

Craig Howell, Physician Assistant, Joins Northern Urgent Care

Craig E. Howell, PA-C, is a key patient-care provider at Northern Urgent Care, a division of Northern Regional Hospital that offers rapid, convenient access to non-emergency care for residents of Mount Airy and its nearby communities. As a Physician Assistant, Howell is responsible for diagnosing and treating patients who do not require the services of an Emergency Department or may be unable to see their primary-care physician.

“I enjoy serving the people of this community,” says 35-year-old Howell, whose adopted hometown is Helotes, a small town outside of San Antonio, Texas. “I believe it’s important that patients have a say in their healthcare decisions; and that they feel they’re getting all the information they need to make good decisions,” he added. “Oftentimes, patients come to me during their most vulnerable time and want information – which is why I’ve always been driven to spend however much extra time is needed to explain their condition to them and outline the recommended ‘next steps’ in their treatment plan.”

“We are delighted with the addition of Craig Howell to our provider team,” said **Brian Beasley**, Vice President of Clinic Operations for Northern Regional Hospital. “His clinical expertise and patient-focused approach to care – as demonstrated by both his prior military service and civilian work experiences – mirrors the healthcare mission of Northern Regional Hospital and its community-based clinics, including Northern Urgent Care.”

Howell’s career in healthcare was launched in the military – when he enlisted in the U.S. Army after graduating from high school. His enlistment was motivated primarily by the overwhelming sense of patriotism he felt after having witnessed 9/11 while still in high school. Howell also knew that he wasn’t quite ready for college. “I knew I would’ve been wasting my time and money if I had enrolled in college at that time,” he says.

The young man’s so-called “gap year” turned into 11 consecutive years of active-duty service in the U.S. Army that included assignments in a multitude of stateside and overseas bases, as well as war zones – including Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan. “I started out as a 68 Whiskey,” he says, referring to the code name used in the Army for the job of a combat medic. He also served as a special operations medical sergeant during his deployments while assigned to the 96th Civil Affair Battalion Airborne. As Howell helped attend to the healthcare needs of sick, injured and seriously wounded soldiers and civilians, he also steadily rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant – eventually serving as Battalion Senior Special Operations Medical Sergeant at the Special Warfare Center and School in Fort Bragg, NC. Along the way, he earned numerous awards and

medals, including a Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medals, Combat Action Badge, Senior Parachutist Badge, and a Pathfinder Badge.

Before returning to civilian life, Howell was encouraged by his father and several Army Physician Assistants to complete all the university graduate- and post-graduate requirements needed to become a Physician Assistant. He thus earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Emergency Medicine from Western Carolina University in 2016; and, four years later, earned his Master of Medical Science degree from Wake Forest University School of Medicine's Physician Assistant program. While completing his advanced education and training, he worked as a ground-transport paramedic and, most recently, as a Critical Care Flight Paramedic with the AirCare Critical Care Transport team at Wake Forest Baptist Health, in Winston-Salem, NC.

During his hands-on clinical training at Wake Forest, Howell knew he would feel comfortable doing his elective rotations in Trauma, Critical Care and Emergency Medicine – but he was surprised by how much he enjoyed several other specialty areas – including Hospitalist care and Family Medicine. “I appreciated the continuity-of-care that was part of the Family Medicine rotation – in that I was able to see how my treatment recommendations helped improve a patient's health,” he said. Howell also calls upon his own recent hospitalization to help ensure that he gives his all to patients. “I had appendicitis recently; and that experience as a patient helped solidify my resolve to do my best for patients – especially in creating and maintaining a comfortable and vital two-way communication between my patients and me.”

Howell is a member of numerous national, state and regional professional organizations, including the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), North Carolina Academy of Physician Assistants (NCAPA), Piedmont Association of Physician Assistants (PAPA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and the American Legion.

Howell and his wife Britany, a college biology instructor, and their two children – six-year-old son Bryce and three-year-old daughter Bella – live in Pilot Mountain, NC, his wife's hometown. Together, the family enjoys camping and spending time together. An avid outdoorsman, Howell enjoys exercising, archery, sky-diving and hunting.

Northern Urgent Care is open seven days a week and conveniently located at 119 Welch Road, Suite A, in Mount Airy, NC (at the corner of Highway 52 and Snowhill Drive). Hours of operation are 8 AM to 7 PM Monday thru Friday; 8 AM to 5 PM on Saturday; and 11 AM to 5 M on Sunday. Phone: 336-719-7200.
