



TOMMIE MORELOS

## NANCY PLAZA, BSN, RN

University Medical Center of El Paso

Nurse Residency Program, El Paso, Texas

Graduate: 2016

**FROM BLUE TO RED:** Nancy Plaza, BSN, RN, submitted her admissions application for the second time; she was not giving up. The nursing school wanted to see more community service hours on her resume.

The now-retired police officer of 15 years was ready for the career change she'd been dreaming of—attending nursing school at TTUHSC El Paso.

"I used to say that after I got out of the police training academy, I could do anything," Plaza said. "And when I was accepted to the Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing (GGHSON) I told (student affairs manager) Gretchen Ruiz, 'They're going to have to carry me out of here kicking and screaming! There's no way I won't graduate.'"

**LEARNING FROM LEARNERS:** As the determined mother of two adult sons was getting ready to begin her nursing education, she quickly realized that her classmates would teach her just as much as the faculty.

"The women in my class became my role models," Plaza said. "As a police officer, I was always paired with a male officer—someone I became as close to as a brother. But being in a group with women is different, especially for those younger. To see them with their struggles—some with three, four or five kids—inspired me. They're my heroes."

When the going got tough, Plaza got tougher and her goals got shorter. Plaza used to tell her female classmates to just "get through today." She knew tomorrow would bring its own challenges.

For Plaza, and most of her colleagues, challenges came and went so quickly that she didn't realize when it was time to graduate. As recent as a week before the December commencement, Plaza was taking exit exams.

"I put my head in my hands as tears rolled down my face. I thanked the Lord," Plaza said. "Nursing school is tougher than the police academy; it took so much. All I wanted to do was scream, 'I'm graduating!'"

**THE PAYOFF:** Now, Plaza realizes her efforts were not in vain. She's enjoying every moment of her first nursing job. The stress of school has been replaced with a love of caring for others.

BY SERGIO RAMIREZ



## SARAH SEPULVEDA, MD

Chief Resident

TTUHSC El Paso, El Paso, Texas

Graduate: 2015

**SURVIVE AND THRIVE:** Sarah Sepulveda, MD, knows how to juggle 80-hour workweeks and 24-hour weekend calls. As a resident in the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine Department of Family and Community Medicine, at times she earns a mere four days off a month.

But even with that hectic schedule, her resume is sprinkled with volunteer projects, professional memberships and research experiences that she has somehow managed to squeeze in. Perhaps that's why Sepulveda was elected as chief resident of her department.

"Residency has been the toughest job of my life," Sepulveda said. "So the fact that I have been successful—and am actually doing well as a resident—is a huge accomplishment for me."

**JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES:** Sepulveda has seen a little bit of everything. During her first year of residency, she rotated through a number of specialties, including surgery, psychiatry, ophthalmology, and obstetrics and gynecology.

"We're typically the first physician a patient sees," she said. "I need to be able to recognize a number of problems so that I can adequately care for my patients."

Family medicine physicians have another advantage that Sepulveda loves; they get to build relationships with their patients. Primary care physicians can see their patients two or three times a year and oftentimes even get to treat their patients' entire families.

**HERE TO STAY:** Born in El Paso and raised in Fabens, Texas, a small town in El Paso County, Sepulveda has no plans to leave. Surrounded by her family, an excellent medical education system, and extraordinary peers and mentors, the doctor said she doesn't need much else.

"I grew up in El Paso; I know the culture; I know the language," Sepulveda said. "It makes sense for me to stay here and serve the population that I know and love best."

Charmaine Martin, MD, a TTUHSC El Paso family medicine physician, is one of Sepulveda's role models. Known for her caring personality and outstanding reputation among her patients, Martin helped guide Sepulveda as a fledgling medical student.

Now, Sepulveda wants to give back to the community just like she watched Martin do.

She said, "I know that this is somewhere I can make a difference."

BY NADIA M. WHITEHEAD



## JOHN DODGE, MPH

Systems Analyst

Baylor Scott & White, Dallas, Texas

Member of first Master of Public Health program, TTUHSC at Abilene

Graduate: 2016

JOHN WEAST

**EFFORTS REWARDED:** John Dodge, MPH, received the 2016 Texas Rural Health Student Award, which recognizes a student who, through studies and activities, made a significant effort to improve rural health care in Texas.

Dodge's award was the result of his efforts to assist the Big Country Area Health Education Center (AHEC) track participants in their Abilene program. AHEC, a program of the F. Marie Hall Institute for Rural and Community Health, supports a pipeline to bring young people into health careers, crucial to ensuring the future health care workforce for rural West Texas.

He created a Microsoft Excel platform to study participant data and produce statistics and graphs for AHEC management to present to the Texas Legislature for future funding. He also created a training video for the tracking tool.

**HIS MATHEMATICAL MIND:** "I have a very analytical math mind," Dodge said. "I see how to use that in public health. Math lets us see the data behind every public health issue. It helps me see where health is going."

Dodge's passion is data analysis of health-related issues, and he is especially interested in how that data can be used in workplace safety environments.

**ALL IT TOOK WAS A DARE:** As a high school sophomore, Dodge had his light bulb moment. "I was registering for a heavy AP (Advance Placement) class load in history, biology and English (he also took AP calculus). An adviser told me this would be a stretch. I said 'Watch me.'"

Of the four students accepting that challenge, Dodge was one of two who finished; they were co-valedictorians. "We pushed each other and it paid off," he said.

BY JO GRANT LANGSTON

A portrait of Sara Robison, PharmD, a woman with long brown hair, smiling and wearing a white lab coat. The lab coat has a name tag that reads "Sara G. Robison, PharmD" and "Director of Pharmacy". The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting.

## SARA ROBISON, PHARM.D

Director of Pharmacy, Health South Rehabilitation Hospital of Fort Worth, Texas

Preceptor for University of North Texas

TTUHSC Alumni Association National Advisory Board Member

Graduate: 2004

JOHN WEAST

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS:** When Sara Robison, PharmD, was a child, severe asthma made hospital visits and trips to the pharmacy a routine part of life. And just as she grew up associating the hospital with being sick, she associated the pharmacy with getting better. "Our pharmacist would come out from behind the counter to greet us," she recalls. "He truly cared about his patients, and I loved that."

**CLOSE ENCOUNTERS:** Those early encounters are what led Robison to a career in pharmacy. She enjoys working in a small hospital, and she spends as much time as possible interacting with patients. "I love helping people understand their medications and how to best use medications to improve their health," she adds.

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE:** At HealthSouth, Robison has implemented a transition of care/discharge counseling program, an anticoagulation safety committee and an antibiotic stewardship committee. She also enjoys being a preceptor, and the University of North Texas pharmacy students selected her as their 2015 Preceptor of the Year. Away from work, she serves on a steering committee for Foodie Philanthropy and works with 100 Women Who Care, a pair of nonprofits that raise funds for local charities. She also recently began a three-year term on the TCU Wesley Foundation board and is a member of the Tarrant County Pharmacy Association and the Texas Pharmacy Association. Robison also makes time for her husband, Matt, and their three dachshunds, Viagra, Levitra and Juno. Her hobbies include hot-air ballooning; she is captain of a team and is working to obtain her pilot's license.

**TEAMWORK AND CHOICES:** Robison works closely with an interprofessional team of nurses, physicians, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, dieticians and case managers. "As a team, we help our patients to grow stronger, regain independence and decrease caregiver burden." She says the well-rounded School of Pharmacy curriculum helped her pare down career options. She thought she would be a retail pharmacist; geriatrics and pharmacy management were never her plan. "Within four years of graduating I was doing both," she said. "I was so grateful for those pesky management classes and my geriatrics rotation."

BY MARK HENDRICKS





KEN KOSUB/LIMELIGHTFILMS.TV

## WADIE WILLIAMS JR., RRT, RCP, MEMS(S)

Manager, Respiratory Care Department and Dermatology Therapeutics Services

Houston Methodist Hospital, Texas Medical Center, Houston, Texas

Lieutenant Colonel, Texas State Guard Medical Brigade

Graduate: 2010, 2007

**EXPERIENCE THAT COUNTS:** A 1970 graduate of Ball High School in Galveston, Texas, Wadie Williams Jr., RRT, RCP, MEMS(S), attended Galveston Community College where he earned an Associate of Applied Science in Respiratory Therapy in 1972. After serving as a respiratory therapist for nearly two decades, he opted to augment his skills and experience by enrolling in the distance-based Clinical Service Management (CSM) program through TTUHSC and then continued his education in the Clinical Practice Management (CPM) program.

**TRAINED TO SERVE:** Williams opted to apply his skill set while transitioning his career trajectory slightly toward the management side of health care. Although he has remained active as a practicing therapist, his additional education has enabled him to move into management and leadership midcareer. He says his training through TTUHSC was instrumental in preparing him for the opportunities and challenges in his current position. "Though I had many years of experience, the CSM and CPM programs filled in the gaps in some of my experience and learning," he said. "I developed a greater understanding of the 'whys' and 'hows' that come into play when working in a highly progressive and innovative health care environment."

**NOW AND THE FUTURE:** Williams has been with Houston Methodist Hospital, Texas Medical Center in Houston, Texas, since 2006. There he serves as manager of the Respiratory Care Department, overseeing all operational activities, staffing, budgeting, financial reporting, operational metrics, emergency preparedness, patient satisfaction and other duties in the large and growing health care center. That same year also marked the start of his service to the Texas State Guard. His work in the Medical Brigade as a medical service officer has led to a recent promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

**RAIDER INSPIRATION:** "That high school graduation year isn't a typo, but perhaps it may inspire someone else to pursue their dreams at (TTUHSC)," he said. Williams is quick to credit TTUHSC for helping him pursue his. "My professors had real-world experiences that made sense of the learning rather than simple didactic, static opinions that allowed us as students to bring our real-world issues to class and work through them. The result for me was a solid working knowledge of the processes and application of solutions to those problems."

BY TOBY BROOKS

## JESSICA SPIEGELBERG, FNP-C

Nurse Practitioner, Outpatient Adult Psychiatry

TTUHSC School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry and Covenant Health, Lubbock, Texas

Graduate: 2012

NEAL HINKLE

**OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS:** When Jessica Spiegelberg, FNP-C, completed the coursework for a minor in addiction and substance abuse at Texas Tech University while working on her prerequisites for nursing school, she didn't know what opportunities were ahead.

Yet, as a student at Covenant School of Nursing, Spiegelberg said she felt right at home among the staff when she did her rotation through the hospital's psychiatric unit. There should have been bells and whistles telling her this was a sign of things to come; instead, Spiegelberg saw it as the perfect part-time job. "I was looking for a supportive environment while I was going through school."

After becoming a registered nurse, Spiegelberg took a full-time position in the unit and worked for four years, promoting to charge nurse, until she graduated with her master's degree. But even then, Spiegelberg said she still had not really considered psychiatric care as a long-term career field.

**ADVOCATE FOR HER PATIENTS AND PEERS:** Fast forward five years, and Spiegelberg says she can't imagine doing anything else.

"I've always been drawn to populations that are underserved. These are fields that need a bigger voice and one where I feel I can make a greater impact."

As a clinician and educator, Spiegelberg said she is bridging the gap for those battling mental health issues and those who are caring for them. Access is a huge obstacle for patients, and many are not getting the help they need because there is not enough funds nor providers adequately trained to meet the need.

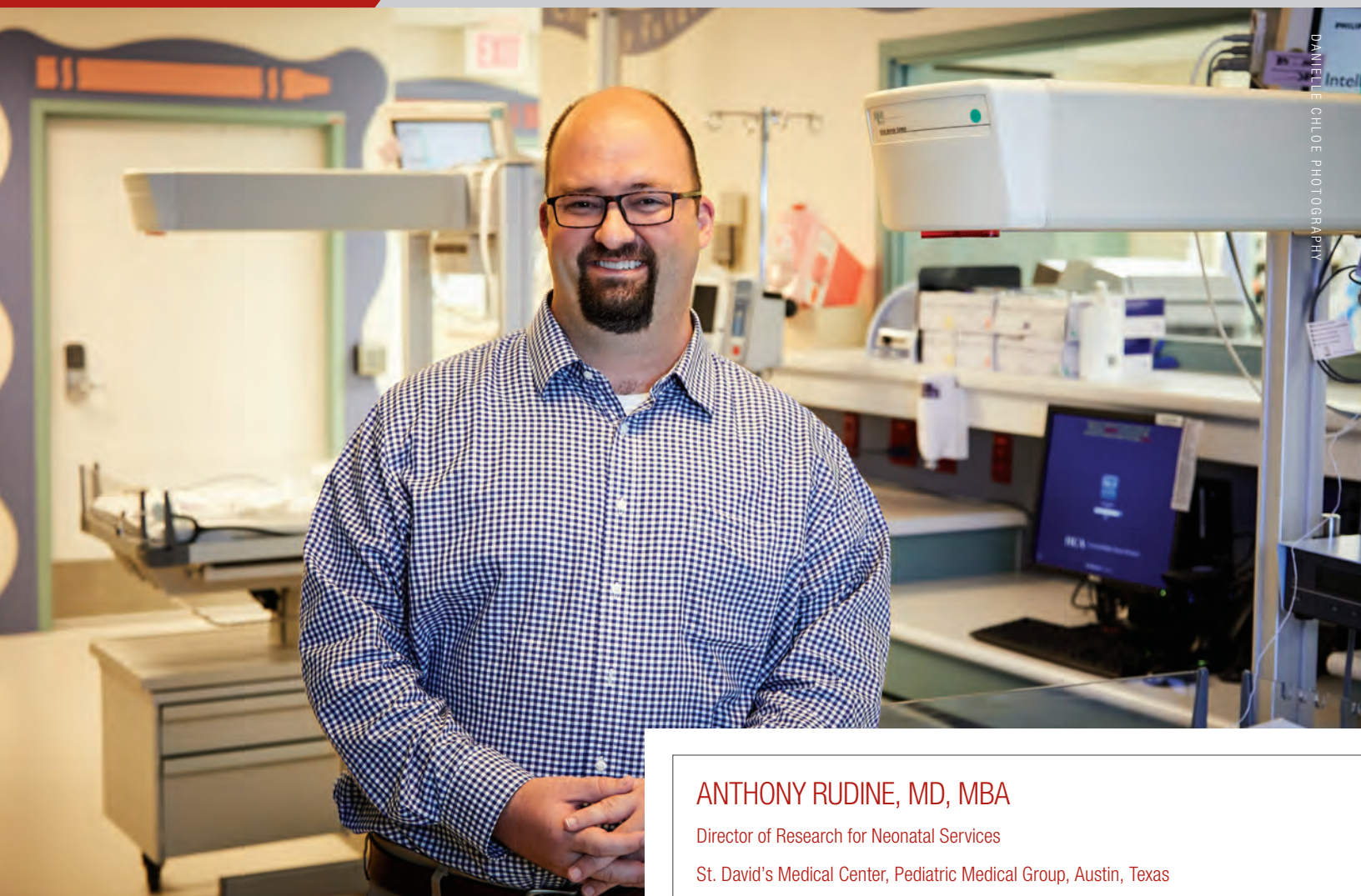
She also believes the path to change for both patients and providers is through advocacy. She is currently pursuing a Doctor in Nursing Practice through TTUHSC, which she believes will open additional doors and lead to new opportunities for her professionally and as an advocate.

**'IF NOT ME, WHO?':** "I never really saw myself as being the type of person to lobby, but the more I'm in this field I see there just never could be enough people to advocate for needs."

"I have enough experience at this level to know where we are lacking with mental health both locally and statewide, and even on the national level. I have the experience so I thought, 'If not me, who?'"

BY DANETTE BAKER



**ANTHONY RUDINE, MD, MBA**

Director of Research for Neonatal Services

St. David's Medical Center, Pediatric Medical Group, Austin, Texas

Graduate: 2008

**HOLY GRAIL OF THE HUMAN BODY:** There's not an organ in the body more beautiful, more prone to injury and more adept at repairing itself than an infant's brain. And to Anthony Rudine, MD, MBA, there also is no other organ so incompletely explored.

"Right now, we are not able to prevent a lot of brain injury at birth, but we can recognize and deal with what happens after," he said.

**BACK IN THE LONE STAR STATE:** Rudine moved to Austin about four months ago, bringing with him a background in neonatology research and a network of experts from his fellowship and faculty appointment in neonatology-perinatal medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. While there, he pursued research interests centered on the developing fetal brain and how maternal exposures affect neurodevelopment.

At St. David's, Rudine's goal is to develop interventions and expand treatment options for babies with birth injuries and strokes similar and complementary to the work being done in Pittsburgh. The second part of Rudine's work is to standardize the protocol used for treating brain injuries or infant stroke and educate those in the medical community about importance of neonatal brain protection.

**OFFERING HOPE:** In the meantime, Rudine is helping create a medical home to meet the specialized needs of children with these compromised health issues. His office is at Austin's First Steps, where health care services and resources help fill the gaps in caring for babies with disabilities and providing parents and caregivers a community that understands the challenges—and one in which they can participate in the search for answers.

"In whatever small way we can, we want to lessen the burden now and help these babies become the fullest individuals they can be and ultimately move the needle in prevention and care."

BY DANETTE BAKER