

As the CICU medical director, I know better than most that an experienced CICU nurse can be terrifying. The depth and breadth of their experience sometimes makes cardiology and PICU trainees quake in their boots. These individuals can be tough critics and the interaction you have with them can make or break your CICU experience. They are often front and center setting the tone and creating the culture of the unit. Sometimes this creates conflict and drama. But a good one makes the unit hum. Tanya Kopke is the very definition of an experienced CICU nurse. She has been a bedside nurse for over 30 years and she is a true expert. While her nursing colleagues could speak to her vast experience with CRRT and VADs, her leadership roles on various committees, and her role as a nurse educator, I am nominating Tanya because of her influence on CICU culture and her role in developing literally hundreds of young doctors.

When you are in the unit and Tanya has your patient, you know that there will be no drama no matter how sick the patient or how hairy the situation. Tanya brings a calm confidence to every interaction, but she is also never arrogant. She approaches every situation with a questioning attitude and has the unique ability to do so without triggering the insecurities or sensitivities of the junior doctors who are supposed to be “supervising”. She teaches just by being herself and you can’t help but learn by diffusion. She is usually 5 steps ahead in what she is troubleshooting but she is not flashy or self-promoting. She just does the job, seemingly effortlessly, day after day, modeling the way we all should behave – a breath of fresh air in the midst of everyone’s COVID angsty-ness. She is a fierce patient advocate, a loyal teammate, and a lovely human. She is never too busy to answer a trainees question or help them think through a problem. She flies under the radar and so I worry that we often underappreciate her incredible contributions. But I will say that when the email went out about this nomination, the spontaneous support for Tanya was overwhelming from nurses, trainees, and doctors alike. I don’t know that they still produce nurses like this. I’m just glad I’ve gotten to learn from her.

Tanya has been an integral part in leading the PICU/CCU nursing staff through all the up's and down's of the last three decades. I have worked with Tanya for the last 10 years and she has always been my "go to". She is such an amazing resource and seems to know it all! Have a question about the CRRT circuit? Need her to assess a pressure injury and tell you how to stage it and dress it? Not sure what the alarm is going off on your VAD patient? Want to know where to chart something in EPIC? Curious about how she would handle a challenging family? Talk to Tanya! She has a way of being welcoming to new nurses, firm with providers when needed and above all, a wonderful advocate for the patients and families that she takes care of. She does it all in an unassuming way – she works her tail off day in and day out – and you would never know that she has just taken care of the sickest patient on the unit for the last 3 weeks straight.

When I think of nurses throughout my 18 year career who I want to emulate, Tanya is at the top of my list. She has the experience, the knowledge and the kindness that makes her a rarity in the nursing profession.

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my great pleasure to nominate Tanya Kopke for this prestigious bedside nursing award. Tanya has served as a bedside nurse in the Cardiac Care Unit (CCU) at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago for over three decades. Tanya is the kind of nurse that every nurse strives to be like, the one they all compare themselves to, and only hope they can emulate her. It's the indescribable that sets Tanya apart from other nurses. -The way she cares for her families in a clinically exceptional way balanced with great trust and a sense that she is alongside the patient and the family for the entirety of their journey.

When Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago decided that they would move across town to a new building, Tanya was one of the first nurses we recruited. Known for her passion for the cardiac patient population and clinical excellence, she was a trailblazer. After Tanya committed to come to the CCU (which did not exist in the former hospital) many other nurses decided that they would join her, helping us create a superior nursing team. It was her unspoken leadership and their admiration of her that gave people the confidence to commit to work in our new CCU.

Tanya also serves as a CRRT Specialist, Expert Clinical Nurse, preceptor, developer of hospital-wide nurse advancement program, mentor to all nurses going through the clinical ladder process, hospital skin care committee member, and avid professional governance advocate. Above all, Tanya is a problem solver. She is consistent, approachable, and kind. Nurses and multidisciplinary team members go to her, seeking her sage advice. She is quiet, because she is listening with her head and her heart -she is trusted when she speaks up as every word is a gift and great contribution to everyone we serve.

Warm regards,

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