

Changing Careers, Saving Lives

Brett Kiser

BY LIBBY ZAY

Brett Kiser, MS, first became interested in nursing after suffering a head injury when he was a child – but it would take more than two decades and a career change before he started nursing school.

At the age of 7, Kiser was riding on the back of a golf cart during a family vacation when the vehicle hit a bump and he fell off, injuring his head. His father, an ophthalmologist, insisted they get to the hospital right away. Once there, the staff discovered that Kiser's head trauma had caused

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an epidural hematoma, or bleeding between the outer membrane covering the brain and the skull that causes a mass of blood to form.

Kiser underwent two brain surgeries to remove the hematoma and reduce the pressure it was causing on his brain.

“That injury really did spark my interest in nursing because I was in a hospital environment, having surgery, and being post-operatively watched by nurses,” he explains.

Science and research also fascinated Kiser, and those interests

ultimately led him down a different path. He earned undergraduate and master’s degrees in geology and resource management and spent more than a decade working at research-consulting firms, most recently for the National Park Service. But all the while, something kept drawing him to health care.

To make sure nursing was really something he wanted to pursue, Kiser moonlighted as an emergency room volunteer for more than four years. In that role, he answered call bells, relayed messages between patients and nurses, transported patients to other areas of the hospital, and provided patients with water and blankets.

What Kiser saw convinced him that nursing was where he belonged. “The field of nursing is just an exciting place to be,” Kiser says. “It’s always changing. There’s science involved, there’s research involved – I’m interested in all of that – and there’s this personal component of getting to be with people and work with people in extreme situations.”

Kiser welcomed his first child a month before he started the Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) master’s option at UMSON last spring. He says that after 11 years in another field, it has been helpful to be around other career-changers in the program.

“We’re committed to doing it and doing it right,” he says. “It’s been great to have people you can rely on and share experiences with, and to really have a diversity of experiences.”

Kiser was awarded the Mary Catherine Bunting Scholarship, which provides financial support to CNL students. “Not only do I have myself and my wife to take care of, but now a daughter – so having that support was just huge,” Kiser says. “The other piece, psychologically, is that it’s proof you’re making the right decision. It’s people saying, ‘We trust that you can do this.’” ♦