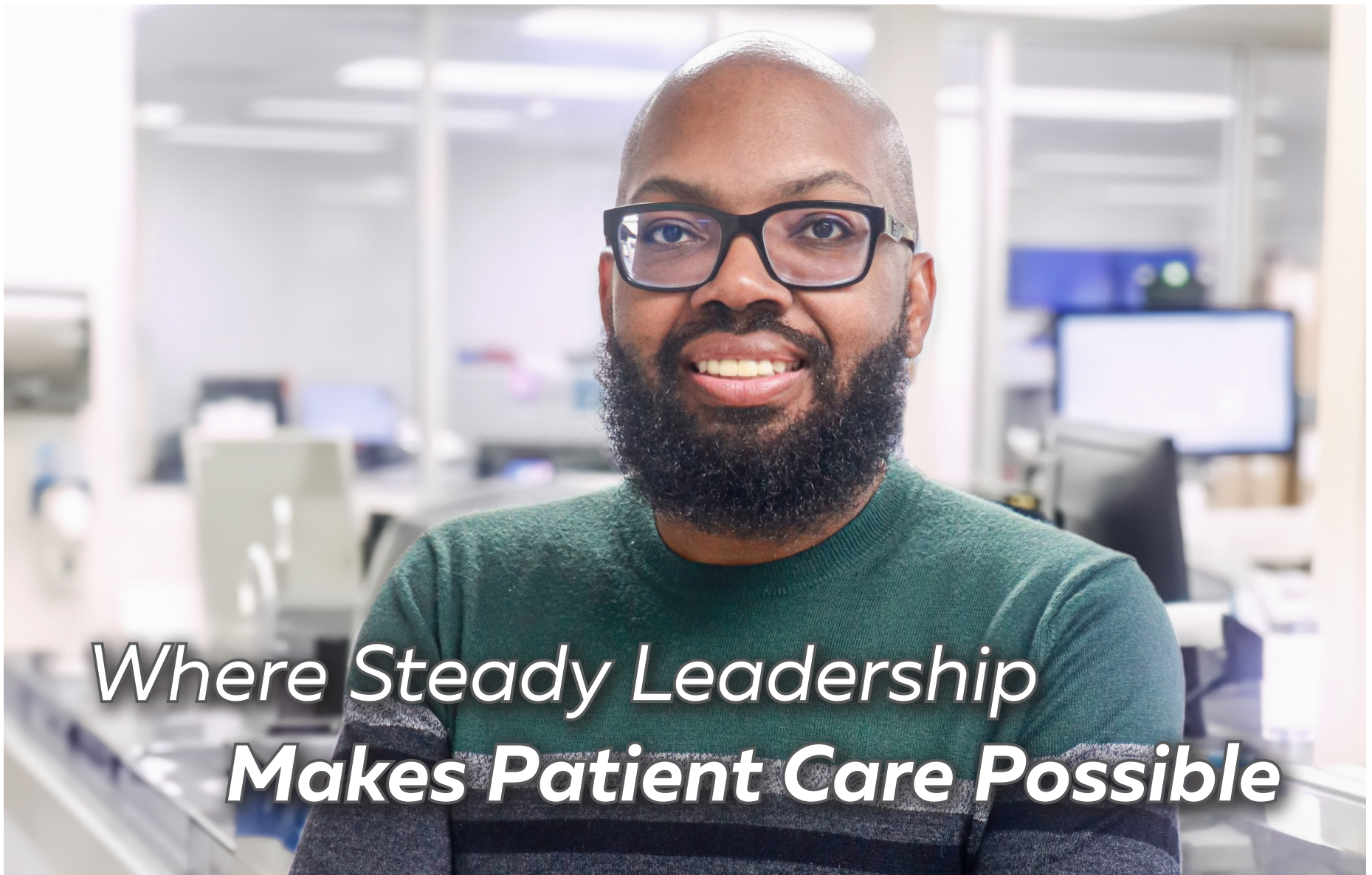


# A COMMUNITY OF CARING

## STORIES OF CARING AND COMPASSION AT UNC HEALTH NASH



### Where Steady Leadership Makes Patient Care Possible

Most patients will never see the laboratory.

They won't hear the soft whir of centrifuges beginning their cycles or watch gloved hands line specimens in careful rows. They may never think about the quiet concentration required to keep each step moving without interruption. Yet every diagnosis, every treatment plan, and every clinical decision depends on the accuracy and timeliness of the work happening there.

For Maurice Thompson, Laboratory Clinical Manager at UNC Health Nash, that responsibility is never taken lightly.

"Maurice is deeply patient focused," said Shairee Taylor, Laboratory Clinical Director.

"Every decision he makes is grounded in how it will impact the patient and the quality of care they receive. He keeps the team aligned with our core mission and ensures patient care remains at the center of daily operations."

Maurice leads in a laboratory of more than 70 team members, including the phlebotomy team whose work begins nearly every patient story. From the moment a specimen is collected, a chain of precision is set into motion—one that must remain constant for physicians to complete their part of the work.

"Ancillary departments like the lab play a critical role," said Thompson.

"If we couldn't run cardiac markers, every patient who comes in with a suspected heart attack would have to be transferred elsewhere. We take our responsibility seriously because our piece of the puzzle allows physicians to complete theirs. It's all about the total patient experience. We provide our piece so the full picture can come together for the patient."

While providers interpret results, Thompson ensures those results can be trusted.

He reinforces procedures, encourages staff to understand the "why" behind each protocol, and checks in frequently to make sure processes are followed correctly. At the same time, he looks for ways to remove obstacles so the laboratory can move efficiently without compromising quality.

"Maurice helps people understand when to slow down and when they can move," Taylor explained.

"And because of that, we maintain a safe and highly productive environment."

Inside the laboratory, trust is quiet but absolute. Team members must know that when pressure rises, someone will help them find their footing.

They say Thompson is that person.

"He communicates clearly, follows through on his commitments, and is always willing to step in to support the team," said Cynthia Johnson, Lead Phlebotomist.

"Maurice is someone you can depend on, and he strengthens everyone around him."

Those who work alongside him describe a leader who listens, who makes himself available, and who steps toward challenges rather than away from them—whether that means troubleshooting an instrument, reallocating staff to manage workload, or supporting a team member who feels overwhelmed.

"I appreciate how he listens to our ideas and encourages open communication," said Kimberly O'Conney, Phlebotomist.

"I know I can go to him with a problem or for guidance. Quality comes first, and he makes sure we have what we need to do it right."

That steadiness becomes especially important in high-stakes moments. During an extended EPIC downtime, when the hospital's electronic health record system was temporarily unavailable, many lab team members found themselves navigating unfamiliar processes while patient care continued across the hospital. Maurice gathered the team and walked them through downtime procedures step by step, remaining present for over 20 hours to answer questions and coordinate workflow.

"Maurice remained calm, available, and hands on," Taylor said.

"He steps in wherever he's needed. His calming presence brings stability to our team."

But Thompson is quick to shift attention away from himself.

When asked about impact, he speaks first about the team.

One moment that stands out to him involves a phlebotomist who entered a patient's room and recognized they were in distress. Instead of stepping out and waiting for help to arrive, she immediately began chest compressions while calling for assistance. By the time the response team arrived, she had already initiated care.

"She later went back to check on that patient," Thompson recalled.

"That kind of ownership shows that we are fully part of the care team. We're not separate from patient care—we are in it."

Moments like that, he says, reflect the culture the lab staff work to build—one where technical precision and human responsibility exist side by side.

"For example, very few people enjoy having their blood drawn. So, we focus first on comfort. We explain what we're doing and why, and we reassure them throughout the process. At Nash Day Hospital and in the Cancer Center especially, patients see us regularly. Relationships form and grow over time. That continuity helps ease anxiety and makes a difference in their care."

As part of his commitment to strengthening this culture, Thompson recently completed the UNC Health

Emerging Leaders Academy, a year-long program for team members identified as future leaders within the system. The experience sharpened his leadership skills and reshaped how he approaches communication, including restructuring meetings to better connect with staff and encourage stronger connections among the team.

"We have a multigenerational workforce that brings both experience and fresh perspectives to the table," said Thompson.

"People approach communication in different ways, but those differences make us stronger. When we bring those perspectives together, patient care improves."

For Taylor, that focus on people—not just processes—is what makes Thompson's leadership resonate beyond the laboratory.

"While some leaders concentrate first on numbers, Maurice begins with people," she said. "By prioritizing compassion, safety, and collaboration, strong outcomes follow."

It's clear that he measures success differently.

"What I'm most proud of is starting here in an entry-level bench tech position and growing into a leadership role," said Thompson.

"Mentors invested in me when I didn't fully see my own potential. Being able to honor that and pay it forward means a lot."

Through steady leadership and a deep respect for the responsibility his team carries, Thompson ensures their work begins and ends with certainty. And he knows that certainty is never created by one person alone.

It is built shift by shift, decision by decision, by people who understand what their piece makes possible.

For someone waiting to hear what may be a life-changing result, that kind of leadership is felt long before it is ever seen.

We're not  
separate  
from  
patient  
care—  
we are  
in it.

- Maurice Thompson



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