



Heather Elton,
MSN, RN, CHPN, COS-C

DEVELOPING NURSES

CCH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (PDP)

Heather Elton, MSN, RN, CHPN, COS-C, could be the poster child for Columbus Community Hospital's Professional Development Program (PDP).

She has participated each of the seven years the program has been in existence. In fact, she and other registered nurses worked on a committee with Dorothy Bybee, CCH's former chief nursing officer, to help create the opportunity.

Elton says she feels every nurse should consider participating in the program — and not just because they can earn a cash bonus. “A fancy paycheck looks good on paper, but if you don't love what you're doing, it's not going to mean anything,” she said. “When you participate in the PDP, you gain a better understanding of how health care works. You can see how each of us plays a huge role in the satisfaction of our patients and the satisfaction we find from our day-to-day work. The money is just gravy on the side.”

A changing role at the hospital

Over the past three decades, Elton has been involved with CCH in various ways. She worked in maternal child health in the late 1990s and left in 2000 for East Central Health District and Good Neighbor Community Health Center. She eventually became chief operating officer there, but came back to CCH in 2010, accepting a position as director of Occupational Health Services.

Since 2013, Elton has worked as a registered nurse in home health and hospice. “I needed more time for my family and wanted to return to direct patient care,” she said. But now, she is in the process of transitioning to a role as an RN educator in the professional practice department.

“I have always had a passion for lifelong learning,” she said. “I believe that at this point in my career, I would like to be able to promote it, whether that's for new staff or staff that have been here. Now is a good time for me to use some of the things I've learned along the way to share and build up our profession.”

PDP submission

Every year that Elton has completed the PDP, she has participated in different types of professional development opportunities. In 2025, she finished her master's degree in nursing, which had a big impact on her submissions.

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Other parts of her program included:

- Promoting quality within the home health and hospice department and updating its policies.
- Providing education to both staff members and hospice volunteers.
- Taking on leadership roles in various committees, including the Pathway to Excellence Committee and PDP Board. She is also currently on the Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Association Education Committee and recently completed tenure as a board member for the Nebraska Home Care Association.
- Submitting a poster for Poster Day that summarized quality improvement in her department.

The PDP process is incredibly rewarding, says Elton. “It's both as challenging as you think it's going to be, and also less intimidating than you expect,” she said. “There are nurses in every eligible department who have submitted a PDP. Those nurses and the board are there to support anyone in their journey.”

RNs who complete the Professional Development Program strengthen Columbus Community Hospital and elevate patient care. Their advanced education, specialty certifications and involvement in councils and research improve clinical expertise and support evidence-based practice. PDP nurses bring leadership through Unit-Based Council participation, mentoring and quality improvement initiatives, all of which enhance safety, outcomes and unit performance. The PDP also fosters engagement and professional growth, helping retain skilled nurses and building a stronger, more capable workforce that directly benefits patients.