

Nurse Honor Guard Stands Ready to Serve Community

Atrium Health Floyd Team Celebrates and Honors Fellow Nurses

ROME, Ga., October 23, 2025 – In a light-filled solarium on the sixth floor of Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center, nurses Amy Burgess and Jamie McKnight struggled with a cherished relic from their past. Their hands fumbled above nurse Katie Wingate's head in an attempt to secure a stiff, perfectly molded, white nurse's cap. They joked that had a seasoned nurse would have managed it effortlessly.

"I think we may need to plan to start 30 minutes earlier, next time," offered nurse Donna Sentell.

These four nurses are members of the area's very first Nurse Honor Guard. Their ceremonies require the traditional white nurse uniform along with cap, white gloves and a navy-blue cape lined with red satin. The ceremonies involve a triangle percussive instrument, a candle lamp and a white rose.

The local guard is Wingate's brainchild.

"About five years ago, right before COVID-19 hit, I was at my son's baseball game with my mom, scrolling through my phone," Wingate explained. "I was watching videos on Nurse Guards in other states."

Moved by the respect displayed and the ceremonies conducted by these volunteer groups. She nudged her mom, a nurse for nearly 40 years.

"Look at what they're doing to honor these nurses," Wingate instructed, her eyes spilling tears.

That chance video encounter planted a seed. When a nurse friend passed away during the pandemic, Wingate thought it would have been nice to honor her years of service with an honor guard. But it was not until she learned that a Nurse Guard had been formed at an Atrium Health sister hospital in North Carolina that Wingate took action.

Wingate contacted Sheila Bennett, senior vice president and chief of Patient Experience at Floyd, to ask for permission to establish a guard. With permission in hand, Wingate began recruiting volunteers and was pleasantly surprised at the overwhelmingly positive responses. About 25 Floyd nurses are currently involved in the program.

The Guard and its ceremonies are designed to underscore the importance of the individual nurse.

"It's wonderful to honor nurses who have spent their lives serving others," McKnight said.

Wingate, Burgess and Sentell agreed.

"This is a way to give back to the teachers and others who have helped along the way and honor the service that nurses have given to their families and communities," Wingate said. "There's a part in the service called

the Final Call to Duty. It is like calling for attendance. You say the nurse's name, ring the triangle three times, and then they're released from their duty when they don't answer. It's really moving."

"I tear up every time we talk about it," Sentell said.

"It's a wonderful way to honor nurses and their service and to let them relinquish their duties when they're done," Burgess added.

At funerals, Nurse Honor Guards perform the Nightingale Tribute – named for Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, and read the poem, *She Was There*, adjusting the poem for gender:

*When a calming, quiet presence was all that was needed,
She was there.*

*In the excitement and miracle of birth and in the mystery and loss of life,
She was there.*

*When a silent glance could uplift a patient, family member or friend,
She was there.*

*At those times when the unexplainable needed to be explained,
She was there.*

*When the situation demanded a swift foot and sharp mind,
She was there.*

*When a gentle touch, a firm push, or an encouraging word was needed,
She was there.*

*In choosing the best one from a family's "Thank You" box of chocolates,
She was there.*

*To witness humanity — its beauty, in good times and bad, without judgment,
She was there.*

*To embrace the woes of the world, willingly, and offer hope,
She was there.*

*And now, that it is time to be at the Greater One's side,
She is there.*

The Final Call to Duty concludes the ceremony.

Wingate said the Guard also performs ceremonies for nurse retirements and celebrations.

Now officially recognized as the Northwest Georgia Nurse Honor Guard, with Wingate serving as president, these nurses serve Floyd, Chattooga, Walker, Dade, Catoosa and Whitfield counties. Membership is open to nurses from other facilities, and their services are available to honor any nurse in the area.

About Atrium Health Floyd

The [Atrium Health Floyd](#) family of health care services is a leading medical provider and economic force in northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. Atrium Health Floyd is part of Charlotte, North Carolina-based [Advocate Health](#), the third-largest nonprofit health system in the United States, created from the combination of [Atrium Health](#) and Advocate Aurora Health. Atrium Health Floyd strategically combined with Harbin Clinic in 2024 and employs more than 5,200 teammates who provide care in over 40 medical specialties at four facilities: Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center – a 361-bed full-service, acute care hospital and regional referral center in Rome, Georgia; Atrium Health Floyd Polk Medical Center in Cedartown, Georgia; and Atrium Health Floyd Cherokee Medical Center in Centre, Alabama; and Atrium Health Floyd Medical Center Behavioral Health, also in Rome. Together, Atrium Health Floyd and Harbin Clinic provide primary care, specialty care and urgent care throughout northwest Georgia and northeast Alabama. Atrium Health Floyd also operates a stand-alone emergency department in Chattooga County, the first such facility to be built from the ground-up in Georgia.

About Advocate Health

Advocate Health is the third-largest nonprofit, integrated health system in the United States, created from the combination of Advocate Aurora Health and Atrium Health. Providing care under the names Advocate Health Care in Illinois; Atrium Health in the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama; and Aurora Health Care in Wisconsin, Advocate Health is a national leader in clinical innovation, health outcomes, consumer experience and value-based care. Headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, Advocate Health services nearly 6 million patients and is engaged in hundreds of clinical trials and research studies, with Wake Forest University School of Medicine serving as the academic core of the enterprise. Advocate Health is nationally recognized for its expertise in heart and vascular, neurosciences, oncology, pediatrics and rehabilitation, as well as organ transplants, burn treatments and specialized musculoskeletal programs. Advocate Health employs more than 160,000 teammates across 69 hospitals and over 1,000 care locations and offers one of the nation's largest graduate medical education programs with over 2,000 residents and fellows across more than 200 programs. Committed to redefining care for all, Advocate Health provides more than \$6 billion in annual community benefits.

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