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Author

Parga, Kevin Daniel, RN

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UCSDH DREAM Externship Experience

Author: Kevin Daniel Parga, RN

My nursing journey began as a member of the UCSDH DREAM Externship Cohort of 2023. The degree of commitment that UCSDH has towards inclusion and fostering growth was made evident to me through countless experiences during my year in the DREAM externship. Despite the challenges I faced throughout my time as an extern, I am eternally grateful for every opportunity that was afforded to me by UCSDH and the DREAM Externship. I can say, with certainty, that UCSDH is unmatched in its ability to foster growth, promote inclusion, and create unique opportunities for professional development.

I was fortunate enough to have gained acceptance into the DREAM externship program during my third semester of nursing school. I was offered an extern position on UCSDH Hillcrest 5West (5W) Trauma PCU floor and quickly accepted. 5W cares for a multitude of patients including falls, motor vehicle accidents, gunshot and stab wounds, traumatic brain injuries and any other kind of trauma that requires in-patient hospitalization. After being given a description of the patient population I would be caring for, I was eager to begin learning and start my clinical hours.

From the onset of my externship, there was a seamless flow of communication between the heads of the externship program, the 5W nurse managers, and myself. The DREAM leadership, Gwendolyn McPherson and Bea Lizarraga, held an introductory meeting with the DREAM externs prior to starting our clinical hours. During this meeting, they discussed the

mission and vision of the DREAM program, clearly outlining the program's goals and expectations. It was apparent that Gwen and Bea were committed to promoting and sustaining an inclusive workforce at UCSDH and their dedication and support towards the DREAM program and its members was reassuring. Having a solid support system within the externship eased my apprehensions of balancing school with an externship.

My clinical hours began in August of 2022. Trisha Weers and Diane Wiskus, the 5W nurse managers, reached out to inform me that Misty Anderson would be my primary preceptor. Misty was a wonderful preceptor. On my first day, she familiarized me with the layout of the floor, nursing workflow, and opportunities for learning. Misty asked important questions such as, "What are your goals for this externship? What are learning opportunities that you would like to experience/be a part

of? From your point of view, how can I best assist you in ensuring that you meet your goals?" This conversation reassured me that I had the support needed to be successful, helped define my professional development goals, aligning these objectives with the hands-on aspect of my training. Having a consistent preceptor throughout my externship was a crucial component towards my learning and confidence, providing the stability that was lacking in my regular nursing school clinical rotations. The DREAM externship allowed me to gradually improve my skill set. Misty identified my strengths and weaknesses, using those to formulate weekly goals that progressively increased my autonomy. Trust established with Misty allowed me to take more responsibility with each shift, developing my critical thinking skills. Without a doubt, this externship made me a stronger and more confident nursing student, allowing me to go into my nursing school clinicals ready to take on my assigned patients. I felt empowered, allowing me to advocate and communicate my desire to take on as many patients as was appropriate. However, even though I was building my skills, I understood my limitations as a student and was aware of the room for improvement.

Another highlight from my experience as a DREAM extern was observing the unit culture. From the very start to the end of my externship, everyone on 5W was welcoming. It was a pleasant experience to get to know the staff, ranging from nurses to providers to assistive personnel, and all other members of the unit. The nursing staff



Kevin Parga, RN works at UCSD Health Hillcrest Medical Center. He recently graduated from Southwestern College, where he obtained his ADN in nursing and is currently working towards his BSN from Grand Canyon University. Kevin successfully completed the UCSDH DREAM Externship and was able to secure a position as a full-time RN working on 5W Trauma PCU.

was always happy to answer all my questions regarding nursing skills, policies, and procedures. Many would go above and beyond my expectations, such as printing the UCSDH policies and procedures for me to take home and review. I had previously rotated on units at UCSDH La Jolla and felt the same sense of inclusion. This, in my opinion, is a common theme throughout UCSDH, setting them apart from local hospitals. I believe this is because UCSDH, values educating, training, and giving a positive experience to the next generation of healthcare workers. The workplace environment quickly became one of the driving factors as to why I wanted to begin my professional career with UCSDH, this and the continuing inclusivity, support, and collaboration.

I would like to acknowledge Gwen McPherson, one of DREAM leaders. Gwen is yet another prime example of the immense amount of support granted to me. During my externship, I informed Gwen that I had a strong interest in rotating in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). She mobilized resources, securing a spot for my senior preceptorship in UCSDH Hillcrest's Medical ICU, 10 CCU. When she informed me of this opportunity, I was in shock, filled with excitement and overwhelmed with joy. I knew that senior preceptorships in the ICU were rare and Gwen made it happen for me! Similarly, to my externship on 5W, my senior preceptorship experience on 10 CCU was nothing short of amazing. The setting was incredible, the acuity and management of medical conditions was fascinating, and the role of the nurses was thrilling. I was lucky enough to have Khoder Osman as my preceptor, he is hands down one of the smartest individuals I have worked with and an excellent educator.

Although I had countless positive experiences, the externship had its challenges. The biggest challenge I faced was the management of my time. Commencing the externship during the most challenging semester of my nursing program was one of the reasons that many of my former classmates did not apply. The fear of not being able to manage my time appropriately was a valid concern, and it was indeed very difficult. Admittedly, trying to

coordinate my lectures, exams, nursing clinicals, externship clinicals, and my personal life was a major source of stress for me. I had to take a step back, set my priorities, mindfully plan and schedule my shifts months in advance, taking my academic schedule into consideration.

The fourth semester became even more difficult, intensified by the inclusion of my senior preceptorship shifts on 10 CCU. For that entire year, my life exclusively revolved around nursing and the only thing that kept me pushing through was my vision of beginning my professional career with UCSDH. I am proud to say that I successfully completed the UCSDH DREAM Externship and graduated from nursing school with a 4.0 GPA, which would not have been possible if it weren't for the support and flexibility that the externship afforded me. I am also grateful to say that I was hired as a RN on UCSDH 5W Trauma PCU. Recently, I completed my orientation and began independently providing patient care. Undoubtedly, the DREAM externship equipped me with the tools necessary to successfully transition into professional nursing practice. The experience equipped me with the standards of practice that UCSDH proudly upholds. I am overwhelmed with joy knowing that I am employed by an institution that has an exceptional organizational culture and highly values its nurses and their professional development. I am so grateful for the DREAM externship program and its leadership vision. I look forward to advancing my professional career with UCSDH, providing exceptional patient care to our community, and creating a healthier world — one life at a time.