

BULLETIN

A passion for education

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Medical Radiation Technologist Charmaine Nathan guides students through their practicum year

AS MEDICAL RADIOLOGY clinical educator at St. Pauls Hospital, Charmaine Nathan has a job that fulfills both her passions.

Throughout her 14-year career as a sonographer and medical radiation technologist, Nathan has moved back and forth from clinical work to teaching. She has always valued working with clients and a team in a medical facility, but no matter how fulfilling those positions have been, the calling to work with students has never gone away.

Her current position gives her the best of both worlds. Nathan oversees BCIT students doing their practicum year at St. Pauls. As well, she is responsible for keeping St. Pauls X-ray technologists up-to-date with their ongoing education requirements.

-Im still out there working in the tech field, and I work with students," says Nathan, enthusiastically.

She loves the challenge of preparing students to become confident and competent health care professionals.

-Its a very comprehensive program," says Nathan. -In the practicum year, BCIT does the didactic component, and I work in the clinical setting with them." At the end of their practicum, students need to be ready to step right into work in a variety of clinical settings.

-Sometimes people dont understand the magnitude of the job. It can vary from a plain hand x-ray to a multiple-vehicle car accident where there is trauma ... that is not the time to be learning. So we go through scenarios with roleplaying so that when there is trauma, they feel ready to deal with it," she says.

Currently she has six students at her site. She works alongside them, along with other technologists, as St. Pauls is a teaching hospital.

Teaching is more than passing on a skill set, says Nathan. Equally important is helping the students develop a calm and confident attitude. This is part of the art of teaching, something Nathan passes on through the way she treats her students. -Im very supportive and dont make students feel uncomfortable," she says. -This is important. If you are working with someone who makes you uncomfortable, you will make mistakes.

-Im really passionate about the students and about wanting them to learn and be engaged and treat people how youd want to be treated. If I can parlay that then I can feel good about my job when I leave for the day."

NATHAN SPENDS 60 PER CENT of her time with the BCIT students; the rest is spent as the clinical educator in the department. This includes orientation of new staff as well as the preparation and presentation

of monthly educational sessions to her colleagues.

-For instance, I put together a PowerPoint presentation on the N1H1 virus, gently reminding people to wash their hands, looking at what can be done for pandemic preparedness. Also Ive done sessions on occupational health and safety, and I educate them about changes in technology and train people in how to use new equipment."

Although more than half her hours are spent working with BCIT students, Nathan`s position is entirely funded by Providence Health Care.

-It is in the best interests of a hospital to provide an educational base for students. More than likely these students will become employees. If you open your door they are more likely to step in. For instance, in my own case I came here for my final year, and I`ve worked here for 15 years. If Providence had not provided a clinical instructor I might not have come to work here," Nathan says.

These considerations are especially important these days. -The shortages in the medical radiation field are severe," says Nathan.

-Not a lot of young people know about this job or what the route is to get into it," she says. The public often doesnt understand how technically sophisticated and interesting the field has become.

-In the past ten years Ive seen so much change; its just exploded, and for the better. Were giving timely health care results back to patients. The diagnostic end with technology is so much more advanced. We dont use x-ray film anymore; its all digital and computerized radiography. So anyone anywhere who has the capability to log on can view any diagnostic imaging done on a patient," Nathan says.

The government recognizes that there are shortages and are providing more seats to train medical radiation technologists, she says. In addition to BCIT, two schools will be offering medical radiography programs: one on Vancouver Island and one in Prince George.

Nathan is an articulate spokesperson for the rewards of her job.

-I like the diversity of the different interactions with patients; I like the fact that I can do so many different things. Im never bored. You always have to be thinking; you have to be precise. We like to produce good images. We take pride in our work, as x-ray technologists. Even with the simplest hand x-ray, I say, oh look at this, oh this is beautiful."

At the HSA convention, Nathan took a small but significant step to make her profession more visible. The experience piqued her interest in union involvement.

-It was the first union thing I went to. They had these pins for everyone saying -Im a•." and then their profession, OT, Lab Tech, that kind of thing. They had run out of pins saying -Im a Medical Radiation Technologist." So I phoned up to suggest they make some."

The person she spoke to obviously appreciated Nathans ability to advocate for her profession and talked to her about union activism.

Nathan laughs as she continues: -I was like, I just want some pins; they were like, youll get a lot more than pins!"

After the phone call and conference, Nathan is enthusiastic about HSA. -Im going to become way more involved," she says.

-It was interesting hearing what other people are dealing with in BC, not just in x-ray but in the whole healthcare industry. It makes me more aware. Its great to be informed. You have to have a voice and have a say," she says. It may well be that union activism becomes her third passion. 

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