

Rachel Guarneri Garcia: ‘In this service I hope to live; in it I wish to die’

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Rachel Guarneri Garcia, a member of Community Heights Church in Lubbock, is a registered nurse in the neonatal ICU at the University Medical Center in Lubbock. From deep in the heart of one Texan, she shares her background and thoughts on being a follower of Christ in health care. To suggest a Texas Baptist leader in health care to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you served in health care, and what were your positions there?

I’m blessed enough to be in the same unit where I took my first job.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Fort Worth and finished high school in McAllen, where my parents still live.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

My dad is a pastor. So, I’ve been exposed to the gospel and church all my life.

Tagging along with my parents to summer camps and other events was routine, but the summer I was 8, one service in particular caught my

attention. I made a decision and concretely declared the rest of my life for Jesus. My parents walked me through the evening and have been great examples and spiritual leaders for me since then.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?

I attended Baylor University and received a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing with a minor in religion, focusing on missions.

About life in health care

Why do you feel called into health care?

Since I was little, my parents told a story of my mother's high-risk pregnancy and delivery—the story of my birth. I had the idea of helping families like mine. I knew I wanted to go into health care, either as part of an obstetrics team or otherwise.

In high school, I went on a mission trip to Panama that was supposed to be a medical outreach. When the doctors realized how remote the trip would be, they backed out. The team and I ended up going, taking lice treatments and multivitamins, nothing near enough to meet the great need for medical attention where no one would go.

After some research, nursing seemed like the best fit for me. I set my sights on Baylor for nursing education with a Baptist foundation, bonding my two callings. At Baylor, I loved and grew in my religion courses, and clinical was my favorite part in nursing school.

Another medical mission trip, this time to Ethiopia, helped solidify my faith in my future plans.

I felt discouraged, because I could not see myself working day in and day

out in many of the units we were exposed to—until my NICU rotation. I prayed about it and realized God had brought me full circle, that I could help high-risk deliveries and babies while having the ability to help with missional outreach.

How does being a Christian influence your decisions in health care?

I believe all health care providers are compassionate and want to help people, but I think the main difference of being a Christian in health care is our motivation.

As a Christian nurse, I strive to make my decisions revolve around not only how I can advocate for my patients, but also how I can serve them best. I try to go into work with a mindset of ministry and career.

There's only so much I can do in my scope of practice, but I can make sure the decisions I make help the families I come in contact with feel solidarity, as opposed to judgment; as much control as possible, as opposed to powerlessness; and hope that things will get better for them and their baby, as opposed to despair.

What is your favorite aspect of health care? Why?

My favorite aspect of health care is the tangibility of the work I do. I get the privilege of feeling a new life in my hands. I get to see miracles happen every day and every week.

I get to make the baby more comfortable as it goes through pain I can't imagine. I get to celebrate little milestones, like a baby's first outfit or first bottle when they finally are well enough to do so.

There is sickness and mourning, but there also is healing and victory. I get to be there for both.

What one aspect of health care gives you the greatest joy?

The best feeling is when a baby I helped fight for life finally can go home thriving. If there are loving parents who have been there every step of the way and finally get to use that crib they have at home, it's even better.

What one aspect of health care would you like to change?

I wish capitalism did not have such a stronghold on health care. I work in a county hospital, which means I see patients regardless of whether they can afford insurance, which aligns with my personal values, but the hospital faces challenges for serving everyone.

It hurts me that in some regions having a baby at a private hospital—and paying a higher bill—means better care than a county hospital.

The last thing people should be worried about when trying to heal or help their baby thrive is money.

What is the impact of health care on your family?

The biggest impact my job has had on my family is my schedule. My shift technically is from 6:45 p.m. to 7:15 a.m. I sometimes stay later if I need to, and I often work my shifts in a row. That doesn't give me much time to spend with my husband or communicate with my parents if I'm able to do anything besides sleep during my time in between shifts.

I sleep during the day most of the time. Whether I'm available to do anything depends on if I worked the night before and what time the event is.

Some days, I am on my feet most of the shift; so, I come home physically tired. More days than not, I am caring for critically sick babies; so, I come

home mentally and emotionally tired. Alarms go off most of the shift; so, I come home over-stimulated.

I am thankful for a husband who understands sometimes I have a “work hangover” and need time to have silence—and food—for a bit before I can ask how he slept that night, or how his day was while I was asleep.

How do you expect health care to change in the next 10 to 20 years?

I hope in the next 10 to 20 years, technology will be on health care’s side. In the NICU, there is so much equipment we use that is amazing, but it always can be improved.

We have beds that take babies’ temperatures and adjust warmer or cooler to keep them in a certain range, because their brain and skin—not to mention size—isn’t mature enough to do it by themselves. The beds even provide humidity.

Recently, our hospital found we can go straight from mom to these beds in order to minimize the baby getting any cold stress. It is a great idea, but it is so bulky and difficult to move, it’s hard to execute well.

The same can be said for some ventilators, transport materials and medication pumps that can cross over for adult use, even though the doses of some medications we give in our unit are just a few drops of liquid.

I’m sure some people hope there will be more robots or machines providing care, but I don’t think a health care provider’s humanity and gut feelings ever can be replaced wholly by technology.

What do you wish more people knew about health

care?

I wish health care and hospitals were represented differently, especially in media. I watch shows where doctors somehow do everyone's job, when in reality, there's a bedside nurse and a team of others like respiratory therapists, laboratory technicians, radiology and ultrasound technicians, physical therapists and more who come together to provide care for a patient.

I wish people knew to expect to see their doctors less than the others on the team. A doctor's information is very important, but I wish people would trust and respect nurses on the same level. Doctors have the difficult job of having the last say in making the decisions for treatments. I wouldn't want to have their place, but I do have some expertise as well.

About Rachel

Why are you Baptist?

I am Baptist because I believe in the authority of the Bible and the church. I've seen God work through both.

Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?

My first mentors were my parents. They've helped me and continue to do so in every big decision.

Two other longtime friends and mentors are my husband, Jaziel Garcia, and my pastor, Tiny Dominguez.

These four are closest to me and guide me from a God-fearing perspective, support me and are always around without judgment to help me process life. They're my biggest cheerleaders, and I try to make them proud.

Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.

Reading is one of my favorite things to do. Some Christian reading I recommend to anyone is C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and *Screwtape Letters*. Lewis' writing is timeless and profound in a simple way.

I also like *Anxious for Nothing* by Max Lucado and *Radical* by David Platt. These have helped shape my living.

I would recommend *How Then Should We Choose* by Douglas Huffman for a more theological read. It was a book I read in one of my religion courses that still is thought-provoking.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

My favorite Bible passage is in 1 John, and my favorite verse is 1 John 4:12—"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is perfected in us."

It reminds me God will be made known by the way we are his hands and feet. We have an active role in the way people know God.

What words inspire you?

"God had an only Son, and he was a missionary and a physician. A poor, poor imitation of him I am, or wish to be. In this service I hope to live; in it I wish to die" (David Livingstone).

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can" (John Wesley).