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Columbia resident Josh Thompson, R.N., left, says the support he received from co-workers in the Williamson Medical Center's Surgery Department like director Ricky Yates, R.N., center, and surgical nurse Kim Hutson, R.N., motivated him to complete his transition from Nutritional Services to surgical nursing.

Williamson Medical Center program empowers food service employee to become nurse

FRANKLIN, TENN. – What began four years ago as a dream and one at-work class culminated recently with a license as a registered nurse for an employee at Williamson Medical Center.

For four years, Josh Thompson, R.N., worked full time, studied full time and raised four kids while pursuing a career in surgical nursing.

Sustained by the support of family and colleagues, Thompson can breathe a little easier now knowing he achieved what many people yearn to fulfill.

“I did all this for my kids more than anything else,” says Thompson, a Columbia resident. “I wanted to give them something to be proud of.”

Pursuing a goal

Ten years removed from high school, Thompson had no intention of going back to school. He had worked in the restaurant business nearly his entire adult life and was comfortable with his job in WMC's Nutritional Services, helping serve food to patients.

If he were to have gone back to school, it probably would have been to learn more about restaurant management, he says. His interest in surgical TV shows coupled with an opening in WMC's Surgery Department sparked the idea of changing his career to nursing.

"I never thought I would have gone into the clinical side," he says. "When you think of a nurse, you typically think of the ones on the floor helping patients. You don't necessarily think of the ones in the background assisting with surgeries."

Thompson talked with Ricky Yates, R.N., WMC director of surgery, who convinced Thompson to give nursing a shot. Yates also encouraged him to join WMC's School at Work program.

School at Work is a free course provided by WMC that teaches employees good study habits, medical terminology and basic math and reading skills needed to further their education and advance in the health care industry.

Thompson used the opportunity to regain his academic footing before moving on to nursing school at Columbia State Community College. He received his nursing license in August.

"School at Work helps you get up to speed if you're out of school for a while," Thompson says. "I don't think I would've gone to nursing school without it."

Overcoming adversity

Aside from being older than the traditional student, Thompson faced the adversity of providing food and shelter for a wife, three children ages 5 – 8 and a 7-month-old.

When he wasn't working, he was studying. One day every weekend, however, he put away the books and devoted his attention to his family.

"The biggest sacrifice I had to make was not always being around for my kids and my wife, but I think now they realize it was worth it," he says. "My wife was the glue that held it all together."

Belinda Mead, R.N., M.S.N., P.L.N.C., clinical educator and School at Work instructor, thinks Thompson's story should be shared with everyone who's thought about the prospect of going back to school, yet felt anxious.

"He started out with a goal, which was to get his skills up to par, and when he met that goal, he set another," she says.

Story's ending unwritten

Yates says Thompson has yet to reach the pinnacle of his career.

“I’m proud of what he’s accomplished,” Yates says. “But I’m excited to see where he’ll go with it. He’s one of those people who can keep moving.”

Thompson is thrilled to start his career as a registered nurse, but he knows this experience has opened the door for more possibilities.

“I haven’t nailed anything down,” he says. “But I want to go further.”

Williamson Medical Center, a 185-bed hospital fully accredited by The Joint Commission, provides comprehensive inpatient and outpatient care including emergency services, with credentialed physicians in 53 specialties and sub-specialties. The community-focused hospital offers a wide range of wellness services, screenings and classes. For more information about Williamson Medical Center, visit www.williamsonmedicalcenter.org.

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