the WHC board, cementing them in our chapter bylaws. These bylaws were recently approved by AACN's chapter specialist.

One initiative WHC incorporated in the strategic plan was to have general membership meetings at the beginning and middle of the fiscal year. These two meetings are in addition to WHC educational meetings throughout the other months of the year. The first meeting was in July 2024. The agenda opened with an introduction of officers and board members. AACN's theme video, Courage to Soar, followed. Nurses who attended the National Teaching Institute & Critical Care Exposition (NTI) gave brief summaries of their learning experiences. Discussions between board officers and membership centered on educational programming, the annual chapter needs survey and community outreach activities. The membership was also surveyed about their interest in becoming a chapter officer or committee member. In August 2024, chapter membership completed the Healthy Work Environment (HWE) survey. The HWE results will be presented in December 2024.

Succession planning has been a work in progress for WHC. This plan is reworked each year to encourage new leadership recruits. Objectives this year had officers taking active roles at chapter membership meetings and acute care facilities. They introduced AACN and WHC to hospital nursing staff, inspiring them to become part of our professional organization. At chapter meetings, they visited with potential leadership candidates. All WHC officer positions have elect status, allowing support and learning opportunities prior to assuming the officer role. This year, the board authorized new guidelines for the Nominating Committee. The leader for this committee will preferably be a past chapter president with at least two representatives from the membership focusing on succession planning each month. We were able to fulfill this obligation, resulting in filling all open positions with first-time candidates for FY 2025/2026. This committee is now responsible for preparing, counting and reporting ballot results, and the annual review of the succession plan.

Here are some examples demonstrating the impact of WHC's adjustments to accomplish its goal to increase member involvement in chapter activities and leadership roles. Seven nurses from our chapter membership were selected by Houston Good Samaritan Foundation to be honored for excellence in nursing. These awards proclaimed our members as leaders in their positions at our community hospitals.

Job descriptions with responsibilities for officers and board members were written following rules outlined in the AACN Chapter Governance Manual. This enabled the Nominating Committee and board members to

review and give written information to the membership. Other talking points included term length and new leader support, thereby creating more interest in these positions. These measures, along with diligent work by board members, helped WHC decrease the recycling of leaders.

The significance of embracing past presidents and former board members is not lost on the WHC board. These members at-large can be appointed by the president or board to serve on committees where their expertise in specific subject matters is invaluable. Previous WHC leaders act as mentors and role models, giving members precious insight about officer roles in action.

In the interest of nurturing our succession plan, the board agreed that each committee should have at least two members from the general membership. This action would provide the general members hands-on experience in chapter operations, problem solving and decision-making.

WHC had the Courage to Soar, making crucial decisions and taking bold steps to spark our membership's engagement in chapter proceedings. These process changes will support the partnership relationships of current leaders and new leaders. To maintain consistency, the improved processes have been hardwired into our chapter bylaws. Through strong leadership, WHC will have the Courage to Soar into the future.



Excellence in Promoting the Value of Certification



Greater Miami Area Chapter

Florida

For more than 10 years, the Greater Miami Area Chapter (GMAC) of AACN has been facilitating CCRN certification for its nurses to support and foster their continuing education in high-acuity and critical care. Four years ago, the chapter transitioned to hosting its CCRN review virtually to help reach more nurses in the community and nationally. The review is presented by a national lecturer and author who specializes in CCRN certification review. Having someone who is nationally recognized attracts more nurses to attend the programs.

This year, the chapter's goal is to increase the number of members who are certified by at least 30% to have half of our members certified by the end of 2025. To achieve this goal, during the chapter's strategic meeting, the board came up with various ideas on how to increase certification among members. To encourage more members to advance their practice, GMAC will host both a CCRN review and a PCCN review. This is due to an increase of progressive care nurses who have joined the chapter and non-GMAC PCU nurses who attend monthly meetings.

To ensure a successful plan, the board is collaborating with one of the chapters in Region 7 that has been

holding both reviews for many years. Each will be a two-day virtual review with a booklet sent to attendees days before the events. To further incentivize participants, a recording of each review will be provided, allowing participants to revisit and examine the content on their own time. Being able to record the virtual reviews is a new achievement that GMAC is excited to provide to its nurses.

The chapter will also leverage technology by using social media to reach more nurses and encourage certification. Social media platforms will also be used to celebrate members who pass their CCRN or PCCN exam during the 2024-2025 AACN year as meaningful recognition. Those who are able to attend the annual Miami Teaching Institute conference will be recognized for becoming certified and will receive CCRN or PCCN pins/mementos. In addition, GMAC will give a rebate of \$100 to the first three members who pass both certifications within a 60-day period.

In order to achieve this goal, GMAC will advertise on social media and visit local hospitals to motivate nurses to get certified. The chapter will also have a table at area hospitals having conferences to educate nurses on how

to sign up for the exams and what review materials AACN and GMAC offer.

In closing, GMAC's purpose is to empower its nurses through certification to further their knowledge.

Through that power, GMAC can have the Courage to Soar into this journey together.



Excellence in Promoting the Value of Certification



Greater Twin Cities Area Chapter

Minnesota

The Greater Twin Cities Area Chapter (GTCAC), the local chapter of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses in the Greater Twin Cities area, has been courageously soaring for the last 51 years. The chapter is dedicated to creating an environment that engages our membership through knowledge acquisition, service opportunities and recognition of the contributions of our acute and critical care nurses to patient-centered care. We are dedicated to continually providing quality evidence-based educational opportunities for our members who represent all professional areas of practice, including acute care, critical care, emergency care and schools of nursing.

Research shows that having a higher percentage of certified nurses in the practice setting improves patient outcomes; therefore, we focus much of our efforts as a chapter on providing certification review courses and continuing education opportunities for those who are certified, to obtain the CERPs needed to maintain certification. Each fall, we have an in-person CCRN/PCCN review course, and 115 participants attended our most recent course on Sept. 17 and 18, 2024. Of them, 47 participants are planning to sit for the CCRN, and 50 want to obtain PCCN certification. The rest are already certified and took the course for a review and to obtain CEs. As of Feb. 15, 2024, Minnesota has 297 PCCN-

certified nurses and 1,766 CCRN-certified nurses. GTCAC has a goal to increase the number of PCCN-certified nurses in our area, so we appointed a PCCN chair to our board this fiscal year whose focus will be increasing the number of PCCN nurses in Minnesota.

Each November, GTCAC hosts a two-day symposium that highlights current hot topics in the practice setting. We recruit national and local subject matter experts to present to our participants, and this year each participant will be granted 14.5 CEs/CERPs for the two-day conference. This event has had up to 235 participants. In addition to our high-quality speakers, we host vendors who showcase the latest in equipment and pharmaceuticals to help our nurses take stellar care of patients.

Each February, we sponsor a journal club dinner for our membership. Our research chair presents a peer-reviewed journal article on a topic of interest to the entire membership. There is always a great discussion with all participants, and everyone receives CEs, which can help maintain certification. This year's meeting is scheduled for Feb. 11, 2025.

In March, the chapter hosts a certification dinner for all certified members. We celebrate those who are newly certified and recognize those who have courageously

soared in their specialty field and maintained their certifications for years. We host this well-attended event at a local fancy restaurant, and it is a highlight of the year. On April 15, 2025, GTCAC will host its annual in-person CMC/CSC review course, one of the few in the country, for an estimated 45-60 participants. Nicole Kupchik is the presenter, and we expect all seats to be taken.

About 80% of our eligible board members hold CCRN or PCCN certification with the remaining members studying to take their test within the next year. Also, 62.5% of our 262 members are certified; five have both CCRN and PCCN certifications, 27 are PCCN certified and 128 are CCRN certified. Our goal is to increase this number by 10% in the coming year, and with record attendance at our recent review course, we are well on our way to achieving this level.

Each year, we partner with a nonprofit organization to highlight their work at our symposium and work with them throughout the year to give our members an opportunity to provide service to the organization through meaningful volunteer work. We know that certified nurses can courageously meet these needs.

We also recognize active members in our chapter with annual scholarships to NTI, where they can obtain enough CEs during the conference to maintain their certification and also participate in the fantastic certification celebration at NTI.

We have course evaluations at each of our educational offerings to not only evaluate speakers but to obtain input on the offerings our membership would like in the future. Our board works tirelessly to obtain speakers to meet the needs of our members, who can apply for CEs. These educational offerings are beneficial in helping members maintain certification as well as increasing the knowledge base of those who attend.

Having the Courage to Soar means we overcome obstacles to obtain high-quality facilities and speakers. Our members not only obtain national certification, they maintain certification through our educational offerings, where our certified nurses can also obtain the needed CEs. Our three main foci as a chapter are certification, education and collaboration, which we are courageously and tirelessly soaring to achieve.



Excellence in Promoting the Value of Certification



San Antonio Chapter

Texas

The San Antonio Chapter of AACN (SAAACN) supports the mission, vision and initiatives of AACN by making a strong commitment to promote certification in acute and critical care nursing. The chapter recognizes that certification contributes to the nurse's ability to provide high-quality nursing care through expanded knowledge and the ability to critically evaluate clinical situations. To accomplish this, SAAACN promotes the preparation and maintenance standards for certification, specifically CCRN and PCCN, with myriad approaches.

Our chapter consistently offers a CCRN/PCCN review every other year with national speakers. This year, in collaboration with University of Texas at San Antonio, our chapter provided a one-day PCCN/CCRN certification review course with a national speaker, Beth Melton Poppas, MSN, RN, CCRN, PCCN. With a reasonable registration fee, meals provided, door prizes and a state-of-the-art venue at the School of Nursing in San Antonio, it proved to be a successful event with 75 nurses in attendance. Nurses from San Antonio hospitals and a few nurses from outlying hospitals participated in this course. University Hospital and Baptist Health System supported the endeavor by paying for their employees to attend this course with the expectation

that the nurses would take the certification exam. And 15% reported successful completion of the certification exam.

Meaningful recognition and educational offerings are the primary ways our chapter influences the renewal and retention of certified nurses. By providing monthly educational offerings and biannual symposiums, and including all three CERP categories, our chapter facilitates meeting the requirements for certification renewal. We offer scholarships to NTI and send as many board members as possible. All newly certified nurses are recognized at monthly chapter meetings and receive a certification pin. Each meeting features certification review questions with member discussion of answers and rationales. Prominent signs with all types of certifications are displayed with certification brochures/booklets. SAAACN members state the positive impact these activities have on their preparation for the certification exam as well as maintaining current knowledge. The chapter has increased the number of certified nurses and the renewal and retention of certified nurses as reported by hospital CNOs, directors and managers. San Antonio hospitals display plaques in the units with the names of the certified nurses,

while other hospitals have a board with pictures of the certified nurses in the unit for families and friends to view.

Promoting the value of certification through celebration is yet another way that our chapter supports the hard work of dedicated certified nurses. Each year, a Certification Celebration is held to recognize all certified nurses across San Antonio regardless of their specialty as well as inviting non-certified chapter members/co-workers who want to be inspired.

In 2023, the chapter celebration post-COVID was a grand celebration featuring a Great Gatsby theme. The Certification Celebration Committee invited the military jazz band to perform and a DJ for celebration and dancing. The keynote speaker was Theresa Davis, then president-elect of the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. She addressed the Certification Celebration attendees and shared personal and professional experiences that uplifted the nurses. At the end of her presentation everyone felt so proud of being part of the nursing profession. She made every nurse in the room feel that they make a profound difference.

One of the board members searched to find the nurse leader who first launched the chapter in the '70s. Surprisingly, she found Carmen Dennis, who spoke about how the chapter got its start in San Antonio. Following the keynote speakers, a themed Great Gatsby

video showcased the certified nurses in San Antonio to include the origins of certification. Later that evening certified nurses were recognized. They shared their stories about being certified nurses. Gifts were given to first-time certificants, five-year certificants, nurses with the most certifications, and the longest someone has been certified. In 2023, over 50 certified nurses attended with their significant others, and in 2024 more than 90 attended. Each year, it has proven to be a memorable, enjoyable and entertaining event celebrating certified and soon-to-be certified nurses.

The certified nurses in San Antonio are held to high standards and use their clinical judgment to make decisions. These nurses manage the care of the more critically ill patients and have rapid response roles and charge nurse roles. RRT/code blue data from our hospitals demonstrate that patients have better outcomes, because certified nurses manage care or escalate care to prevent further deterioration of the patients. Research shows these patients have better outcomes and fewer infections, and there are less medication and medical errors.

The San Antonio Chapter's dedicated, loyal, new and veteran board members and members continue to maintain the Courage to Soar as we promote the value of certification.



President's Award for Chapters



Houston Gulf Coast Chapter

Texas

Courage to Soar: Our Year of Growth and Impact

The Houston Gulf Coast Chapter has embraced the AACN theme, Courage to Soar, as a guiding principle for all our activities, initiatives and goals. This theme symbolizes our commitment to inspiring bold actions, fostering innovation and achieving excellence in our chapter and the communities we serve. By integrating the theme holistically into our efforts, we encourage our members to rise above challenges and reach new heights.

The theme has not been confined to a single event or program; it permeates every activity we organize. From our monthly chapter meetings to our community outreach initiatives, Courage to Soar is the cornerstone of our planning and execution. We set high standards for our chapter, including providing educational programming every month, noneducational networking opportunities semiannually and bimonthly webinars. All these activities are designed to help members expand their critical care knowledge, connect with other nurses throughout the community, and explore ways to collaboratively improve healthcare.

For example, through one of our webinars, nurses can learn about conducting research and the art of grant writing, which foster innovation to improve quality of care. During our chapter meetings we include a good news segment dedicated to our members' achievements. It highlights members who take bold steps in their careers or lead groundbreaking initiatives in their workplaces, inspiring others to do the same.

Another standout educational opportunity is this year's chapter symposium featuring Jennifer Adamski, AACN president, as the keynote speaker. Tailoring the content to reflect the theme, the Courage to Soar Symposium includes presentations on technological advancements in patient care related to virtual/telehealth medicine, exploring the growing market for weight loss medications and its consequences for patient health, and the revolution of rapid response teams at several hospitals in the Houston area. Along with highly engaging presentations, the symposium features healthcare companies showcasing cutting-edge technology that allows participants hands-on interaction with products, as well as a poster session for

our members to showcase their research endeavors. The aim of the symposium is for attendees to walk away with new knowledge, reinvigoration for the art of critical care nursing, and actionable strategies to achieve personal and professional growth.

The theme also shaped our community service efforts, leading us to set a goal of at least one outreach program every month to address pressing needs in the Greater Houston area. These projects included volunteering for the Houston Food Bank after Hurricane Beryl; collecting books for children with limited resources; answering the call to replenish supplies for Nora's Home, which provides services to transplant patients and their families; volunteering as medical personnel for the Houston Chevron Marathon; and adopting a family of five for Christmas through Centro de Corazon. These outreach activities allowed our organization to engage with new partners and stakeholders, ultimately creating a significant and lasting impact.

The adoption of Courage to Soar as our guiding theme led to meaningful outcomes for our chapter and beyond. Internally, it fostered a culture of resilience, collaboration and innovation, making our board of directors stronger than ever and more efficient. Our growing strength has translated to a steady increase in membership from the beginning of fiscal year 2024 by 2% on average, every month. It has also given us the opportunity to celebrate our veteran members and offer them free membership in our chapter.

By embracing the theme of Courage to Soar, the Houston Gulf Coast Chapter of AACN inspires our members to rise above limitations and demonstrates how boldness and determination can drive meaningful change in our work environments, patient care and the broader community.



President's Award for Chapters



Northwest Chicago Area Chapter

Illinois

At the 2024 National Teaching Institute & Critical Care Exposition (NTI), President Jennifer Adamski introduced AACN's theme, Courage to Soar, significantly inspiring the Northwest Chicago Area Chapter (NWCAC) to follow AACN's guiding vision for excellence.

As our chapter excitedly discussed the new theme at our transition meeting, we developed our strategic plan for 2024-2025 with a focus on embodying Courage to Soar. Defining this theme as our compass and vision, our chapter affirmed our commitment to promoting certification, providing excellent educational opportunities, providing a professional network and enhancing clinical development and leadership for critical care, progressive care and emergency room nurses. Our mission and vision continue to support evidence-based practice supporting nurses' Courage to Soar with research and knowledge to optimize patient outcomes.

The chapter board, inspired by Courage to Soar, defined this year's key initiatives as increasing membership, developing chapter leadership, providing excellent education programs, supporting community needs, and promoting certification of professional nurses.

Our website, newsletters, educational meetings and mailings proudly display the Courage to Soar theme. At every meeting, the displayed theme leads discussion on methods of promoting Courage to Soar.

NWCAC has 15 board members and approximately 110 members. To support membership enrollment, NWCAC offers reimbursement for AACN national membership dues for chapter members who recruit four new members. The NWCAC Award and Scholarship Program promotes involvement of chapter members and encourages new membership. The awards include reimbursement for conferences, nursing books/journals, certification and AACN dues. This past year, over \$20,000 was awarded to chapter members. This encourages and supports chapter leaders and members to attend AACN's NTI, including the Chapter Leadership Development Workshop. Our Board Learning Partner (BLP) Program was developed to mentor and support members in their new chapter board positions. This program has been crucial to maintaining a robust chapter with Courage to Soar.

NWCAC has sponsored the annual Midwest Conference for over 50 years, featuring national and local speakers.

Topics are selected based on members' learning needs assessments, new technology and healthcare issues. NWCAC collaborates with nursing and industry leaders to review and introduce best practices and new technologies. This year's conference features national AACN President Jennifer Adamski presenting the keynote, "Courage to Soar." There are four tracks (17 presentations) available for registrants. At the 2024 Midwest Conference, nearly 400 attended from as far as California. Evaluations had high satisfaction scores, noted that the knowledge gained positively influenced their practice, and their attendance influenced their participation in future conferences.

The chapter provides quarterly education programs that are free for chapter members with a nominal fee for nonmembers. Programs are offered both in person and virtually. Additionally, we have coordinated educational dinner meetings.

For over 50 years, NWCAC has been enriched by monthly collaborations in the community, including industries, colleges and local chapters, to aid diverse populations. Examples include participating in back-to-school events, providing first-aid kits and BP screening for 200-250 inner-city families in August. In September, we collected glasses and hearing aids that were distributed through the Lions Club for those in need. In October, we packed meals at Feed My Starving Children (packing 32,000 meals feeding 86 children/year). One member's granddaughter, impressed with the event, organized a "Feed My Starving Children" annual event for her high-school class. In November, NWCAC helped make 500 blankets for homeless people at Blankets-of-Dreams. In December, we donated ornaments tagged with Courage to Soar to hospitalized patients with cancer. In January, we made meals for homeless people. In February, valentine greetings were sent to patients in long-term care facilities. In March, the 2024 Midwest Conference's

silent auction benefited the American Cancer Society with a \$640 donation, and it will benefit the Wounded Warrior Project in 2025.

In March, we'll also collaborate with the Greater Chicago Area Chapter in the 2025 Chicago Marathon and Shamrock Shuffle, benefiting Chicago Park District, Ronald McDonald House and Advocate Charitable Foundation. In April, we'll donate items to WINGS (Women in Need Growing Stronger). In June, we are planning a blood drive. Collaboration at a local college included a simulation-lab patient portrayal. NWCAC provides student nurses free admission to quarterly meetings and the Midwest Conference, encouraging professional affiliation for future nurses.

Supporting critical knowledge and clinical advancement, NWCAC strongly advocates for certification and sponsors certification review courses, thus supporting nurses' Courage to Soar. Certified nurses are recognized at every event. The result is approximately 70% of chapter members have achieved certification, and about 20% are planning for certification in the coming year.

The Northwest Chicago Area Chapter proudly continues to promote AACN's mission and vision for excellence by setting Courage to Soar as our compass. NWCAC improves the nursing profession through educational programs, the Midwest Conference and community service. By assisting nurses to meet the dynamic demands of the healthcare environment and providing the best care possible for patients and the community, we embody the Courage to Soar theme, achieving optimum outcomes to make the impossible become possible!



President's Award for Chapters



Palm Beach County Chapter

Florida

“You cannot swim for new horizons until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.” – William Faulkner

Palm Beach County AACN (AACN-PBC) wholeheartedly embraced AACN's theme, Courage to Soar, with then-President-elect Jennifer Adamski's announcement at NTI. Sitting in the audience, the board and officers texted the artwork and theme to chapter members not in attendance. During three planning meetings, leaders challenged themselves by taking the Healthy Work Environment (HWE) assessment to evaluate the chapter's health.

With Courage to Soar, the leadership committed to activities that promote and drive change. Over the past year, the chapter had conducted a survey on nurses' perceptions of their work environments; a repeat of the same survey in 2001. The survey revealed that turnovers and job dissatisfaction stemming from lack of empowerment and growth, the lack of a sense of belonging and not feeling valued were the top three reasons for a poor workplace. Compared to 2001 results, not much had changed over the past 23 years. Reviewing these results, AACN-PBC leaders focused on the Courage to Soar for impactful change by bringing awareness of

the issues evidenced in the literature and also apparent in the survey.

During a two-day leadership summit in August, AACN-PBC presented 1) Feeling of Empowerment/Accomplishment, 2) Corporate Culture 3) Job Satisfaction/Retention and 4) Sense of Belonging. With sponsorship from all 14 local hospitals, 300 attendees experienced a huge audiovisual fanfare opening as President Adamski joined us virtually and set the tone with the AACN theme, Courage to Soar. The six HWE standards were our foundation and were incorporated into the conversation as solutions during interactive discussions with attendees. This year, seating was arranged by mixing attendees with others who do not work together. The networking and interactive exchange of ideas were very productive and a huge hit. A toolkit with all references and resources, including the HWE assessment, was provided via QR code to attendees to implement in their home units. Hospital leaders joined us and the keynote on day two of the summit was a regional CNO who addressed time management and delivery of care. A trifold display titled “What would you do if you couldn't fail?” was on display and attendees'

responses were shared from the podium. This activity continues at our monthly meetings.

The national theme adorns all the advertising for chapter events, PowerPoints and Facebook, and it serves as a platform for the content of our meetings. In an effort to foster grassroots action and collaborate with hospital leadership, meetings were moved from restaurants to hospital conference rooms for January through April. The January meeting, “Courage to Soar for Impactful Change in 2025,” presented change theory, which included buy-in practices, team member traits and HWE practices that could be adopted easily. Again, an interactive style had attendees quickly participating and exchanging ideas. In addition, a hands-on clinical component is presented at the end of each meeting, offering opportunities for teams and individuals to engage.

Leadership development is a pivotal goal of the AACN-PBC mission, believing that everyone is a leader regardless of position or title. Over the past two years, chapter leadership has focused on chapter succession and professional development of its members, provided through individual mentorship as well as at in-person and virtual events. Chapter team leadership is integral to personal and professional growth. The AACN-PBC team leads have set very lofty goals and manage their own events and budgets. They are great leaders who are producing impactful activities. Teams include 1) Membership, 2) Outreach, 3) Professional Practice, 4) Education, 5) Social, 6) Ambassador, 7) Social Media and 8) Legacy.

Events include Paint and Sip night, a holiday gala with 82 attendees, a certification recognition dinner free for certified members, a school supply drive, a hurricane relief fund raising \$1,000, a food pantry drive feeding 80 families, Toys for Tots donations including two bicycles, three EBNP workshops, PCCN/CCRN reviews, nursing school presentations, a leadership series, new grad summer sessions and monthly journal clubs. AACN-PBC welcomes attendees from across the nation with over 275 registered between the three workshops. The Ambassador group has 60 members of diverse generations representing 14 hospitals and provides an excellent springboard to leadership roles. This year’s PCCN/CCRN reviews will be a collaborative first with the Greater Miami Chapter. Also, the social and outreach team jointly hosted the holiday gala. The education, social and professional practice teams planned and will host the certification dinner this March. Team leads who collaborate produce greater events and the best use of chapter funds. AACN-PBC also offers scholarships for evidence-based practice projects, certification reviews and NTI registration. Formation of a nurse honor guard is the newest endeavor for AACN-PBC.

AACN-PBC has endured many challenges over its 52 years and continues to improve patient care and foster resilience with the Courage to Soar by losing sight of the shore, heading to the next horizon.



President's Award for Chapters



Sacramento Area Chapter California

This year's AACN theme, Courage to Soar, has inspired the Sacramento Area Chapter (SAC AACN) to take steps further than we have before. Several of our board members were at the 2024 NTI in Denver and heard Jennifer Adamski, then AACN president-elect, share her vulnerability and her courage. This message fueled us as we planned the upcoming year at our transition meeting. Using this theme, we stepped out of our comfort zone.

Our first courageous event was planning a journal club with the local Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) chapter. We had never hosted a journal club or worked with this SCCM chapter. We picked topics, found speakers and a location, and held our event both locally and virtually for both chapters to take part. We had a moderate attendance but really enjoyed the speakers and learned a lot about collaborating with other groups. We also gained a few new members.

Our chapter's largest risk this year was planning our first-ever Courage to Soar pediatric-focused conference. Realizing there is extraordinarily little pediatric education in the Sacramento area, we have wanted to host a conference for several years. Last year, we

gained a pediatric member, and she was able to recruit other pediatric nurses to help guide us. Using national and local speakers we put together a great event. We recruited vendors to help cover costs and establish relationships. We have been inspired by this conference to continue having pediatric conferences and engage our community.

Using the theme of Courage to Soar, we have a full calendar of multifocused events for our members. SAC AACN strives to not only offer educational events but also events that provide opportunities for the whole nurse. We continue to reach out to our community with our hands-only CPR education at farmer's markets. We offer networking and social opportunities such as our recent nurse networking event in January. Several new graduate nurses came to our event, and we were able to give them words of advice and courage as they start their job search and their new careers as nurses. We are also planning our annual Courage to Soar certification celebration to celebrate the certified nurses in our community.

This year, Grand Canyon University reached out to the chapter about forming a partnership to support the

chapter with educational opportunities. Four of our members are trekking to Arizona to see the campus and the school. This would be a brave new opportunity to open additional training for our members. New partnerships can bring uncertainty, but using our courage to inspire us forward we will see where the journey takes us.

In April, we will host our annual “Courage to Soar” Spring Symposium. We are fortunate to have Jennifer Adamski attend and share her inspiring message. One of the most striking statements in her speech was about showing up every day. “It takes so much courage to keep showing up. Every hour. Every day. A day, even an hour without each of us changes the face of healthcare for the worse,” she said. We often feel like showing courage is a big act or grand gesture, when it is actually making the commitment to go back day after day and keep going.

Our chapter has shown that courage by continuing to meet year after year. Several of our board members have been in the chapter for over 20 years, and this year we will celebrate our 51st year as a chapter. Through the years and even the pandemic we have shown up day after day, committed to our community and nurses.

We are most proud of the new members who have joined the board this year. It takes courage to start something new with people you do not know. With new voices come fresh ideas and skills that continue to support our board as we continue to support the nursing community in the Sacramento area.

Thank you to the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses and Jennifer Adamski for continuing to show up for us, advocating, sharing evidence-based practices and motivating us to have the Courage to Soar.





For details, please visit

[https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/
excellence-awards/circle-of-excellence-chapter-award](https://www.aacn.org/nursing-excellence/excellence-awards/circle-of-excellence-chapter-award)

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