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Announcer:

On this episode of Pathways...

Nicole Rice:

You get to play detective a little bit. Patients come to you, usually not on their best day, and they rely on you to listen to them. And you're the eyes and the ears for the radiologist, so you're looking at their patient, the symptoms that they're having or the follow-up imaging that you're performing, trying to find something, and you get to play detective and try to figure out what's wrong with that patient.

Announcer:

Blending cutting-edge technology with compassionate patient care, we're delving into the sonography profession and what it takes to see what's on the inside.

Emily Tadlock:

Hello, and welcome, listeners, to season two of our Pathways podcast, part of Northern Light Health's Healthy, Happy, and Wise podcast series. This season, we are focused on careers in healthcare which need two years or less of schooling or training of some sort. So here to help me kick this season off is Nicole Rice, an ultrasound supervisor at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center. Thanks for joining me, Nicole.

Nicole Rice:

Hi, thank you, nice to be here.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay, so my first question, what exactly is ultrasound?

Nicole Rice:

Ultrasound, simply put, is we use sound waves to create images on our ultrasound machine and for the radiologists of the human body to find pathology.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. So you're using all of these cool images to help figure out what's wrong with someone.

Nicole Rice:

Yes.

Emily Tadlock:

Or what's not wrong with someone.

Nicole Rice:

Yes, correct.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay, all right, that's good. Okay, so there are different specialties or credentials, as you put it, that you can get with ultrasound. Could you explain those a little bit?

Nicole Rice:

Yes. So you can be a registered cardiac sonographer that deals with the heart, you can be a general sonographer, which is a registered diagnostic medical sonographer, we scan most of the general stuff, all of the organs in the abdominal cavity and soft tissues, a lot more than that too. And vascular sonography looks at all the arteries and veins in the body and looks at all the hemodynamics and all of that. And then, there's musculoskeletal sonography, looks at all the tendons and muscles and nerves and that type of thing.

Emily Tadlock:

Wow. You wouldn't think, when you hear ultrasound or sonography, you wouldn't necessarily think that there are so many different specialties, but there's different ways to look at so many different pieces of the body.

Nicole Rice:

Yes.

Emily Tadlock:

Wow. And you need each one to help diagnose whatever the ailment is with the patient. Okay. Nicole, how did you get into this? How in the world... Because the only time I've ever heard of ultrasound was when I was having one when I was having a baby.

Nicole Rice:

Yes. I thought that ultrasound was just about baby ultrasounds when I first got started, and I really fell in love with all of the other different specialties. I wanted to do something in the medical field, I wanted to work with patients, and it was a two-year degree that paid well, so I chose to go to school for that and it's something I just fell in love with.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. So schooling, tell me a little bit about schooling, what did that look like?

Nicole Rice:

So it's typically a two-year degree. There's multiple different pathways. Each school can be a little different. Some you can get an advanced certificate in sonography, other schools offer an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay.

Nicole Rice:

They all gear you to take the registry, and really that's what it's about is, as long as you can pass the registry under a credentialing body, then you can become a sonographer.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. So you're speaking to the heart of what my podcast is called here, you can take several different pathways to get into a sonography career. But you did two years, and of course, this season is focused on

two-year or less, just to get people in. What specialty did you decide you wanted to get into when you were doing yours?

Nicole Rice:

So most of the schools, and the one I went to, they gear you to become a registered medical sonographer. They pretty much teach you to take the abdominal and small parts registry and the OB GYN registry. So they train you in OB GYN and they train you in general ultrasound, and that's what most hospitals require to work.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. What is that like on a day-to-day basis, you come into work and what do you do?

Nicole Rice:

So we see a variety of exams, all different patient ages, we do about eight to 12 ultrasounds a day.

Emily Tadlock:

Wow.

Nicole Rice:

We scan up everything, the NICU, looking at neonatal brains, to you can be scanning in the breast center looking for a tiny cancer. We go portable to inpatient rooms, bedside. There's a lot of variety every day. We also do ultrasound-guided procedures, help radiologists visualize liver lesions to biopsy masses and all of that.

Emily Tadlock:

Wow, that's a lot. It's cool too, because you come to work and not every day is the same.

Nicole Rice:

Correct.

Emily Tadlock:

I think a lot of people might think that it's just same routine, day in and day out, but you're taking so many different types of images for different patients. And I have to assume that you work really closely with your radiologist physicians, yeah?

Nicole Rice:

Yes. I work very closely with the radiologists, and in the vascular lab, we work very closely with the vascular surgeons as well.

Emily Tadlock:

Wow. So you also talked about portable, so you're not just in one spot and patients coming to you, you're going to the patients too.

Nicole Rice:

Correct, yeah.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. So you get your steps in every day, yeah. Okay, so tell me, what do you love about your job?

Nicole Rice:

You get to play detective a little bit. Patients come to you, usually not on their best day, and they rely on you to listen to them. And you're the eyes and the ears for the radiologist, so you're looking at their patient, the symptoms that they're having or the follow-up imaging that you're performing, trying to find something, and you get to play detective and try to figure out what's wrong with that patient, so get to play doctor a little bit in that aspect. And the radiologist also, you gain a lot of trust from the radiologist, providing that information for them.

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah, it's nice to work as a team to help figure out what's going on with the patient.

Nicole Rice:

Yes, yeah.

Emily Tadlock:

So if you were somebody who liked detective games or enjoyed Solve-It puzzles or things like that, this could be a really good career for you.

Nicole Rice:

Yes, you're always learning.

Emily Tadlock:

That's awesome. So then, you mentioned in your answer there that patients are coming to you on their not so best days, I don't think people think of imaging as necessarily caregivers, but you guys are, you direct patient care.

Nicole Rice:

Yes, absolutely, yep.

Emily Tadlock:

So what is that like, talking to patients and working with them on those days that they're scared and nervous?

Nicole Rice:

Well, it's really rewarding to be able to be there for them and be that listening ear and give them the support that they need, and it's rewarding when you can know that you're giving them the answers that they need by giving them a quality ultrasound.

Emily Tadlock:

That's great. Okay, so how many images do you think you've taken over the course of your career?

Nicole Rice:

Oh, hundreds of thousands, I have no idea.

Emily Tadlock:

Wow.

Nicole Rice:

Any ultrasound could have 80 images or so in, because each one's a thin cross-sectional slice of anatomy, so it takes a lot to build a whole picture.

Emily Tadlock:

Okay. So I mentioned puzzle before, so it really is like a puzzle. Oh my gosh. Because you're not just going in and taking one picture and you're like, "Oh, there's the problem."

Nicole Rice:

Yes, no, it's very user-dependent. If you don't see it and you don't image it, then it doesn't really exist, so there's a lot of weight on the sonographer to be able to manipulate the machine and get the images-

Emily Tadlock:

Okay.

Nicole Rice:

... to show that pathology.

Emily Tadlock:

I wouldn't say that sonography is a very well-known career path, would you say the same?

Nicole Rice:

Probably not, yeah.

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah, right. So what would you say to encourage people to explore a career in sonography?

Nicole Rice:

I think it's very rewarding. I absolutely love my job. You get to be with patients and you know that you're helping them. You go home every day knowing that you're helping patients and helping them get the care that they need.

Emily Tadlock:

All of that is obviously super important, and we love that because we love to hear the passion. As I've spoken to different people on this podcast, the passion really does come through in every interview, you guys really do love your job and love what you do and taking care of patients. But there's another part to it, and that part is financial security, job security, there is a high need for sonographers in the area.

Nicole Rice:

Yes.

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Emily Tadlock:

And it's a well-paying job too.

Nicole Rice:

Yes, yeah.

Emily Tadlock:

So that's exciting. And then, to boot, it's a two-year program, so you're not going to have a ton of student debt, which I think is something that is obviously a very hot topic when it comes to different careers that kids, students, anyone in or out of school, experienced or non-experienced in the working world, it's a hot topic for everyone. And so, having a chance to go back to school and start a really great career in two years, it's a big deal.

Nicole Rice:

Yes.

Emily Tadlock:

So just final thoughts maybe that you have for folks when it comes to sonography and anything interesting you think they should know about your job?

Nicole Rice:

Every day is something new and you get to work with a great team. You definitely become family with the people that you're working with, you rely on each other a lot, and it's just a great environment.

Emily Tadlock:

Awesome. So you heard it from Nicole, everyone, don't everybody jump into the sonography field at once, or do.

Nicole Rice:

I was going to say, or do.

Emily Tadlock:

Yeah, right. Or do jump into the sonography field. Thank you so much for hopping on with us, Nicole, we really appreciate it.

Nicole Rice:

Great, thank you.

Announcer:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Pathways. Please join us next time for a new episode. There are several ways you can tune in, on our website at northernlighthealth.org/healthyhappywise, we are also on Apple, YouTube, and Spotify, which makes it easy for you to listen on the go on your favorite app.