Expert spine care has been at the heart of the Gillette Children’s mission since the hospital began in 1897. Founder, Arthur Gillette, MD, was one of the first orthopedic surgeons in America. The spine service was established in the 1940s and some of the earliest spine fusion operations in the world were performed at Gillette.

Today, Gillette is nationally and internationally recognized for its research and treatment of children’s spine care. The advanced practice providers (APPs) on the Gillette spine care team bring a high level of expertise and compassion when treating children with orthopedic conditions.

From physician assistants to certified nurse practitioners, APPs are often some of the first health care providers families and referring providers interact with on the spine care unit. One of the most active members of the team is pediatric physician assistant (PA-C) Danielle Harding.

**Let's meet Danielle**

Danielle Harding enjoys focusing on each patient’s complex needs and makes sure they are as ready as possible for surgery or other treatments.

Harding is a key member of the MAGEC Rod clinic which is a procedure used to treat scoliosis. The MAGEC rods are surgically placed on either side of the spine to help control the curve. The rods are magnetic and can be lengthened with a remote control every three to six months in a doctor’s office. One of the main benefits of this treatment is that the rods can expand as the child grows and this often eliminates the need for repeated surgeries and reduces the chance of infection.
Danielle, what drives you in your work with pediatric spine patients at Gillette?

My interactions with my patients are really what drives me and fulfills me in my work. I love the long-term relationships that I’m able to establish with families. I usually see children as they are still growing.

I also enjoy helping to prepare patients and families for surgery. For many patients this is their first surgical procedure, and they may have a lot of questions. For some families they are very familiar with surgery and hospital stays, but spine surgery is still a new experience for them.

I really enjoy being able to help to ease patients’ minds and help them feel as prepared as possible for the hospital stay. I also want them to feel prepared when they go home.

What do you want families to know about you and the spine care at Gillette?

I’d like families to know that I truly love my job and forming relationships with patients and their families. It is a pleasure to watch them grow up and to see the amazing young adults they become overtime.

As a spine specialty physician assistant, I focus on spinal conditions in the pediatric population. I believe that it’s important to know what is important to each patient and their family when discussing treatment options.

I believe listening to patients and their families is a very important part of my job. Someone’s spine care is one piece of who they are. You need to know what is important to them so that we can discuss treatment options that are going to be most in line with their goals while also setting them up for a successful spine management journey.

I also like to get to know my patients. This is important because with spine care, I see patients for a number of years. It’s nice to know what’s going on in their lives.
What would you like referring providers to know about spine care at Gillette?

I would encourage anyone who sees a patient with concerns regarding their spine to please start a workup to the level of your comfort. It’s particularly important to get imaging or x-rays. It’s very helpful to have a starting point for when a patient is going to be seen at Gillette for spine care.

If a referring provider has any questions on how to start a workup, what x-rays would be most informative, don’t ever hesitate to call and speak to a Gillette spine provider to get more clarity. We’re always happy to see patients to give them our expert opinion.

One thing I’d like to highlight for referring providers and families is the advancement we’ve made in the MAGEC rod clinic in the use of ultrasound to measure rod lengthening in real time. This gives us very accurate information and another benefit is, it reduces the number of x-rays and lowers the radiation exposure for patients.

What's this about a new puppy and cookies?

Harding says she appreciates the skills, support, and camaraderie on the spine team. When she’s not at work, Harding is busy playing with her new puppy and baking new recipes.

“I’m not one to brag,” Harding adds. “I’m quite the baker and enjoy making treats to bring to my coworkers!”