



RALPH HARPER, STATIONARY ENGINEER

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

If a bed breaks or a boiler blows, Ralph Harper is one of nine stationary engineers who put things back together again. Truly a jack-of-all trades, Ralph can repair almost anything mechanical, electrical, pneumatic, or hydraulic — skills he needs to help guarantee that the central plant continuously delivers steam, sterilized air, and electricity, as well as water for the heating and cooling systems.

“You need to be able to twist a wrench in this job. You’re a welder, a plumber and an electrician. These days you have to know electronics, too,” said Harper. “We’re really a tightly knit team. If there’s something one of us can’t figure out, it’s frustrating, but you know someone on the crew can do it.”

Surveying a hospital room, Harper observed, “We’re responsible for maintaining and fixing just about everything in here — the phone, television, suction devices, curtain rails, IV poles, clocks, beds and nurse call system. Plus, we take care of x-ray view boxes, ceiling tiles, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and wheelchairs.” Whenever something seems amiss, Harper makes a note of it in the little brown “to do” book that lives in his shirt pocket.

Harper’s responsibilities also include helping the security staff during a landing of a medical helicopter on the hospital’s rooftop helipad. “If you see one of us running down the hall, we’re probably on our way to the roof,” he said. Harper wears a walkie-talkie, so when there’s an emergency, he can be found anywhere in the 400,000 square feet of hospital buildings or on the nine acres of grounds.

“If a light goes out at a critical moment, you drop everything and get it going. If a steam line breaks, you come running,” he stressed.

Dwarfed next to the central plant’s eight massive boilers and their maze of color-coded blue, yellow and gray pipes, Harper said the engineering crew has affectionately named the hospital’s two emergency power back-up generators Minnie Mouse and Goofy.

A sense of humor and a positive attitude are essential, according to Harper. “When you go into a patient’s room to fix something, it’s important to present a cheerful face,” said Harper, who is known as a pro at cajoling staff into good spirits when they’re having a bad day. “This is the kind of place where you smile and say hello to one another in the hall even if you don’t know someone by name.” — *story by Janet Herring-Sherman*

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LORI SERRANO, CODER

MEDICAL RECORDS DEPARTMENT

A perky flower pinned ever in her hair accentuates the radiance of Lori Serrano's smile, and her cheerfulness — so familiar to those who know her — spills from every word as she speaks of the hospital, herself, and her work.

A registered nurse and a Memorial employee since 1979, Lori opted five years ago to make a career change. Her penchant for accuracy and details made medical records coding a natural choice, and she has worked in that capacity ever since. As a coder, she assigns numerical codes to injuries and illnesses treated and operations performed at Memorial Hospital. "The codes are part of the standardized classification system used by the medical field nationwide," Lori explained. "For instance, 540.9 means acute appendicitis universally."

Each code has several sub-codes. If treatment has been complex, Lori says she may spend a couple of hours reading through an entire file in order to determine all the appropriate codes. If a patient's file is straightforward and complete, it takes her only about 15 minutes. "You never know what you will find," she said. "Each file is like a detective story." The different levels of coding were instituted years ago by the World Health Organization, according to Lori.

"My nursing background helps me decipher information in lab and radiology reports and helps me make out doctors' hand writing, symbols and abbreviations on progress reports," said Lori, who maintains her registered nurse license and is accredited by the American Medical Records Association.

One of the primary reasons for coding medical information, Lori explained, is to facilitate reimbursement from insurance companies and Medicare. She is quick to add that scrupulous coding produces records valuable for future care if a patient is readmitted, and for reference. "An obstetrician might need to know how many of his deliveries were cesarean. Another doctor may want a computer printout of all the coronary artery bypass grafts he's done to compare the procedure used," she said.

Each of 20 medical/surgical departments has a list of criteria that merit attention by the hospital's quality assurance team. It's up to the team of seven coders, along with nurses, to red-flag those situations.

"We rely heavily on teamwork within our department and with the physicians. The physicians are extremely helpful when answering questions about their diagnoses and operations, so our coding correctly reflects the care provided," stressed Lori.

There are thousands of codes. Although Lori knows a great many by heart, she routinely verifies the codes in the four-inch-thick "International Classification of Disease Code Book" that remains open on her desk like the unabridged dictionary of a reference librarian.

— story by Janet Herring-Sherman

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MARION CARLSEN, VOLUNTEER

HOSPITAL AUXILIARY

You can't see it, but petite Marion Carlsen wears an extra-large halo. The volunteer role she has taken on — that of coordinating 45 volunteers and trainees to work in Memorial Hospital's numerous nursing departments during various days and shifts — is no small task.

One of the most familiar faces among Memorial's 190 active "Rose Ladies (and gentlemen)," Carlsen also works as a volunteer in the special care unit and in the outpatient pavilion, spending as much as two or three full days at the hospital each week. In the last eight years, she has logged more than 3,500 volunteer hours. "That's nothing compared to some volunteers," she said modestly.

Carlsen puts in additional hours at home, mostly making phone calls to arrange volunteers' schedules. "I have a desk in the den where I work, if I can keep my very big golden retriever from eating my papers," she smiled.

Once employed as a secretary at a university, Carlsen claims she always wanted to be a hospital volunteer, but lacked the time until she retired. Now, "Marion is the volunteer unit," interjected volunteer coordinator Katie Lambert, who says she'd hate to think what she would do without Marion.

Carlsen started her volunteer career with a training period similar to the present-day program. Educated in nine different areas, trainees spend time on each nursing unit, in the surgery waiting room, the outpatient pavilion and at the information desk. Carlsen herself started working on a nursing unit as soon as a vacancy became available following her training. Today she trains volunteers new to the special care unit.

Commonly referred to as "working the floor," a volunteer assignment to a nursing unit means, among other things, running errands for the nurses, Carlsen explained. "We go to central supply, to the lab for a report, to the pharmacy to wait for a prescription, or to the delivery dock to pick up flowers for a patient.

"It's an eighth of a mile from the west wing to the east wing of the hospital, so if you go over and back five or six times a day, you get some good exercise. If the nursing staff needs us, but we're out of sight, they'll page us.

"I feel as though I'm part of a well-oiled machine and that I'm using my time to do something really good for people," said Carlsen, slipping her glasses into the pocket of her official pink volunteer jacket. Then, reaching out to hug a fellow Rose Lady passing in the corridor, she added, "Besides, the volunteers are such a great bunch to be around!"

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WES LOGAN, COURIER

MATERIEL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

His Irish eyes smiling, Wes Logan organizes his workday with a chess master's precision. Responsible for transporting everything from x-rays to surgical supplies, Wes spends a good deal of time on the road, running errands and ferrying goods between Memorial Hospital, the Rohnert Park Health Center and Memorial's print shop, located across town. In a month, he puts 750 to 900 miles on the hospital's Dodge van.

"I start out each day by picking up two or three buckets and sometimes one or two sacks of mail at the post office and delivering it to the mail room here.

Then I shift gears and help out

in the store room, like a shipping, receiving and file clerk. I help stock the shelves with everything from office supplies to baby powder to surgical blades," explained Logan. When filling orders, he pushes a streamlined grocery-style shopping cart between the tall gray metal supply shelves.

Later in the morning, he makes the rounds, checking to see if the radiology department, the laboratory and the pharmacy need things picked up or delivered around town. "This afternoon, I'm going to the hospital's dental clinic over on Morgan Street, and to a photo lab for the medical records department and pathology.

"Yesterday, I took a piece of surgical equipment over to another hospital. I don't have clearance to run lights like an ambulance does, but if there's any urgency involved, I'll really push it!"

Setting priorities can be a challenge when three or four people need something at the same time, added Logan. "I was a security officer here before I took this job, so I know who a lot of the staff are. Sometimes I can get a sense of how urgent something is just by knowing who is making the call."

Logan goes about his business quickly, politely and often, unseen. "If I don't have to wait for a signature, I'm in and out quick. Sometimes people don't know I've been there. They just think things appear on their desk, like magic," he said with a Leprechaun's grin.

"When I walk through the hospital doors in the morning, it's like coming into a small town. The staff are the people who live there and the patients and their families are the visitors. The mail room is the post office and the cafeteria is the diner," observed Logan. "Me? I'm like the keeper of the back room in the general store!" — story by Janet Herring-Sherman

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