

Nurse of the year perseveres in face of adversity

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SHEBOYGAN - Several people told Kelsey Frericks and her mom, Kristin Murphy, she would never be a nurse.

After having to be resuscitated and stabilized following her mom's emergency cesarean section in November 1992, Frericks was rushed to a neonatal intensive care unit in Milwaukee, where she spent more than three weeks.

Murphy was told twice that her daughter would likely not survive.

However, after receiving treatment on her respiratory system in Milwaukee, and then care from the Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center for a week, Frericks was sent home, healthy.

A lasting side effect for her was a loss of hearing. But that hasn't deterred her.

Frericks was recently named the 2021 Nurse of the Year for the Hospital Sisters Health System hospitals in Eastern Wisconsin. Ten nurses were nominated across the four hospitals: HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital in Sheboygan, HSHS St. Vincent Hospital and HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center in Green Bay, and HSHS St. Clare Memorial Hospital in Oconto Falls.

She is an emergency department nurse and the Critical Care Trauma Program coordinator at HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital, where she's worked since 2018.

Frericks is an "astute emergency" nurse, said Cassandra Loose, emergency department manager at HSHS St. Vincent Hospital, who worked with Frericks for five years at HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital, first as a bedside colleague and then as her emergency department manager.

She said Frericks is an advocate for her patients, making sure to give the right care as quickly as possible, and she also motivates those around her to lead healthy lifestyles.

"Everybody that she comes into contact with, whether that be her patients or colleagues — and not just nursing colleagues but X-ray and house supervision and our inpatient staff and our registration staff — she really, truly cares about everyone and makes sure that everyone feels heard and knows their value," Loose said.

Murphy said Frericks' dad, Dan, and she were thrilled when they found out Frericks won the award.

"I'm over the moon," Murphy said. "She's had a lot go wrong in her life. We've never let her define herself by her disability, even though people wanted to. ... It's a full circle from being told she might not be here twice when she was in the NICU to now being a mom, an RN and ER nurse, nursing supervisor. She's my inspiration, all of my girls are."

Nurse of the year Kelsey Frericks perseveres in the face of adversity

Frericks said she thinks her birth sto-



Kelsey Frericks is the 2021 HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital Nurse of the Year.

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ry impacted her decision to become a nurse.

"My birth story has always really intrigued me," Frericks said. "I always wanted to learn more about everything — all the equipment I was on. I wanted to learn everything that I went through. I wanted to know just all the things that all the people that were involved that helped keep me alive during that time."

Growing up, Frericks said she dressed up as a nurse and doctor for a few Halloweens, wearing a fake stethoscope and carrying a nurse kit as part of her costumes. Despite thinking she wanted to be a nurse when she was little, she was concerned her hearing loss would be an obstacle.

"Having a stethoscope really concerned me because I have the hearing aids in and, (I thought), 'Would I be able to hear like the lung sounds, the heart sounds with that in?'" Frericks said. "But there's a lot of technology out these days that just really helped me be able to hear."

Although it made Frericks upset when some people said she wouldn't be able to be a nurse because of her hearing loss, she persevered.

"My parents were always very encouraging, supportive and (told me) if I work hard, I'll achieve what I want to," Frericks said. "I try not to let anyone stop me from achieving what I want to."

Murphy joked that Frericks is "pretty hardheaded and stubborn," which she said she gets from her.

Frericks recently completed her bachelor's degree in nursing at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay and graduated from Lakeshore Technical College with an associate degree in nursing in 2017, before coming to HSHS St. Nicholas Hospital.

When faced with her first emergency situation, she said she was very calm.

"That's key, definitely in those situations," Frericks said. "You gotta push forward and remember everything

you've learned. And just remember that the patient's No. 1 and you get them better."

Murphy said Frericks is like her dad in that way.

"Her dad is very calm," Murphy said. "I'm very high strung and organized and she's a lot like her dad — very Zen, even with her toddler now."

Frericks said she gives credit to her dad for her decision to pursue emergency care. When she was growing up, they'd watch ER drama reality shows, and he is a first responder in the town of Wilson.

"I was always intrigued by his 911 calls and the adrenaline that comes behind it," Frericks said. "Not knowing what you're gonna walk into or what's gonna walk in the door. I just love that it's always something different. And it gets to really challenge me."

She has been on the COVID-19 front line throughout the pandemic

For nurses and health care workers across Wisconsin, the nation and world, the COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented and extremely challenging time.

Frericks said it was very scary.

"Being in the ER, you're on the front line of taking care for these COVID patients," Frericks said. "Learning about the actual virus, learning about how it can affect you and how it can affect everyone else around you — it was terrifying. I mean you don't know. You're terrified that you're gonna get it."

Frericks' team and COVID-19 health protocols were critical to getting through it.

"We were blessed to have all of the isolation precautions you could possibly need during that, and I think it was really important that I work with a great team, and we all just had each other's backs," Frericks said. "We helped each

other on the really difficult days."

Loose said unlike some health care workers who may have lost their passion for their work during the COVID-19 pandemic, Frericks' passion for nursing continued.

"That light and passion for nursing never went out," Loose said. "Kelsey really stayed committed to not only just nursing but our hospital values and our patients and really making sure that every patient that walks through the door knew that she was there for them."

Because Frericks said she relies a lot on reading people's lips, it has been challenging to communicate with face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, her team helps bridge communication in the hospital.

"They will enunciate what the patient says, or they'll ask them later," Frericks said. "Or, say we go into a patient room together ... if I miss something, they're always willing to be like, 'Hey, remember that they said this?' or 'Actually, no they meant this.' And all the doctors know to come up to me and talk and not scream over from where they sit. And also, the nurses I work with, they'll come right next to me, they'll pull their mask down just so I can read their lips."

The Sheboygan nurse wants to keep spreading kindness

For Frericks, one of the greatest rewards of her job is hearing she's made an impact on someone's life.

"I'll hear about it later that they survived, or they're now living a better life from life-saving techniques that we did on them," Frericks said. "I just love hearing that they're doing better."

In her work, Frericks said she thinks of the mantra "always be kind."

"You don't know what they (patients) have been through," Frericks said. "You don't know what they're going to be going through. And I think it's important in today's world to really show more kindness."

She said she gets that from her mom.

"I've always tried to teach my girls, 'You're no better or no worse than anybody,'" Murphy said. "Be kind. You never know what that person is going through. The outer shell may look all pristine and happy, but you don't know. I will admit that when people would come up to me and say, 'You know she probably won't be a nurse?' — Did it hurt my feelings? Damn right. But my personality would be such that, 'She'll show you.'"

For people who may relate to Frericks — being told they can't achieve a goal — Murphy said she hopes people won't listen to naysayers.

"You have a goal? Go for it," Murphy said. "They don't know what you're going through. Just do it, don't limit yourself."

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