Nurse.com prides itself in recognizing the accomplishments of nurses of excellence at its GEM (Giving Excellence Meaning) award programs.

In Florida, a regional winner from each of the six different categories — Advancing and Leading the Profession; Clinical Nursing, Inpatient; Education and Mentorship; Home, Community and Ambulatory Care; Patient and Staff Management; and Volunteerism and Service — was selected. The regional winners move on to compete in the GEM national nurse of the year program.

“Our nursing excellence GEM Awards program shines brightly once again as we salute our 2014 regional winners,” said Eileen Williamson, RN, MSN, senior vice president and chief nurse executive. “Nominated and selected by their colleagues, they truly epitomize nursing at its best. We are honored to present them with our prestigious GEM awards and privileged to recognize them publicly for their many contributions to nursing and healthcare.”

Nurse.com is pleased to introduce you to the 2014 Nurse.com GEM regional award winners.

HOW ARE WINNERS CHOSEN?

1 NOMINATE
Nurses submit nominations of nurses and their professional roles and contributions, including examples that demonstrate the nominees’ excellence in one of six categories.

2 SELECT
Finalist nominations are blinded and sent to a panel of judges comprised of nurse leaders. Each winner is determined by the ratings of those blinded nominations.

3 HONOR
The six regional winners are celebrated at the GEM Awards and will move on to the national phase of the Nurse.com Nursing Excellence Awards Program.

4 NATIONAL NURSE OF THE YEAR
In the latter part of the year, Nurse.com will honor a national Nurse of the Year in each of the six categories. Who will they be? Read about the Nurse of the Year winners at Nurse.com/NursingExcellence.

For more on the GEM Awards program, visit Nurse.com/Nursing-Excellence.
Edward Briggs, APRN, MSN, DNP
FNP, Bay Pines (Florida) VA Healthcare System

“It was a surprise and an honor to hear that I am the recipient of this award,” Briggs said upon learning he was a 2014 Nurse.com regional GEM Award recipient. “The fact that colleagues who I respect and admire would nominate me for this award makes receiving this award truly humbling.”

Briggs is one of the Florida’s top advocates for professional nursing, serving in several capacities with the Florida Nurses Association and the Florida Nurse Foundation. For years, he was the FNA’s Pinellas County district president and also regional director of the West Central Florida Region of FNA. He has served on the board of FNA for almost eight years, including being chairman of the Safe Staffing Task Force and past chairman of the membership committee. He also is a member/board representative to the FNF. Admired for his professional involvement, Briggs has organized many events, including CEU programs, a panel on healthcare reform and annual legislative forums.

He has held office at the state level of the FNA, first becoming the vice president and then president in 2013. Briggs said he is honored to serve as the president to promote professional nursing practice and the autonomous practice of advanced practice nurses.

Briggs is recognized and well-respected by his colleagues for his comprehensive presentations on the Affordable Care Act. He also has been influential in educating legislators about the reasons to grant APRNs prescribing authority of controlled medications and autonomous APRN practice.

Briggs strongly believes improving healthcare in the U.S. will require nurses to become leaders in developing new and innovative healthcare delivery models, including refocusing to a patient-centered model.

Last year, Briggs participated in a mission trip to Belize with Nokumbaya, a group that visits local schools in southern Belize twice a year among its other efforts. Briggs serves as a clinical advisor for the mission.

He was instrumental in organizing the Pinellas County FNA’s 31st annual Legislative Forum, with 130 attendees. Briggs received the Barbara Lumpkin Award in 2012 from the FNA and the 2013 Award for Nurse Advocacy from the American Nurses Association.

Margarita Johnston, RN
Staff nurse, Martin Health System, Stuart, Fla.

As a staff nurse in the ED, Johnston is responsible for delivering urgent and critical care services to adult and pediatric patients. Though Johnston has been at Martin Health for just over a year, she is an ED team leader. Her responsibilities include implementing protocols and facilitating communication between physicians and support service members. She also assists with ensuring appropriate staffing of the ED and daily patient assignments.

Johnston is an engaged and committed nurse, involved in many organizational projects and initiatives in which her enthusiasm and energy are vital to success as she motivates others to participate. Her leadership inspires others to become involved.

Johnston is a co-chairwoman of the health system’s Journey to Excellence team, a group that was designed to foster excellence in patient care and encourage the professional growth of clinicians, including increasing the number of nurses obtaining their BSNs. The team is composed of RNs, clinical coordinators, an educator, a nursing supervisor, a pharmacist and a lab professional. She is pursuing her BSN and is one of three nurses who volunteered to lead the group. She has been instrumental in defining strategies for the group’s mission. Her responsibilities include ongoing staff education, championing the use of evidence-based practices and leading a transformational journey at the grass-roots level. She remains focused on the goal of excellence and interprets this for other staff in a positive, diligent and captivating manner.

Helping the health system improve its data collection system and researching best practices to encourage nurses to return to school is another of her duties. As the cost of furthering their educations often can deter nurses from pursuing advanced degrees or certifications, Johnston is working with another nurse and the hospital’s foundation to seek additional funds from private donors to assist with nursing scholarships.

Her dedication to nursing flows into the community. She was a guest speaker at a local high school in their healthcare nurse assistant program, where she worked with students on medical vocabulary and discussed how healthy choices made at a young age might contribute to an individual’s overall health.
EDUCATION & MENTORSHIP

Meredith Norkus, BSN, CPEN, CNML
Clinical educator, emergency services
Martin Health System, Stuart, Fla.

“I must say that I am humbled, honored and at the same time excited to have even been nominated, [and then] notified that I won such a significant award,” Norkus said when she learned she was a regional winner. “I am deeply appreciative to those here at Martin Health System who supported me ... to recognize the work that I was doing was having such a positive impact.”

Norkus is responsible for unit/department-based clinical orientation and clinically focused development activities at the point of care for four EDs. One of her greatest strengths, according to her nominator, is assessing and coordinating the orientation needs of each new clinical employee or department and developing an orientation plan. She acts as a resource and coach throughout the period of competency achievement, mentoring while providing feedback to orientees, preceptors and directors. She also plans and implements evidence-based point-of-care learning to meet the needs of all levels of ED clinical employees, which motivates colleagues to achieve professional growth.

Norkus’ expertise as an educator is notable in her work with those new to the ED. She ensures they are receiving the appropriate experiences as well as being welcomed to the health system’s culture.

“Working with new associates entering our facility, and especially novice nurses, has always been a passion of mine, and I am truly content and satisfied to watch them grow and develop,” Norkus said. “I strongly believe that it's important to provide them with support and mentorship through at least their first year of nursing, as well as serve as a resource for them throughout their career. Building these mentoring relationships with my team and seeing the novice nurses’ successes empowers me to continue this important work.”

Norkus works closely with the preceptor group, which has matured into a multi-disciplinary clinical group versus one solely for nurses. She leads a preceptor workshop focusing on how to avoid burnout and help orientees become engaged in learning and meet expectations. She helps the members of this group communicate their expertise, resolve issues and identify and locate organizational policies on issues.

HOME, COMMUNITY & AMBULATORY CARE

Shoshana Sherriff, RN, ONC
Employee wellness educator, Baptist Health South Florida, Miami

Possessing the joie de vivre of her French-Canadian heritage, Sherriff is an enthusiastic and invaluable member of the employee health management team at Baptist Health South Florida that serves as the nursing arm of a platinum award-winning employee wellness program. As a member of the EHM multidisciplinary team, Sherriff is responsible for supporting all systemwide wellness initiatives, especially those that focus on health counseling and health education with a special emphasis on at-risk employees.

Sherriff has played a critical role in the team’s ability to create innovative programs targeting employees with chronic illnesses and other risk factors, as well as programs for the general employee population. Seeming never to have met a challenge she didn’t embrace wholeheartedly, she is an invaluable resource in program development and execution. Heeding the Centers for Disease Control and other global health reports’ dire prediction of the anticipated astronomical increase in Type 2 diabetes, Sherriff, along with four other team members, spearheaded a new program in 2012 called Real-time Interactive Care Counseling.

RICC is a program for employees with diabetes and prediabetes that integrates available technology with the AADE7 self-care model endorsed by the American Diabetes Association. Sherriff was instrumental in the initial program development, devising an Intranet tutorial. Working alongside the certified diabetes educator, Sherriff transformed RICC from a hypothesis into a premier operation in its second iteration that draws rave reviews from employees who have gone through the program. RICC and other successful wellness programs in the health system’s Wellness Advantage arena are expected to grow in scope and reach.

Unfailing in her dedication to the nursing profession, unselfish in praise and unrelenting in her commitment for parity in the provision of healthcare and access to quality care and health education, Sherriff serves as a shining example of what it is to be a nurse, according to her nominator.

“To be honest, my initial feeling was one of surprise,” Sherriff said about hearing she was a regional winner. “I was nominated for this award by a co-worker. How humbling to know that my co-workers believe that I deserve this award.”
PATIENT & STAFF MANAGEMENT

Regina All, RN, BSN, CNOR
Director patient care, perioperative services
Tradition Medical Center, Martin Health System, Stuart, Fla.

All was instrumental in the planning and development of perioperative services for the newly opened Tradition Medical Center, and her commitment to the project for the past two years has had a direct impact on the facility’s quality of care and communication, patient safety and staff development. She focused on every facet of the patient experience.

Her responsibilities include daily operations management, patient satisfaction and quality of care, process improvement projects, regulatory standards, policy and procedure development, budget development and management, associate education and training, staff evaluations and physician engagement. She also works with college instructors in nursing and surgical technician training to assist with students’ clinical rotations throughout the surgical arena.

All is described as someone who always leads her team with professionalism, building staff and colleague relationships that are long lasting and grounded in mutual respect.

She credits two people for having the most influence on her. “[One is my dad] who always has instilled a work ethic in me and a ‘remember where you came from’ mentality,” All said.

As a leader, All takes that message to heart, remembering when she was a staff nurse and the challenges she had. “I try to see myself in their shoes,” she said. This helps her to consider their needs.

“If you don’t like something, be the change agent” her father always told her. She lives by this motto, and always challenges her staff to be the ones to make things better for their patients.

Her second great influence is a nurse leader who saw potential in her when she didn’t see it in herself, and whom she still considers a mentor even though they no longer work together. “She would delegate to me, push me and molded me into a leadership role,” All said.

All is a great leader who challenges her nurses and strives to make improvements at the facility every day, all the while keeping patients and her staff her main focus, according to her nominator.

“My job as a leader is to be a servant to my staff,” said All, who added she celebrates their successes and motivates them to want to do more.

She was both humbled and proud to be the recipient of this GEM Award, saying she is so very proud of her team.

VOLUNTEERISM & SERVICE

Romeatrius Moss, RN, MSN, APHN-BC, DNP
Flight Commander, United States Air Force, Hurlburt Field, Fla.

Moss, an active duty U.S. Air Force nurse who works as the medical services flight commander for Hurlburt Field Air Force Base, is a model leader who has received esteemed awards, including the Air Force Commendation Medal.

While she commands the largest flight in Hurlburt’s medical group, what sets Moss apart is what she does after hours. An advocate for healthcare, she is an expert in building organizations, committees, coalitions and programs and providing communities with the tools and resources needed for these groups to run successfully.

“With healthcare being an enormous issue to tackle, we have to take a more deliberate approach,” said Moss, who leads in this area by example.

In 2008, Moss became the founder and current executive director for the Mississippi Gulf Coast Black Nurse Association. Its mission is to decrease health disparities by providing a forum for nurses to collectively act in assessment and definition of, and advocacy for, the healthcare needs of those who live in the coastal communities.

Moss founded and organized the Mississippi Gulf Coast Medical Reserve Corps, and as its director, guides the unit in its mission to serve and prepare the community for natural disasters and emergencies. Moss is the volunteer executive director and unit leader for both the MGCBNA and the reserve corps. She lives in Florida and travels weekly to handle the business of these two nonprofits in Mississippi.

“The work I am doing energizes me. It’s my passion,” Moss said. She also has the opportunity to direct projects, produce educational videos, plan and organize conferences and seminars, mentor hundreds of nurses and develop educational content to present at national conferences.

Moss has earned numerous awards for her community service, including the 2013 National Black Nurses Association Trailblazer Award and Community Service Nurse of the Year Award. She has been featured in the Minority Nurse newsletter and was honored as a United Way GIVE UNITED honoree. She works with organizations such as Susan G. Komen to promote breast health. She attended more than 200 health fairs last year. She believes in giving back to her community and reaching excellence in all that she does.

“I am so excited to have this prestigious honor bestowed upon me,” Moss said about the Nurse.com GEM Award. “Wow and wow.”