

Fall
2021

A publication for Hartford HealthCare colleagues

moments

Hartford HealthCare *Hits the Road*



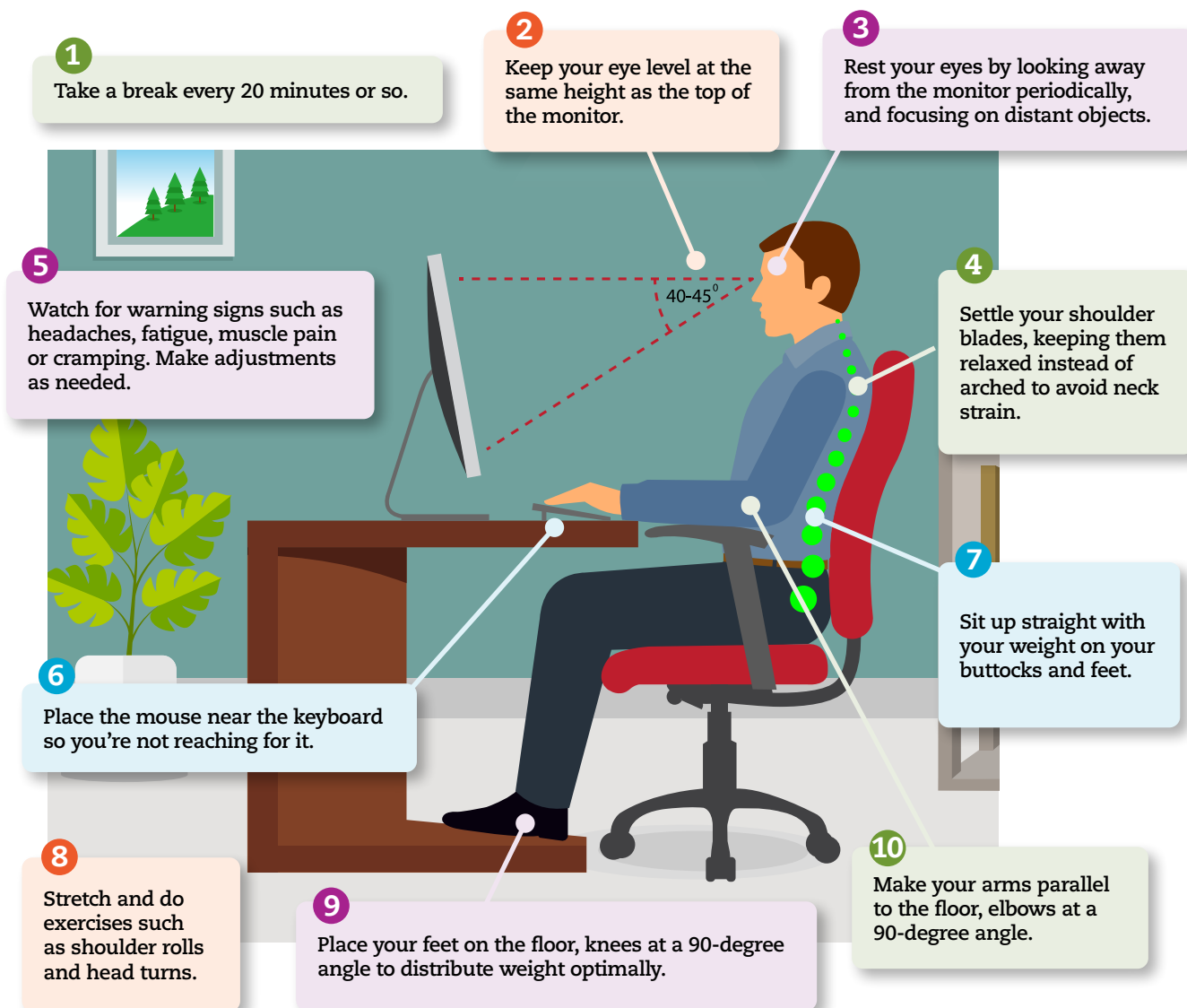
**Hartford
HealthCare**

Also in this issue:

- Swimmers paddle the Sound
- Keeping an eye on DEI
- Writer finds inspiration in family recipes



Top 10 Ways to Monitor Your Workstation Health



Thanks to Scott Applebaum, LATC, CEAS, of the HHC Rehab Network for his help creating these tips.

On the cover: From left to right, are: Dawn Filippa, RN, system manager for Neighborhood Health operations; Melayzia Rivera, Neighborhood Health registrar; Kelly Toth, APRN, system director for Neighborhood Health operations; Roslyn Williams, Neighborhood Health patient care technician; Paul Yeomans, RN, Neighborhood Health nurse; and Nicolas Valente, Neighborhood Health screener.

Photo by: Chris Rakoczy

CORRECTION: A photo accompanying a story on the Parish Nurse Program at St. Vincent's Medical Center in the summer issue of Moments incorrectly identified the nurse at center as Marilyn Faber. The photo was actually of Chaplain Doreen Bottone with spiritual care services at MidState Medical Center. We apologize for the error.



Beating Bias to Build Better Teams

By Susan McDonald

In the first overview of its kind, an Institute of Living (IOL) leader published research into the role implicit bias plays in collaboration between healthcare professionals.

The article — “Exploring Implicit Influences on Interprofessional Collaboration: A Scoping Review” — was published in the *Journal of Interprofessional Care*. Dr. Javeed Sukhera, chair of psychiatry at the IOL and chief of psychiatry at Hartford Hospital, was lead author.

“We know there are multiple tensions that can influence team performance, especially in healthcare,” Dr. Sukhera explained. “We also know that implicit biases can influence team communication and trust, ultimately affecting quality of care. That’s why we wanted to understand how bias influences team collaboration on multiple levels.”

The research is the first comprehensive review of how biases — related to race, age and gender — influence collaboration in healthcare.

“We found team members internalized biases about their profession. Perceptions of the biases influenced their attitudes and behavior toward themselves and others. This hindered meaningful, equitable collaboration,” he said.

In response, he said, people often adapt how they collaborate to reflect power structures and organizational hierarchy. The behavior of others can also condition some healthcare professionals to view themselves as having certain attributes or expertise.

“Learning how personal and professional identity influences collaboration is essential to help us build the health system of the future. If a team member sees themselves as powerless or lacking authority, they tend to disengage. To have a high-functioning team, it’s essential that everyone feels they belong,” Dr. Sukhera said.

Sarah Lewis, vice president of health equity for Hartford HealthCare, said the research contributes “to our shared understanding of how bias influences the human experience in

healthcare settings.”

“This research points us in the direction of the connection between colleague wellbeing, belonging and psychological safety,” Lewis said. “Improving our ability to succeed along all of these dimensions can positively influence how we care for our patients, and how we show up in the communities we serve.”

Leadership, both Dr. Sukhera and Lewis agreed, also plays a key role. Success, Lewis noted, “depends on our ability to bring everyone’s voice to the table, and that requires an inclusive environment fostered by inclusive leaders.”

“Having the ability to understand and mitigate biases are not skills traditionally expected of healthcare leaders,” she said. “We are learning that, going forward, they must be. The health and well-being of our workforce and our patients depends on it.”

Interestingly enough, Dr. Sukhera’s research uncovered the tendency of team members who see themselves as less dominant — social workers in one case — to align with those they perceive to be more dominant to increase their influence. These findings, he stressed, should help promote future research on bias and belonging in healthcare.

“We know bias can adversely influence healthcare quality. We hope this will spark further research on how bias, privilege and power intersect between and among different health professions,” he said.



Banners noting Equity as the fifth value were hung around hospital campuses.

Photo by Steve Coates

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Understanding & Growth Come From Within

By Susan McDonald

Every day, more than 27,000 people across the state and beyond report to work for Hartford HealthCare in clinical areas, offices, laboratories, boiler rooms and from remote locations.

Each brings a variety of life experiences, cultural backgrounds, personal preferences, native languages and opinions. Pamela Lofton-McGeorge is part of the team empowering their unique voices forth to improve work environments, better reflect the rich diversity of colleagues and, ultimately, improve the care patients receive.

As senior director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, Lofton-McGeorge helped create system-wide colleague resource groups (CRGs) meeting regularly to address concerns, expand understanding and build upon cultural humility.

“Often, people feel like they’re looking into an organization. In this case, we’re looking out,” Lofton-McGeorge said, calling CRGs microcosms of communities within the organization that might feel invisible. “These are marginalized groups that play a part in the make-up of our organization. As we continue to build out a culture of equity and inclusion, we need to hear their voices and make changes.”

After the police killing of George Floyd triggered national unrest last year, the need to address colleague equity became more acute, she explained. Establishing CRGs is part of a 10-point plan system leadership put in place to listen.

“People have the option to be uncomfortable during change or remain status quo. Race and other demographic differences can make us uncomfortable because we don’t know much about them. But, when we’re uncomfortable, we know change is working and people are trying to understand,” she said.

This spring, HHC colleagues were invited to apply to join the CRGs, explaining their desire to participate.

Colleague Resource Group launches included:

- Black and African-American CRG in February
- Asian American and Pacific Islander CRG in March
- Hispanic and Latinx CRG in April
- LGBTQ+ CRG in May

“We can never walk in each other’s shoes, but we can listen to the experience of others and what matters most to them,” Lofton-McGeorge said. “Meetings are a time to reflect, listen and learn. It’s okay to be uneasy. We don’t have all the answers but we can learn and ask questions.”

In doing so, allies are created. When a member of the LGBTQ+ CRG shared a personal healthcare experience, others felt the colleague’s anguish.

“We become allies for those individuals, which says, ‘If it matters to you, it matters to me,’” Lofton-McGeorge noted.

CRGs — each has approximately 40 members representing medical staff and every level of colleagues — have executive sponsors from the CEO cabinet who listen to members’ concerns and help navigate the system to achieve group objectives. Each CRG establishes a charter, and sets measurable goals and objectives.

Colleagues beyond CRGs are connected to actions through subcommittee membership and promoting and participating in the efforts.

“Our responsibility is to bring others along with our experience, which builds alliances and understanding,” she explained. “We want to increase awareness about the experience of others and the bias we all have.”

Each CRG leadership team will present their group’s mission, vision and values to guide activities in 2022 in an attempt to ensure the system fosters a culture of equity and inclusion. Look for updates in newsletters in the coming months.



Amina Weiland, resource coordinator, Hartford HealthCare Center for Healthy Aging, and Debby Zakka-Pongoh, a patient service coordinator, Hartford HealthCare Medical Group, take a break during last summer's Riverfront Asian Festival in Hartford. They are members of the Asian-American and Pacific Islander CRG.

Photo by Sreedhar Poetti



Members of the Hispanic and Latinx CRG attended the Hispanic Health Council Summer Salsa Festival in Hartford in September. From left to right are: Mona Heredia, senior program manager; Jennifer Doran, senior director, digestive health and surgery; José Garcia, digestive health and surgery business manager; Joel Jacome, insurance specialist; and Amanda Buade, program coordinator.



At Hartford PrideFest in September, the LGBTQ+ CRG was represented by, from left to right: Dr. Derek Fenwick, psychologist, Institute of Living (IOL); Dr. Laura Saunders, clinical coordinator, Right Track/LGBTQ+ program at the IOL; and Brett Caisse, East Region medical staff specialist.

Photo by Bryan Caisse



Connie Santana, surgical clinical reviewer, left, Wilson Miranda, registrar on the mobile team, and Keishla Rodriguez, bariatric patient navigator, make music at the Windham Latin Festival last summer.

Photo by Chris Rakoczy



Members of the Asian-American and Pacific Islander Colleague Resource Group hand out goodies at the Riverfront Asian Festival. From left, they are: Amina Weiland; Kesha Shah; Shantel Nobel; and Hima Katrapati.

Photo by Sreedhar Poetti

Personal Stories Drive Colleagues to Volunteer

The applications from colleagues to participate in a Colleague Resource Group (CRG) were windows into the essence of who they are and what challenges, hopes and visions they harbor for the future. Consider feedback from some chosen to join CRGs.



Marleny Mangual, MBA, practice manager with Ayer Neuroscience Institute, Hispanic/LatinX CRG:

“My goal is to use this experience to interact and learn from others, and create connections When

we unite and work together, we are able to teach, coach and mentor others, (and can) develop and implement processes to provide a great experience for everyone. Being 100 percent Puerto Rican and growing up as a first-generation Latina in the U.S. was a challenge. I constantly heard the negative stereotypes associated with my culture, (but) it made me stronger and capable of addressing inequality and inclusion in my roles. Additionally, I used this as a motivating force in my success. The CRG is a way to identify and focus my efforts to make positive contributions to my workplace's culture, operations and overall success.”



Chamia Asberry, team lead, Access Center, Black and African-American CRG:

“I wanted to join to be the voice behind the voice. I want to be able to mentor and provide others with the skills they need to grow

within Hartford HealthCare. I am fortunate to have worked for Hartford HealthCare for 13 years and I want to be able to help the next generation.”



Jennifer Doran, MBA, MHA, senior director of practice strategy and operations, with Hartford HealthCare Medical Group, co-chair of the Hispanic/Latinx CRG:

“I joined because I want my children to

have a better tomorrow ... not to fear their history, social differences, economic standing, sex, skin color, cultural differences, accent or even choice of food won't allow them a chance to show their

talents and be their genuine selves.

“One (thing) of most value to me is the opportunity to be a trailblazer in the work we're doing to improve inclusion and diversity ... to break down barriers and drive change. Our CRG (is) about changing the tone. It's about education and the willingness to be curious and unbiased. (We're) focusing on building connections across HHC so we're looking from new lenses and gaining different perspectives to make true, sustainable, positive change toward an even better tomorrow.”



Shasi Malipeddi, director, IT security applications, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) CRG:

“I came to the United States about 20 years back with no

knowledge of what I was getting into. Culturally, it was as different as it could get from what I grew up with in India. Over the years, several people helped me navigate the cultural differences and expectations. Being a part of this CRG helps me help others who are traveling similar paths as mine, as well grow myself in learning from the diverse colleague population in our company.

“Sometimes, we just need someone to hear us without judgment. This CRG is one such resource where colleagues from all AAPI countries can feel safe and talk about any issues or concerns. I expect to learn about all the cultures that make up the AAPI region and work as a group to shine a light on the contributions of this diverse group not only to HHC but our local community.”



Valerie Martin, LCSW, a social worker at the Institute of Living and co-chair of the LGBTQ+ CRG:

“As a professionally out member of the LGBTQ+ community, social

worker and vocal advocate for all marginalized populations, I was proud to see Hartford HealthCare prioritize the needs of my community. I felt compelled to be involved in the process of ensuring HHC would be sensitive and visibly inclusive through our actions, process and environments. Every person deserves to feel safe, respected and supported in being their authentic selves.”



Let the Holiday Countdown Begin

After a life-altering holiday season in 2020, we were curious about how everyone planned to celebrate this year. This is what you told us:

60%



Home with just
immediate family

37%



Gathering with a
small group of
family and friends

3%



Busting loose at
a huge holiday
extravaganza

All Greek to Me? Not Even Close

#

BY THE NUMBERS

Patients come through the doors of Hartford HealthCare facilities often unable to communicate with caregivers because their primary language is something other than English. In those cases, we provide translation services. Here are the top three languages spoken by patients at our facilities in July 2021, based on requests for translators.

Central Region

- Spanish
- Polish
- American Sign Language (ASL)

East Region

- Spanish
- ASL
- Haitian Creole

Farfield Region

- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Haitian Creole

HHC at Home

- Spanish
- ASL
- Chinese/Mandarin

Hartford HealthCare Medical Group

- Spanish
- ASL
- Chinese/Mandarin

Hartford Region

- Spanish
- Portuguese
- ASL

Northwest Region

- Spanish
- ASL
- Turkish





Need to Polish Your Public Speaking? Join the Club

What's your biggest fear? According to the National Institute of Mental Health, nearly 75 percent of Americans are afraid of public speaking, more than those fearing death, heights or spiders. Interesting, right?

In June 2019, the Central Region started offering colleagues a chance to overcome public speaking anxiety and enhance their leadership skills within The Hospital of Central Connecticut and MidState Medical Center, all thanks to Toastmasters International.

The non-profit organization, around since 1924, helps people become more confident in their speaking ability and communication. There are more than 16,000 individual clubs across the globe — including the Central Region chapter, the only one within Hartford HealthCare.

“When you officially become a member of Toastmasters, you’re put on a pathway based on what you want to achieve and what it will take to get you to that point,” said Laura Prior, MSN, APRN, manager of radiology nursing and advanced practitioners with Midstate Radiology Associates, who joined the Toastmasters Club after it started. “I knew I was on a path to leadership, so I wanted to be able to master the skill of public speaking.”

The Central Region Toastmasters Club meets twice monthly and members are tasked with giving pre-planned and timed speeches, doing improv on random topics, and getting feedback to enhance their abilities. That includes a grammarian who points out the number of filler words — “uh” or “um” — used.



Dr. Mohammed Shams, chief of medicine in the Central Region, sought help speaking for presentations he must deliver.

Dr. Mohammed Shams, Central Region chief of medicine, is part of the club and reported seeing tremendous improvement in his speaking abilities.

“I can engage my audience and my colleagues in a way I wasn’t able to before through public speaking,” Dr. Shams said. “I can also articulate my thoughts without having to rush and speak with purpose.”

Amina Weiland, resource coordinator for HHC’s Center for Healthy Aging and vice president of membership for the region’s Toastmasters Club, said the group’s success goes beyond content.

“We get to know each other and there’s so much camaraderie and support to make sure each person in the group feels respected and confident,” Weiland said. “We all have the same goal of becoming better communicators.”

Anyone interested in joining the Central Region club can reach out to amina.weiland@hhchealth.org.

—Brian Spyros

Other members of the group, from left to right, include: Hima Katrapati, Robert Sims, Laura Prior, Amina Weiland and Mona Heredia.

Photo by Brian Spyros



One Beat Ahead with Cardiac First

Fifty-year-old John Aston's prosthetic aortic valve made the standard ablation procedure he needed to ease a blockage too risky, so, in July, Dr. Aneesh Tolat became the first in the nation to use new technology called inHEART to help.

Dr. Tolat, a cardiac electrophysiologist and director of ventricular tachycardia (VT) ablation at the Hartford HealthCare Heart & Vascular Institute, used the inHEART technology to generate a 3D map that guided placement of the catheter in the patient's heart.

Aston had undergone aortic valve replacement in January, complicating his more recent need for the VT ablation. The procedure uses cold or heat energy to create tiny scars in the heart to block abnormal signals causing rapid, erratic heartbeat. VT occurs when the heart's electrical signals cause the lower heart chambers (ventricles) to beat too quickly.

Having the 3D map as a guide for inserting the catheter into Aston's left ventricle made the procedure safer, more efficient and quicker, Dr. Tolat said.

"The inHEART scan gave us a vast amount of information we wouldn't have otherwise had," he explained. "By combining the scan with our real-time mapping (during the procedure), we were

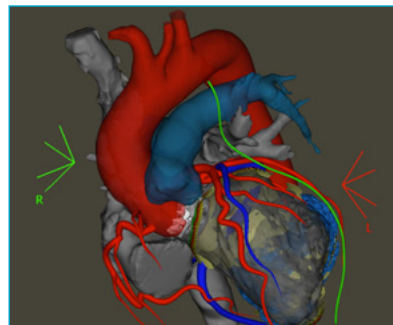
able to see the areas we knew we needed to stay away from much more clearly."

Cardiac CT scans taken during the procedure are sent via the cloud to inHEART to be processed by trained case analysts using proprietary technology.

inHEART was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 2021 for commercial use. Dr. Tolat was the first physician to use it outside a research environment.

"For patients with diseased hearts, this will likely become the standard practice prior to their having a VT or PVC (premature ventricular contraction) ablation," he said. "Having this technology puts Hartford HealthCare at the forefront for patients needing these procedures."

—Elissa Bass



The inHEART CT scan helps guide physicians in placing a catheter in diseased hearts. New technology overlays the scan with a catheter map used during a procedure.

Vascular Quality Program Earns National Recognition

Hartford Hospital earned three stars from the Society for Vascular Surgery's Vascular Quality Initiative (SVS VQI) for actively participating in the Registry Participation Program.

The mission of the SVS VQI is to improve patient safety and the quality of vascular care delivery by providing web-based collection, aggregation and analysis of clinical data for all patients undergoing specific treatments. The participation awards program encourages active participation in the 12 registries.

Participating centers can earn up to three stars for actions leading to better patient care, including:

- Completeness of long-term, follow-up reporting, based on the percentage of patients for whom they have at least nine months of data.

- Physician attendance at semi-annual meetings of a regional quality group.
- Initiation of quality improvement activities based on VQI data.
- Number of vascular registries in which the center participates.

"Our team is dedicated to providing exceptional care to patients. We use VQI data to measure the effectiveness of our programs and improve our long-term patient care," said Dr. Akhilesh Jain, Hartford Hospital's director of vascular and endovascular surgery.

Biannual regional meetings allow physicians, nurses, data managers, quality officers and others to meet, share information and ideas, and learn from each other. Members use VQI data to significantly improve the delivery of vascular care locally, regionally and nationally, reducing complications and expenses.

—Steve Coates



Putting the Brakes on Impaired Driving

A new campaign, funded in part by a \$550,000 Connecticut Department of Transportation highway safety grant to Hartford Hospital, brings a plea from state trauma centers to people debating whether to have “just one more” and drive impaired.

Not One More is part of a campaign that incorporates ads on local television, streaming audio, billboards, social media and the web to prevent the incidence of impaired driving due to alcohol and drugs.

The message Not One More highlights the potential domino effect of impaired driving. In a powerful video, viewers are transported from a restaurant to a busy emergency room and then an operating room as teams fight to save the life of someone who chose to get

behind the wheel impaired.

“My colleagues and I see the devastating effects of impaired driving every day,” said Dr. Jonathan Gates, chief of trauma at Hartford Hospital. “Not only does driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs cause tremendous physical harm to those involved in impaired driving accidents, the emotional impact of these tragedies ripples throughout our communities.”

As part of the Not One More campaign, Connecticut drivers are encouraged to sign an online pledge that they will not drive impaired. The campaign website includes personal stories of healthcare heroes and their experiences treating victims of impaired driving, resources such as a blood alcohol content calculator, information on substance abuse support and related community programs and events.

Sign the pledge at NotOneMore.org.

—Brenda Kestenbaum



Members of the Hartford Hospital Emergency Department flank a mobile billboard truck that started broadcasting the “Not One More” campaign message around the state.

Photo by Chris Rakoczy

Backus Raises First Flag for Organ Donor Awareness

Gabriel Pujols would have turned 36 on July 23, celebrating with his wife Heidi and 1-year-old son Gabriel Jr. Unfortunately, he passed away unexpectedly in February at Backus Hospital.

Instead of cake and ice cream, his family gathered on his birthday to raise a “Donate Life” flag in honor of Gabriel’s decision to be an organ donor. When he died, his heart was implanted in a 60-year-old man in cardiac failure, saving his life.

“This is the very first flag-raising we have had

at Backus,” said Donna Handley, hospital president. “In raising this flag, the Pujols family will start a tradition for all those who give life to others in the future. Please know we grieve with you and we celebrate Gabriel’s life today.”

Attending the ceremony — in both English and Spanish — were Gabriel’s widow, his son and stepdaughter, brother and cousin, as well as Backus colleagues and representatives of New England Donor Services (NEDS).

“This was something pretty special to have on his birthday, to be able to remember him,” a tearful Heidi said.

Heather Harris, NEDS hospital relations coordinator, said Backus typically sees one organ donation a year. By July 2021, she said there were four. Raising a “Donate Life” flag is always offered to a family, and this was the first time it was done at Backus.

Harris read in English, and Ingrid Palacios, NEDS multicultural community program manager, read in Spanish a poem called “My Final Gift.” Hospital Chaplain Mary Horan gathered the family in front of the flag pole to hold hands and share a prayer of gratitude, for both Gabriel’s life, and his gift of life in death. The flag, emblazoned with the phrase Done Vida (Donate Life), was then raised.

“His heart is beating in someone else’s chest,” Gabriel’s brother Marco said. “That is an amazing thing.”

—Elissa Bass



The family of Gabriel Pujols watch as Backus Hospital staff raised a Donate Life flag honoring his decision to donate organs after his death earlier in 2021.

Photo by Jeff Evans



Members of the care team, from left, Natalie Goldberg, Madelyn Filomeno, Addison Koehler, Amy Mecham and Crystal Bellemere surround a patient as he was released from Hartford Hospital for continued care in a rehabilitation facility.

Photo by Allison Zaudke, PT

Rehab Team Achieves COVID Feat with Critically Ill Patient

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the respiratory systems of millions of Americans, including a 27-year-old who came into Hartford Hospital with the potentially lethal virus, pulmonary nodular amyloidosis and Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS).

The man struggled to breathe and caregivers eventually placed him on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) equipment, which provided cardiac and respiratory support that allowed his body to rest.

While hospitalized, the man also received care from the Hartford Hospital Acute Care Rehabilitation Department. Eventually, the team was celebrated as the first in Connecticut to mobilize a patient on ECMO out of bed. With their help, he was later successfully weaned from ECMO support and transitioned to a rehabilitation hospital to continue his recovery.

—Ken Harrison



Rainbow Bright

June was an especially colorful time at Hartford HealthCare as teams across the system celebrated Pride Month in a variety of ways, from planning parades to donning their best bright colors of the rainbow, an international symbol of LGBTQ+ pride and identity.

—Susan McDonald



Pride, inclusion and love were on display as dozens of colleagues, students and patients at the Institute of Living (IOL) hosted a lively parade. With homemade posters, rainbow streamers, colorful flags and clothing, the group trotted their good vibes around the IOL grounds, and were met with cheers of support from onlookers.

Photos by Brenda Kestenbaum



Members of the Access Center team in Hartford, above, literally formed the rainbow with their colorful attire during a Pride Month celebration organized by the Compassionate Associates Recognizing Everyone (CARE) employee engagement team there.

Photo by Rusty Kimball

Swimmers Dive Back in the Water for 2021

Fair skies and following seas set the perfect stage for the St. Vincent's Medical Center 34th Annual Swim Across the Sound Marathon on Saturday, August 7.

Approximately 70 swimmers, accompanied by a fleet of 75 escort and 12 law enforcement boats, took to Long Island Sound in Port Jefferson, NY, and swam across to Bridgeport

to raise money and support for those battling cancer and their families.

HHC colleagues and spectators gathered at Captain's Cove Seaport in Bridgeport to cheer on the swimmers and boat captains in what turned out to be a thrilling finish.

—Anne Rondepierre-Riczu



Bridgeport Mayor Joe Ganim (in white shirt) and Fairfield Region President William Jennings (grey shirt) welcome solo swimmer Andy Rieger, the first to cross the finish line, completing the Swim in 5:56 hours, a new course record.

Photo by Amy Mortensen



For raising the most money - \$45,000 - Team Boo's Crew was given the inaugural Ron Bianchi Fundraiser Award. The team, headed by Captain Jeff Lever, right, was formed to raise money in memory of Lever's sister, Beth "Boo" Hare, a nurse at St. Vincent's for 37 years who lost her battle with cancer in 2020. The team raised enough money to have a plaque put up, permanently naming Hare's former office after her.

Photo by Amy Mortensen



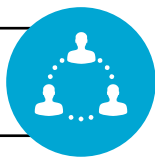
Judy Nunes, senior director of the Ayer Neuroscience Institute, joined this year's Swim Across the Sound as a perimeter boat. She and her furry first mate, Rudder, helped keep the field safe for swimmers aboard her tugboat, Tuggly 2.0.

Photo by Judy Nunes



It was all hands on deck for fan-favorite, St. Vincent's Medical Center Emergency Department team Code Blue Fish, which received the Dream of Life Award. From left to right, the team included: Ann Gorton, tech coordinator; Jose Collado, former ERT now medical technologist in the lab; Ben Miller, scribe; Alex Vuolo, PA; Jaime Chila, RN; and Denae Sheahan, ERT.

Photo by Amy Mortensen



Hartford HealthCare might be where we work, but when we asked you where you find fun, relaxation or deeper meaning in your lives, we were astonished at the variety of hobbies and activities you pursue in your spare time. Here are a few of those stories, and we'll have more in upcoming issues of *Moments*. [To share your hobby, email susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org](mailto:susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org).

Acting Allows BJI Tech to be Someone Else — Even a Villain! (Cue Evil Laughter)

Jason Mullis

**Sterilization technician,
Bone & Joint Institute**

By day, 33-year-old Jason Mullis ensures that all instruments headed for the Bone & Joint Institute operating rooms are clean and sterile. A sterilization technician, his job revolves around the little details that make an OR ready for patients. By night (pre-COVID, at least), he steps into character and becomes someone else, under the lights at the Windham Theatre Guild in Willimantic.

How did you get into acting?

In high school, I would act up sometimes and a teacher suggested I take my rambunctious energy and put it toward the school play. I was always trying to express myself creatively and since I was not good at art or music, this was a positive outlet. I knew since first stepping onto that stage that this was right for me.

What is the Windham Theatre Guild? How long have you been with them?

It is a community theater group in my hometown of Willimantic. They have been part of the city for more than 30 years and have gained a wonderful reputation. I have been acting with them since 2013, and I consider that my stage home, though I have also done shows for the Little Theatre in Manchester.

How did the pandemic affect the organization?

As one might suspect, in theater you need to be

in close proximity to other actors and sometimes even share an act of physical intimacy like a kiss, so theater during the pandemic was shut down for pretty much everyone everywhere, even Broadway. I know some local theaters tried to put on productions via Zoom and others had performances where the actors were socially distanced with an online audience viewing. But, they lacked a certain authenticity to me.

What is your favorite type of role?

Playing a villain is an all-time favorite just because of the fun you can have with the character, depending on the play. When building these characters, you can give them certain traits or nuances that can add to their wickedness. And, getting the right reaction is key, too. You want to make it someone the audience loves to hate.

What is your favorite play?

A favorite play I starred in was the stage adaptation of "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest" where I



Bone & Joint Institute sterilization technician Jason Mullis appears in action during a production of "A Nice Family Gathering" at the Windham Theatre Guild.

played Cheswick. My favorite play of all time is “Little Shop of Horrors” because who doesn’t love a singing, people-eating plant from outer space? Plus the songs are great!

What is your favorite piece of dialogue?

It may sound cliché, but really anything by Shakespeare because there is hidden symbolism in much of his writing. Specifically, the Queen Mab monologue from “Romeo and Juliet.” It’s basically Mercutio making fun of Romeo about his long-winded speeches by giving him a long-winded speech.

What is coming up for you?

I’m on a bit of a happy hiatus since my daughter was born in 2019. At the moment, I have nothing planned for the immediate future, but I know the stage will always be there waiting for me to return. And, I promise I will return (cue evil laughter)!

—Elissa Bass

Marathoner Keeps Eyes Trained on the Finish Line

Dr. Jeffrey Cohen

**Chief Clinical Operating Officer,
Hartford HealthCare**

Dr. Jeffrey Cohen spends a lot of time running around. As Hartford HealthCare’s chief clinical operating officer, he works to enhance clinical integration and operation efficiencies from Fairfield to Westerly. When not running (or driving) around the state, he can be found hitting the pavement for marathon training.

When did you start running competitively?

I ran in college and medical school, but didn’t take it seriously until my late 30s. One day, I was watching the NYC marathon on TV. There is a key part of the race where the runners descend off the Queensborough Bridge and step foot in Manhattan for the first time. The next year, I trained and got into the 1997 NYC marathon.



Dr. Jeffrey Cohen pauses after completing the Brooklyn Half Marathon.

In what kind of events do you take part?

While I ran 5- and 10K races as I trained for my first marathon, my enjoyment comes from competing in and completing longer races. Once I started running marathons, I would intersperse them with half marathons, for training purposes as well as the feeling that even that distance was an achievement I could celebrate.

What is your training regime like?

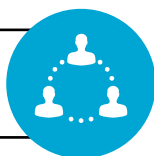
I should point out that my reason for running long distances is so that, within reason, I can eat anything I want. Burning that many calories gives me latitude to not have to count calories I consume. However, I do try to eat healthy as much as possible.

When actively training, I run four to five days a week, which is all my work schedule allows for since I was never great at running in the early morning. One of our purchases during the pandemic was a Peloton bike so I am looking forward to engaging that more frequently in the colder months when I tend to run less.

Do you run with friends or family?

I will run most often with my wife. Our springer spaniel accompanies me on shorter runs. Once in a while, I can draft one of my four daughters to go with me.

Continued on page 18



In how many races have you competed?

Not sure of the exact number, but I do remember all 10 marathons, including four Hartford marathons and four NYC marathons.

What is your greatest accomplishment as a runner?

Crossing the finish line in my first marathon in 1997. I developed severe leg pain about two-thirds through the race, which I pushed through. I also have wonderful memories of the marathons where my wife joined me to cross the finish line together.

How do you overcome injuries?

I have incurred numerous nagging injuries over the years, most of which were short-lived and easy to deal with. My best advice is to listen to your body and not try to run through the injury just to stay on your training schedule. I have had to postpone a couple of races because I didn't take my own advice.

Do you have future races planned?

I am planning to run a couple of half marathons. My main goal is the Brooklyn Half Marathon, cancelled twice during the pandemic, next spring. The last time I ran it was in a cold rain, and I want to run it again as it courses past a number of areas where my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were born and raised.

—Emily Perkins

Author Finds Inspiration in Life, Family Recipes

Caela Collins

**Administrative associate,
Hartford HealthCare at Home**

We met Caela Collins in June 2021, when Congress declared Juneteenth a federal holiday commemorating the emancipation of African-American slaves. She shared a poem she had been commissioned to write for this year's observance.

Today is Juneteenth

by Caela Collins

So often I crave the taste of freedom, that I forget there was ever an evolution to my flavor profile.

My tongue has tasted the delicacies that my ancestors insured.

I am in a fortunate position where my soul does not ache for unbridled joy.

Although there are many strides to be made to further the freedoms I currently have, I will never deny the luxuries that have been offered to me through generational sacrifice.

On this day, I smile and dance in the streets that my heels were once foreign to.

I triumph in the moment that is now and give ode to those who made this day a reality.

Dear ancestors, you live vicariously through me and I will feast on the serendipitous freedom that is now coined as everyday life.

I live in color because it is the pigment of my skin that has afforded me this prestigious pride. Today is a day I celebrate the blessing it is to be Black.

Today is the day I honor my freedom and carry out an undeniably beautiful legacy that is steeped in gratefulness.

Juneteenth is the day in which the taste of freedom is truly ripe.

The poem was commissioned by Let's Breakthrough Inc., a global human rights organization that uses media, art and tech to dismantle cultural norms that lead violence and discrimination.

Your poem is powerful. You have also written a children's book. Tell us about your book.

Food is Love is about a young girl, her grandmother and the importance of cooking and keeping family traditions alive, something every family of any cultural background can relate to. The main character, Catori (a Native American name/word that means spirit) is a 6-year-old girl with a vivid imagination. When her grandmother dies, she takes a magical journey through the history of food and discovers that fond memories and family recipes will keep her grandma's spirit alive in her heart forever.

How did you end up writing a children's book?

I never in a million years ever thought I'd be a writer. In school, I studied business management and studio art. When I took an editorial internship to fill up space in my college schedule, I realized the power of my voice. Because people really liked what I had to say and connected with my perspective, I decided to write more.

Did you illustrate the book as well?

I studied art in college, but I did not illustrate the book. It was important for the illustrations to be highly artistic so I oversaw the art direction. I also wanted to give the opportunity to a young, hungry artist. I put out an open call for artists. I chose an art student from Korea named Jeongin (Jen) Yoon. I'm very proud of how our artistic styles collided for the book.

Where can we find *Food is Love*?

Food is Love is sold on Amazon and Barnes & Noble (online only). It's also available at the Hamden Public Library and on the app Novel Effect. My dad is a railroad conductor and he talks about my book on the train. I've received letters from people who've said that they cried after reading it.



Caela Collins recently published a book of poetry.

What's next?

In the story, Catori and her grandmother use what they call a "scrookbook" (scrapbook/cookbook) to save their recipes and add pictures and stickers to remember their creations. I'm adding a mini activity booklet designed by another great artist, Kimberly (Kim) Balacuit, so kids can make their own scrookbook in a special edition of *Food is Love* that I'm currently working on. It will have a new cover and keto, gluten-free, vegetarian, vegan and meat lover recipes for the whole family, curated by culinary nutritionist Frankie Douglas. I'm also expanding the story as a chapter book series. Catori has so many more adventures in her as she gets older!

—Hilary Waldman

Doctors Working in Concert – Cue, Maestro!

Dr. Karen Blank

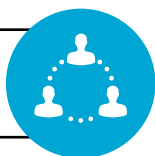
**Psychiatrist and department consultant,
Institute of Living**

Doctors from around Connecticut meet regularly but it's not patients they discuss, it's music. The Connecticut Doctors' Orchestra (CDO), co-founded by Dr. Karen Blank, a psychiatrist and department consultant at the Institute of Living, are string musicians with a shared appreciation for music who raise awareness and funds for various causes through performances.

How did the orchestra come about?

My friend, Dr. Latha Dulipsingh, and I met at the University of Hartford's Hartt School of Music where our children were taking music lessons and playing in children's orchestras. We soon started cello study; I was pleased to find it's never too late as I started at age 50! Several years into our studies, Dr. Dulipsingh returned from a trip to England where she met a member of a doctors' orchestra at Oxford University. She suggested we start one here. We had been looking for an opportunity to get together like-minded musicians, arranging excellent musical direction and sharing our love of music with the community through fundraising concerts for medically-related causes.

Continued on page 20



What's it like to collaborate with health professionals from around the state?

During our 13 years together, one of great pleasures of being in CDO has been to play with musicians who work in a variety of healthcare settings in and outside of HHC. It has been a rare experience to get to know professionals from HHC, Trinity Health, UConn, the New Britain Department of Health, St. Mary's, private practices, and professors in related fields. It has also been remarkable to see relationships develop between healthcare professionals at the widest spectrum of experience from medical students and residents to senior physicians, all united around our shared love of music. Our musicians have musical backgrounds along a wide spectrum from advanced conservatory training to intermediate Suzuki method students. We all benefit from ongoing, wonderful collaborations between extraordinary musicians from the Hartford Symphony Orchestra.

How many people make up the orchestra and what are some of their professional specialties?

We hover between 14 and 15 string players, and are always interested in welcoming more. We have worked with approximately 25 musicians over the years. Dr. Dulipsingh is an endocrinologist for St. Francis and regional physician executive for medical specialties for Trinity Health. Members' subspecialties include neurosurgery, psychiatry, infectious disease, endocrinology, orthopedics, internal medicine, pediatrics as well as professors of chemistry, sociology, women's studies and family and couple therapy.

How often does the group rehearse and perform?

We rehearse two to three times a month on a schedule that works around our conductor's Hartford Symphony Orchestra availability. We give formal performances approximately three times a year and, in addition, hold open rehearsals in nursing homes, assisted-living facilities and memory care centers.

Tell us about the philanthropic side of the orchestra.

Performances are collaborations with community partners. At each performance, we raise awareness and encourage voluntary contributions for a health-related cause such as Alzheimer's disease, breast cancer, UConn's dental outreach program, Jonathan's Dream accessible playgrounds, Adopta Una Familia supporting healthcare in Ecuador, and our most successful fundraising effort raising more than \$5,000 for the Faith Mulira Health Care Center in Uganda.

What pleases you most about the ensemble?

I love being part of a group of colleagues who are students, intent on learning to be better musicians and sharing music with the community. I have especially loved bringing live musical performance to music lovers who no longer have access. It is a wonder to witness the joy and gratitude experienced by older persons living in facilities listening to us perform.

—Brenda Kestenbaum



Dr. Karen Blank, third from right, a psychiatrist and department consultant at the Institute of Living, poses with fellow musicians in the Connecticut Doctors' Orchestra.



Principal: ‘They are My True Purpose’

By Elissa Bass

In high school in New York City, Lamirra Simeon’s guidance counselor talked to her about the future.

“I remember that counselor saying to me, ‘Lamirra, you don’t want to be an obstetrician. You want to be a midwife.’ And I didn’t know what a midwife was, so I looked it up and I thought, ‘Wait a minute. A midwife isn’t a doctor. Why can’t I be a doctor?’ She was judging me on my transcript, and not on who I was,” Simeon said. “To this day, I share those transcripts with students to show them (we) are more than a piece of paper. I went on and I got my education, and no one can take that away from me. I lead by example.”

Those students attend the Joshua Center Thames Valley Clinical Day Treatment Program in Norwich, one of six sites Natchaug Hospital runs for students in grades 1–12 whose social, emotional or behavioral health issues prevent them from functioning successfully in a regular school environment. Joshua Center teaches grades seven to 12.

Simeon has been principal since 2014,

after serving as a long-term substitute special education teacher since 2007. At that time, she was pursuing a master’s in special education and was hired full time after graduating.

“I had never taught before, but Jill saw something in me,” Simeon recalled.

That “something,” said Jill Bourbeau, director of school programs for Natchaug, was Lamirra herself.

“She wasn’t your typical teacher applicant,” Bourbeau said. “But, I thought she would be really inspirational. She is someone who has the life experiences that so many of our students can relate to.”

Bourbeau said her instincts have been proven right time and time again.

“To watch her with the kids is magical,” she said. “She’s such a dynamic individual. She is a very valuable member of our staff.”

Simeon’s road to eastern Connecticut wasn’t a straight line. She was pregnant when she graduated high school, and she and her boyfriend married. He joined the Navy, and they moved around before ending up at the Naval Submarine Base in Groton. By then, there were two children. Now 42 and divorced, Simeon’s kids, 23 and 21, are starting their adult lives.

Her undergraduate degree is in behavioral science from Mercy College, her master’s from Southern Connecticut State University in special education, and she has sixth-year certificate for school administrators. She uses her education and life experience to help students and teachers navigate each day.

“These kids are coming to us out of trauma — everything you can imagine,” she said. “They have been in detention, they have been trafficked, they have been abandoned. They are what drives me, what excites me and they are my true purpose to make a difference for each of them in some way. We cater to the needs of each student. It’s like a puzzle. We just keep adjusting.”



Lamirra Simeon Photo by Jeff Evans



Taking it to THE STREETS

Understanding that healthcare doesn't only exist within the walls of medical facilities, Hartford HealthCare has long been bringing care to the communities and people we serve even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck and starkly highlighted the gaps in access to care and with care experiences.

The work — accelerated by the pandemic's demand for COVID testing and vaccination — coincided with the system's amplified diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) efforts which prompted us to meet our patients where they are, in all ways. This includes rebuilding trust in the American healthcare institution that

mistreated many minorities through the years, and mobilizing efforts to reach people living in areas, both inner city and rural, where quality healthcare has been nonexistent.

There are shiny new CareVans traversing the capital and northwest regions, there are clinics and support groups conducted in Spanish, there are special events tailored to the underserved and disenfranchised and food distribution targeting the dietary requirements of specific diseases. It happens every day at Hartford HealthCare, in every region.

—Susan McDonald

Valuing Equity

The events of 2020 prompted Hartford HealthCare to examine its values and adopt a new one — **"Equity, We do the just thing."**

While one word might seem insignificant, the addition — adopted over the summer after approval from the board of directors — is momentous, made thoughtfully, with input from colleagues across the system.

The words that proclaim our values serve as both a mirror reflecting who we are and a compass guiding us to what we aspire to be. The word — like Safety, Caring, Excellence and Integrity — is a challenge that we, after all we've experienced, are ready to face.

Perhaps Equity has always been present, embedded in each of the other four Values. But calling it out as a Value itself and using it as a measuring stick for progress as our Diversity,

Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) efforts across the system expand and yield change is how we can generate momentum and celebrate success.

Like our other Values, living up to our Equity promise will be difficult and occasionally cause us to see and think differently as we prioritize curiosity over judgment, improvement over discomfort, action over words. Therein lies the challenge and the reward.

Hartford HealthCare has been guided by four legacy Values since formation. The new one, Equity, will guide us as we provide an even better level of care and compassion for those we serve.

—Susan McDonald

East Region colleagues actively engaged with communities on more than just getting COVID vaccine into arms, although they certainly took vaccine into homes, schools and even onto a farm. Efforts include:

- Using an apartment in Willimantic's 444-unit Colonial Townhouse Apartments, colleagues created a clinic with North Central and Eastern Highlands health districts and Access Community Action Agency.
- Hosting a vaccine clinic at Windham Heights, low-income apartments in Willimantic, that attracted 75.
- Registering more than 70 Groton high school students for the vaccine through the school-based health clinic. Parents like Heather Hanson, who came to sign consent for her 16-year-old, Kimberly, could also be vaccinated. Getting the vaccine, the teen softball player said, "makes me happy. I'm so excited to get back to normal."
- Partnering with the state Department of Public Health and United Way of Southeastern Connecticut on the "Trusted Messenger Program" fighting vaccine hesitancy. More than 30 representatives from New London County social service departments, private nonprofits

and others gathered to hear how to effectively talk to clients about COVID vaccines and gather resources to schedule appointments.

- Sponsoring the Windham County Latino Fest, bringing HHC providers and colleagues to downtown Willimantic to distribute information about such services as bariatrics, cardiac health, movement disorders and women's health. A mobile vaccine clinic was stationed just inside the gates, and three Zumba classes were taught.
- Connecting with Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center (PNC) in Stonington to provide tailored food boxes to PNC food pantry clients with specific health issues like diabetes or heart disease. Community health teams trained PNC volunteers to pack boxes with beneficial foods, recipes and health information.
- Expanding Backus Hospital's longtime farm stand to Windham Hospital, with weekly sessions from July through fall. The Healthy Rx Program also expanded to Windham, giving nutritionally at-risk families vouchers toward the purchase of fresh fruits and veggies at the farm stand.

—Elissa Bass



Backus Registered Dietitian Katie Field, right, checks the ingredients of some popular cereals with Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center volunteer Jack Jacobs. Field taught volunteers about food choices specific to several health conditions, including kidney disease, heart disease and diabetes as part of a collaborative program between Hartford HealthCare and the center to provide information about healthy food choices to families served by the Center's food pantry.

Photo by Jeff Evans

East Region

Central Region colleagues are fully committed to the communities served and recognize that commitment often needs to go beyond the confines of our hospitals to reach people where they live and work. Efforts include:

- Supporting diversity, equity and inclusion programs such as the Juneteenth Celebration at the New Britain Museum of American Art.
- Working closely with the Opportunities Industrialization Center, the oldest employment and training program in New Britain, on opportunities for out-of-school youth, age 18 to 24, to gain work experience. The Hospital of Central Connecticut does the same for New Britain High School students wanting to work in healthcare, creating a career channel with our clinical colleagues.
- After racial injustice was deemed a public health issue, collaborated with the Liberty Bank Foundation through the Meriden Provider Network on Racial Justice and Links Inc. to help provide mental health education to communities of color.
- Strengthening relationships with our community partners — local YMCAs, chambers of commerce, churches and schools — during the COVID-19 pandemic to share information and updates. When vaccine rollout began in January 2021, that outreach was again critical in ensuring people had correct information and knew where to get vaccinated. This was done through media coverage, social media interviews,

Zoom meetings, presentations and discussion with our providers. The Central Region Executive Leadership Team worked closely with area health departments to address vaccine hesitancy, especially in Black and Latinx communities.

- Bringing vaccine into communities and neighborhoods identified as having low vaccination rates, as part of our mission to make sure everyone who wants the vaccine has access to it. Micro and mobile clinics have stopped at the Spanish Health Council of Wallingford, Curtis Cultural Center and John Barry Elementary School in Meriden, Wallingford and Southington YMCAs, Plainville Recreation Department and even restaurants to reach hospitality workers. Some clinics were promoted through boots on the ground outreach with colleagues going to stores, churches and businesses to hand out flyers with vaccine information.

—Brian Spyros



Many COVID-19 vaccinations were distributed through a mega vaccine clinic at One Liberty Square in New Britain.

Photo by Rusty Kimball

Central
Region

By nature of the work they do, colleagues at the Behavioral Health Network (BHN) are often working in communities around the state. Outreach efforts include:

- Working to combat the opioid crisis in partnership with the Meriden Health Department to develop the Meriden Opioid Referral for Recovery program (MORR). Funding comes through a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant. MORR connects members of the community who have experienced overdose or opioid-related emergency with Rushford clinicians to facilitate access to treatment and other resources they may not otherwise receive. Since Rushford first began this partnership in 2018, 150 people who overdosed in Meriden have been connected to treatment. MORR teams meet people where they are and work to prevent the cycle of overdose, hospitalization, jail time or worse. A Rushford clinician is often the first person patients see at their bedside after waking up from an overdose, and clinicians often go on ride-alongs with police to help intervene in the moment.
- Starting the Meriden Early Diversion, Referral and Retention (MERR) program with the Meriden Police Department and Department of Health and Human Services. The grant-funded diversionary program gives police officers an additional resource when an arrest may be avoided and the person better served by participating in intensive mental health or crisis intervention treatment through Rushford. The program brings help those who otherwise could get lost in the cycle and miss an opportunity for recovery.
- Launching the Purple Light Project to raise money for psychiatric patients in the Hartford Hospital Emergency Department. Led by Erica Moura, manager of the Institute of Living



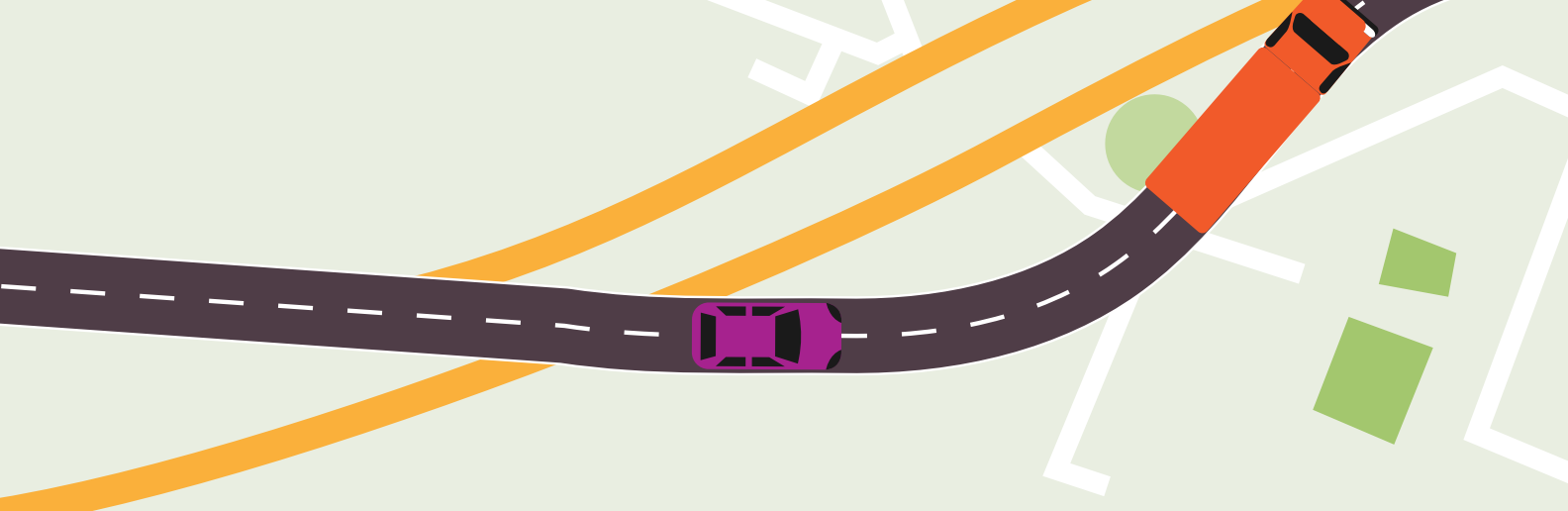
Jessica Matyka, clinical director of Rushford, spoke at a summer press conference at the Meriden Police Department about the city's partnership with Rushford and the Behavioral Health Network to offer the Meriden Opioid Referral for Recovery program.

Assessment Center, the Purple Light Project is so named for the purple pod psychiatric section of the ED where the light is always on for anyone suffering from a mental health crisis. It was initially launched to make the purple pod more humane and patient-centered and bring awareness and community support for mental health needs.

- In its first year, the Purple Light Project raised more than \$20,000 for warm winter clothing, food, hygiene products, blankets and taxi or bus vouchers for patients. The Purple Light Project now supports all seven of the system's emergency psychiatric locations. This year, through an online auction and the first Purple Light Project 5K, more than \$53,000 was raised.

—Robin Stanley

Behavioral Health Network



As a crew from Japanese Television New York rolled film, the Hartford HealthCare at Home (HHAC) team celebrated delivering its first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine into the arm of 92-year-old Manchester resident Edna Hennessey.

“This is super hero stuff we are doing,” said Bridget Kennedy, HHAC clinical team manager.

“It’s an amazing feeling to be a part of the solution,” echoed Kristen Murphy, HHAC regional director of operations.

The pair and their team prepared doses and a schedule for distributing them to clients who, for a variety of health-related reasons, cannot leave their homes to visit a vaccine clinic.

“We are excited to be able to provide this service for our patients who are most vulnerable and at risk,” said Courtney Weyel, RN who gave Hennessey her shot at home.

Sitting comfortably in the living room of the house where she has lived for the past 71 years, Hennessey smiled beneath her mask and rolled up her sleeve. She has a family history with pandemics — her father lost his first wife and infant son to the Spanish Flu, so the magnitude of the moment was not lost on her.

She repeatedly thanked Weyel, saying they were “going above and beyond.”

When asked what she looked forward to most when fully vaccinated, Hennessey glanced thoughtfully at the photos adorning the fireplace mantle.


“Seeing my grandchildren and great-grandchildren in person again. I can’t wait for that,” she said.

—Ken Harrison



Edna Hennessey was able to get her COVID-19 vaccine in the comfort of her Manchester home, courtesy of Courtney Weyel, RN, from Hartford HealthCare At Home.

Hartford HealthCare At Home



Carla Angevine, manager of community health and health promotion in the Northwest Region, and executive director of Fit Together, poses with a bike rack installed along the Sue Grossman Stillwater Greenway in Torrington.

Photo by Jessica Stewart

In the more rural Northwest Region of the state, the community's needs mirror those in more urban areas, and the efforts of Charlotte Hungerford Hospital teams work to address them with various services and initiatives. These include:

- Launching, in February 2021, of a team of community partners and “vaccine ambassadors” to connect with underserved populations, underserved neighborhoods, and people living in senior centers and public housing sites.
- Creating a “health equity” clinic in a trailer outside the Emergency Department to provide COVID-19 vaccine and other health services for 12 straight Wednesdays. Translators from New Opportunities helped patients and providers communicate seamlessly, and transportation was provided by the local Senior Center.
- Providing vaccines through pop-up sessions in congregate living areas, schools, camps, businesses, town halls, soup kitchens and for homebound patients. More than 2,000 people were vaccinated through these health equity efforts.
- Coordinating the Produce RX Program which distributed 16 weeks of fresh produce, with nutrition and other wellness information, to 50 families.
- Partnering with the NW CT Healthy Eating and Active Living Initiative to offer physical activities and nutrition education programs for all ages, both in-person and virtual.
- Installing 20 bike racks around Winsted and Torrington.
- Hosting a three-day Diabetes Boot Camp retreat for diabetic patients, in collaboration with the Neighborhood Health Initiative.

—Tim Lebouthillier



Northwest Region

In the heart of the state, Hartford may seem close to quality healthcare, but some neighborhoods and cultural groups might as well be miles away. A variety of outreach efforts, however, seek to bring care closer to home for residents. These include:

- Partnering with Woman's Ambulatory Health Services and Hartford HealthCare's Early Detection and Prevention Program, Hartford Hospital held a Women's Wellness Day, offering free services like clinical breast exams, PAP smears and HPV tests. Cholesterol screenings and physical activity assessments helped identify patients at risk for heart disease, stroke or other cardiovascular disease. On-site screenings were offered for early detection of breast and cervical cancer, including mammograms on the system's mobile mammogram vehicle.
- Presenting a series of webinars on the topic "Colon Cancer in the Black Community" in recognition of Colon Cancer Awareness Month and inviting members of the local Black fraternities and organizations. The webinars offered participants a chance to discuss colon cancer signs and symptoms with providers.
- Engaging members of underserved communities in Hartford on the importance of COVID-19 vaccination. Vice President of Community Health Greg Jones took to Facebook Live to reach people to stress access to vital services in urban areas. The series of live videos brought the message to people where they were and served as an important vehicle to getting the message out.
- Opening a 3,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art Community Pharmacy at Hartford Hospital which expanded service for patients, community residents and colleagues. Free delivery is available for residents in the community and the "Meds to Beds" service provides medication and prescriptions to patients before they are discharged from the hospital.
- Deploying members of the Northern Connecticut Black Nurses Association, co-founded by Hartford Hospital Nurse Educator Marlene Harris, RN MSN, across underserved areas, distributing masks, demonstrating their proper use and providing smaller children's masks. The group's presence in the community is deep-seeded. "We have a great collaboration with the hospital and work hard to provide things like blood pressure screenings and other services to the community," Harris shared.

—Brenda Kestenbaum

In partnership with Foot Wear With Care, the State of Connecticut and the Hartford Police Department, Hartford HealthCare providers participated in a free clinic providing Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccines and free sneakers for homeless persons at the Band Shell at Bushnell Park in Hartford.



Hartford Region

Hartford Hospital staff came together to donate food and supplies to My Sisters Place in Hartford, while Hartford Hospital advanced practitioners served meals at the shelter.



St. Vincent's Medical Center has a 115-year history of addressing health disparities and our founding was predicated on addressing a fundamental health disparity in the Bridgeport. In 1903, there was one hospital in the city and the only people who could be treated there were White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. A group of doctors wanted a hospital that would treat everyone and invited the Daughters of Charity to open one. Our very founding and essence has been an attempt to address health disparities and equity. Recent examples include:

- Coordinating the Hope Dispensary of Greater Bridgeport, a free pharmacy serving those without access to life-saving medications. In fiscal year 2020, Hope filled 11,337 prescriptions, which would have cost patients more than \$1 million if they had to be filled at a commercial pharmacy.
- Hosting annual Medical Mission at Home events, providing a full array of medical, behavioral health, foot washing and podiatry services to medically underserved in our community. This annual event provides services to more than 400 community members and allows almost 500 colleagues to actively participate in living our core values.
- Convening the Health Improvement Alliance for 15 years. This community collaborative brings together two hospitals, two health centers, seven health departments, and more than 100 community partners to conduct the Community Health Needs Assessment and develop and implement the Community Health Plan addressing unmet medical needs in underserved populations. This work reaches far into the community and delivers services to food pantries, soup kitchens and substance abuse programs. Services include diabetes and blood pressure screenings, nutritional counseling, assistance in healthy food selection, farmers markets, monthly food distribution, and activities to promote healthy lifestyles and communities.
- Bringing COVID-19 vaccinations to more than 50,000 at two mega sites, our retail pharmacy and mobile community clinics. Collaborating with the state, local health departments and community partners ensured we reached deep into the community to vaccinate underserved populations.

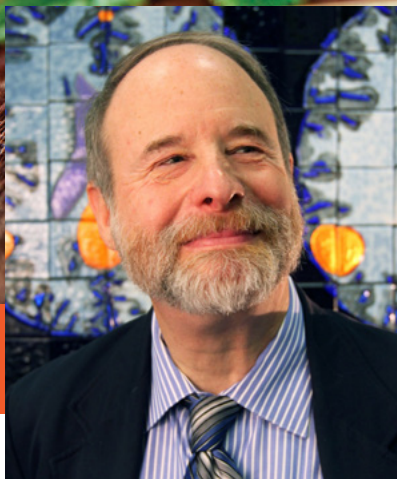
—Danielle Swift



St. Vincent's Medical Center Parish Nurse Coordinator Marilyn Faber, RN, supervises Fairfield University nursing students alongside Professor Jessica Planas, as they conduct blood pressure screenings at Hope Dispensary.

Fairfield Region

Clearing the Air Around Marijuana Legalization



Dr. Godfrey Pearlson, director of the Olin Neuropsychiatry Research Center, wrote "Weed Science: Cannabis Controversies and Challenges."

By Susan McDonald

Ask Dr. Godfrey Pearlson his thoughts on the recent legalization of recreational marijuana in Connecticut, and he literally has a book full of things to say.

Director of the Olin Neuropsychiatry Research Center at the Institute of Living, he has been investigating marijuana use, its side effects, legal ramifications, impact on driving and other related issues for much of his career.

In 2020, Dr. Pearlson published the book *Weed Science: Cannabis Controversies and Challenges*, a popular

science tome that relays personal experimentation with hashish on his 20th birthday through the ensuing 50 years as marijuana segued from a “pariah drug” to a substance two-thirds of American adults want legalized for recreational use.

“The real challenge these days is separating fact from fiction from what has yet to be proven regarding marijuana,” Dr. Pearlson said.

In the decades leading up to Connecticut’s legalization decision, he said people have worried about everything from addiction potential (somewhat valid), to impact on coronary artery disease (no epidemiological link), to ways to identify

cannabis-impaired drivers (research is ongoing), to its potential for triggering psychosis (chronic use in adolescents is connected with psychosis-related syndromes).

“There are more questions than answers,” he said simply, adding that, “More users equal more problems.”

Over more than 300 pages in *Weed Science*, Dr. Pearlson details the biological reaction cannabis has in the human body, long-appreciated benefits from medicinal use and increased potential for addiction, especially for teens.

“Traditional uses of medical marijuana are for treating pain and inflammation, epilepsy, movement disorders, memory disorders, insomnia and anxiety,” he noted, citing a 1999 Institute of Medicine report.

Use — either smoking, “vaping” or the intake of products like edibles or tinctures containing THC, the psychoactive compound in cannabis — is not without concern, however, and *Weed Science* outlines a variety of harm minimization steps Dr. Pearlson believes are needed with legalization of the drug. (See list at right).

“My biggest concern is that potent extracts with attractive flavorings aimed at teens (will be) marketed for use in small, pocket-sized, inconspicuous e-cigarettes, ostensibly to adult consumers,” he said. “These products then rapidly disseminate into an enormous teen marketplace, where use multiplies quickly with short- and long-term adverse health consequences.”

Like other medications on the market, cannabis should be examined closely and dispensed with instructions and guidance, he began.

“Harm minimization and reduction must be studied ... and there should be a list developed of individuals for whom the drug is unsuitable, such as people with established schizophrenia or bipolar disorder,” Dr. Pearlson explained. “How can we best formulate plans and policies to minimize potential harms and make cannabis use as safe as possible?”

Dr. Pearlson’s research team, including Dr. Michael Stevens and others, is part of a world-wide effort to ensure safety around legalized marijuana use. His niche is impaired driving, and how to help law enforcement recognize and prove impaired vehicle use in the field.

Harm Reduction Measures Outlined in Dr. Pearlson's Book Include:

- Setting age limits on cannabis sales, with significant penalties for underage sales. While neurobiology dictates the best age is 25, he said 21 would be more practical.
- Limiting drug potency, although he added it could inadvertently encourage an illicit market for high-potency substances.
- Reducing cannabis consumption rates by limiting the amount of product sold to individuals during a single sale, restricting sale locations and limiting advertising.
- Ensuring product uniformity and safety with national standards and quality testing.
- Pricing product appropriately. Adding too much tax will drive consumers back to unregulated illegal suppliers.
- Teaching youth facts about use, especially those at high-risk for psychosis based on family history.
- Reducing marijuana-impaired driving with evolving technology and public safety advertisements.
- Change drug laws and policies, incorporating restorative justice elements.
- Testing for acute performance-impairing effects of drugs in the workplace to prevent injuries due to cognitive impairment. Portable test devices can establish cognitive baselines.



Basking in the Lamplight

By Susan McDonald

The Marketing Communications team recently earned 29 coveted Lamplighter awards from the New England Association of Healthcare Communicators (NESHCo) for a variety of projects executed in 2020. NESHCo receives hundreds of applications for the annual awards, which are announced during the group's annual conference.

Winning projects, Hartford HealthCare (HHC) marketing-communications sponsors, and Lamplighter competition categories by award level include:

GOLD

"We Stand Together," Single Item & Series Division: Video – Short Format Series

"Ayer Neuroscience Institute Spine Wellness Center," Campaign Division: Marketing – Service Line Marketing

COVID-19 Website, Single Item & Series Division: Websites – Microsite, (only winner in category).



GOLD: Ayer Neuroscience Institute Spine Wellness Center

"One of Our Own," Single Item & Series Division – Success on a Shoestring

COVID intranet, Hybrid Division: Internal Marketing*

Daily text message, Electronic Marketing

"COVID campaign," Campaign Division: Marketing - Image/Brand Marketing

COVID Alert, Internal Marketing

SILVER

"Confronting COVID crisis," Campaign Division: Marketing - Non-Service Line Marketing

"Connecticut Orthopaedic Institute Safety Campaign," Campaign Division: Marketing – Service Line Marketing

"Surrogacy Story," Excellence in Writing: Feature Story

News hub, Hybrid Division: Content Marketing

HHC This Week, Hybrid Division: Internal Marketing and Single Item & Series Division: Publications – General Publications

"We Stand Together: Stories from the Front Line," Single Item & Series Division: Advertising – TV and Single Item & Series Division: Video – Video Short Format Series

Community education direct mail piece, Single Item & Series Division: Publications – Direct Mail

Rehab 360 Tour of Hartford Hospital Inpatient Rehab Unit, Single Item & Series Division: Video – Other

"COVID-19 Miracle Survivor," Single Item & Series Division: Video Patient

News hub 2.0, Single Item & Series Division: Websites less than \$100,000, (only winner in category).

*Hartford HealthCare's team swept the Internal Marketing category with four awards.

HONORABLE MENTION:

“Screening saves lives,” Campaign Division: Social Media Campaign

“Hospice Journey,” Creative (Visual) Design & Photography

Behavioral Health Network Student Calendar, Creative (Visual) Design & Photography: Design, Printed Piece

“COVID-19 Headaches,” Excellence in Writing: Blog

Tallwood Outcomes Book patient stories, Excellence in Writing: Other

“Community Network News,” Hybrid Division – Internal marketing

HHC news briefings, Single Item & Series Division – Media Relations

Regional huddle messages, Single Item & Series Division – Success on a Shoestring

Update newsletter from St. Vincent’s Medical Center, Single Item & Series Division: Publications – General Publications



SILVER: Rehab 360 Tour of Hartford Hospital Inpatient Rehab Unit



GOLD: “One of Our Own”



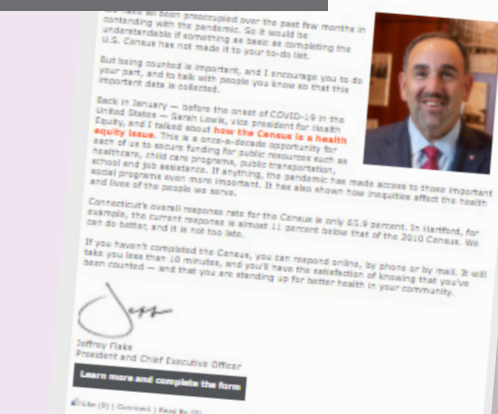
SILVER: “Surrogacy Story”



HONORABLE MENTION: “Community Network News”



SILVER: HHC this Week





Deep Cleaning After Sunset

By Brian Spyros

Picture it — it's 11 o'clock at night and you're getting ready for bed, or already fast asleep. Meanwhile, some HHC colleagues are just clocking in for work as they prepare to tackle the overnight shift and care for our patients and facilities.

"The hospital never closes, it's always open. Even in the middle of the night, we make sure the hospital looks good," said Hipolito Pedraza, a housekeeper with the Environmental Services Department at The Hospital of Central Connecticut.

Pedraza works third shift, from 11 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. The majority of his time is spent in the Emergency Department — emptying trash, sanitizing patient rooms, nursing stations, waiting areas and making sure the floors are spotless. Even in the middle of the night, the pace can be non-stop.

"It's like a movie, sometimes, working in the Emergency Department. Ambulance after ambulance, patients constantly coming in," Pedraza explained.

Some nights, his work extends beyond the Emergency Department and onto patient floors like the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). His responsibilities are the same there as they are in the ED, but it's often on the floors where Pedraza gets to really focus on what he called his favorite part of the job — forging connections with patients who might be awake while the rest of the world is sleeping.

"At that time of night, most patients are asleep. If the patient is awake, though, I will introduce myself and make small talk. Many of them are receptive because they are lonely since visitors aren't allowed that late," Pedraza said.

"Some are experiencing pain or may be scared being in the hospital. Having a conversation can put them at ease and let them know they are not alone. I try to lift their spirits."

While Pedraza ensures the hospital looks and feels good for the arrival of the first-shift workers, he admitted that part of his job involves providing comfort. He's even made it his mission to buy get-well cards with his own money. He pens notes inside and leaves them for patients to read when they wake up.

"The nursing staff will tell me that a patient got one of my cards and it made them so happy. It makes me feel good about the job I do," Pedraza said.

Hipolito Pedraza works third shift keeping many parts of The Hospital of Central Connecticut clean.

Photo by Rusty Kimball





Renovated Morgue Offers a Place to Say Goodbye

By Elissa Bass

It is a fact of life that people die. This year, Windham Hospital renovated its morgue to both modernize the facility and ensure that patient passings are treated with dignity and compassion.

Plans to renovate the morgue germinated three years ago but became urgent in late 2020 when the cooling system failed. Rather than installing a new one, a broader plan was put in place.

About 100 patients die each year at Windham, said Michael J. Davis, hospital senior director for operations. Sometimes, a body stays in the morgue a short time until funeral home transport arrives, but it can sometimes take a day or more. Occasionally, a body remains unclaimed and the hospital uses designated funds for a funeral home. A nursing supervisor oversees management of the deceased, and other departments are involved in maintaining the morgue itself.

The one-room facility included an autopsy station, unused since 2011, and a two-body drawer cooler. Removing the autopsy equipment and drawer cooler opened up the room, as did removing a wall to an adjacent, unused storage room. The morgue's new cooler is a walk-in and can accommodate three rolling stretchers, making it safer for transport personnel.

Before renovations, loved ones of the deceased had to mourn in the hospital room or the morgue, neither of which was ideal, said Shawn Maynard, executive director of the Windham Hospital Foundation.

"People of different faiths have different rituals they must perform at the time of death, and there was no place for privacy," he explained. "Now we have a room adjacent to the morgue that provides families a private space to be with their loved one and pay their last respects until the funeral home arrives."

Chaplain Mary Horan was charged with



Chris Bibeau, Plant Operations and Maintenance Site Manager at Windham Hospital, in the "visitation room" where families can visit with their loved one in privacy.

Photo by Jeff Evans

creating the family space. She based decisions on an experience she had six years ago when sitting with a young man whose parents were killed in a car crash. His mother had been taken to Hartford Hospital and his father to Windham.

On the recent anniversary of that day, the man left Horan a voicemail.

"He called to tell me he was grateful for the time he was allowed to have with his father on the most awful day of his life," she said. "People remember. Having that time gives them what they need at that time."

Horan designed the morgue gathering space, making and hanging curtains, adding pictures on the walls, lamps and comfortable seating.

"It can be so valuable for a family to be able to spend time with the deceased, especially if they are traveling from out of town," she said. "It's our responsibility to take care of the bereaved as well as the body, to make sure they don't feel rushed, that they feel respected."



Rushford Brings MORR Opioid Resources to Meriden

With a goal of sending more people into treatment than jail, Rushford this summer strengthened its collaboration with the Meriden Police Department by embedding a clinician in the department's Special Crimes Unit offices.

The first and only partnership of its kind in the state, the step enhances the existing Meriden Opioid Referral for Recovery (MORR) collaboration, offering crisis, addiction and mental health services to those in need.

"Our goal is to be proactive and conduct more outreach with Rushford clinicians," said Meriden Police Chief Roberto Rosado. "This will not only help us identify individuals in crisis, but connect them with clinicians who can bring forth immediate assistance."

The partnership began several years ago to combat the opioid crisis. The presence of a clinician at the station comes as opioid overdose deaths are at an all-time high nationwide.

"This last year has been very challenging for all of us," said Dr. J. Craig Allen, Rushford medical director. "Beneath the pandemic has been an ongoing epidemic of substance use disorders and opioid overdoses. The stress, isolation and

disruption of recovery and treatment programs have wreaked havoc on our community, especially those who suffer from substance use and mental health disorders."

In 2020, the United States saw a 30-percent increase in drug overdose deaths, the highest ever recorded. Connecticut experienced a 14-percent increase with numbers continuing to rise. In Meriden alone, opioid overdose deaths doubled from 2019 to 2020.

Since launching in 2018, MORR, funded by a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) grant, has connected 150 people who have overdosed in Meriden with treatment, said Jessica Matyka, clinical director at Rushford.

Rushford clinicians will be on-site at the station during the week to provide crisis support, diagnosis, counseling and referral to treatment. The presence of a clinician will also allow police to offer additional victim support services.

"When a detective interviews a crime victim, they no longer have to hand over a pamphlet or card with a phone number to call to receive support," said Det. Sgt. George Clements. "Instead, they will be able to interface directly with a clinician who will can better support, assess and get them pointed in the correct direction."

Call Rushford's Access Center at 877.577.3233 to be connected to clinicians and resources.

—Robin Stanley



Police Chief Roberto Rosado announces the expansion of a partnership between Meriden and Hartford HealthCare to address the opioid crisis.

Photo by Chris Rakoczy

Program Builds Confidence Through Skills

It is not every day that you see a group of 12- and 13-year-olds using power tools to sand wood. But, for Chet Samok's clients in Natchaug's Extended Day Treatment (EDT) program, it's just another day.

A mental health worker at Joshua Center Northeast, Samok helps offer the opportunity for school-aged children to improve social skills while receiving psychological care. The program includes clinical and educational group sessions, family therapy, outings, team-building and volunteer projects.

"Most of the kids have social anxiety," Samok said. "EDT works on those social skills. We go out into the community a lot to practice. For example, if we go for ice cream, the kids may be too nervous to order the first time. We work on developing those social skills and try to teach life skills."

Samok started in the maintenance department at Natchaug in 2014 on summer breaks from Eastern Connecticut State University, and knew his true calling was working with children. Self-described as someone who likes working with his hands, he found a way to blend two passions at the EDT, providing hands-on experiential learning opportunities for clients.

"I enjoy working on cars, and I have my own shop at home," he said. "I have many old motors, so I brought them in and let the kids take them

apart. For most of the kids, the stuff I try to do with them, they have no option of doing at home. I try to give them something different to do, rather than play video games or watch TV."

Other activities include building and painting birdhouses, fishing and service projects for the neighboring Quinebaug Day Treatment Center.

"Kerri Griffin, the program director, liked the birdhouses and she knows that I like building things," Samok said. "A picnic table at Quinebaug broke and she asked if we could fix it."

In addition, Samok's clients are working to transform offices at Quinebaug into a food pantry and clothing closet called Laura's Pantry and Laura's Closet in memory of Laura Lassow, a primary therapist who recently passed away.

EDT clients diligently worked on shelving and clothing racks for the closet, with Samok teaching them how to sand and paint the wood.

"I took the kids to measure the spaces, and I let them be creative about what they wanted to do," Samok said. "I didn't have much input because I wanted them to express themselves."

Busy sanding a piece of wood, 12-year-old Colin said he enjoys learning and doing good deeds.

"It's lots of fun," he said. "If I didn't come here, I never would have learned this."

—Robin Stanley



Chester (Chet) Samok, right, helps students in the Extended Day Treatment (EDT) program at Joshua Center Northeast in Danielson work on a remodeling project at the Quinebaug Day Treatment center.

Photos by Jeff Evans





Chamber Celebrates CHH Healthcare Heroes

The Northwest Chamber of Commerce named Charlotte Hungerford Hospital (CHH) a 2021 Quality of Life Award Winner at its 20th Annual Celebration of Success. The award recognizes individuals and organizations demonstrating exceptional, unselfish service to the northwest corner.

Torrington Mayor Elinor Carbone said, “I can tell you from the perspective of a municipal leader that the role Charlotte Hungerford Hospital plays in our community goes far beyond patient care, safety and clinical excellence. Our hometown hospital has repeatedly and successfully stretched its resources to ensure access to quality and integrated healthcare. They have become a community partner in every sense of the word.”

Dan McIntyre, president of the Northwest Region and senior vice president of Hartford



Northwest Region President Dan McIntyre, right, accepts the 2021 Quality of Life Award from Torrington Mayor Elinor Carbone.

HealthCare, accepted the award on behalf of CHH and HHC.

“Every day and night for the past 18 months, I witnessed the compassion, wisdom, courage and strength of our staff as they put aside their own fear and fatigue to give everything they had to our ill and injured,” he said. “We learned to lean on each other and reach deep, pulling ourselves into a resilient ‘can do’ mind set, and making every moment matter.”

—Tim Lebouthillier

Trainer’s Quick Thinking Saves a Life

Khamari Haughton is used to responding to calls for help. As Hartford HealthCare Rehabilitation Network’s certified athletic trainer for New Britain High School, he’s helped countless student athletes injured during games or practices.

The call he heard while covering a baseball game at the New Britain Bees stadium last spring, however, didn’t come from the field but the stands behind him.

“I remember hearing people calling for help. I instinctively looked out on the field, but didn’t see anyone hurt,” Haughton recalled. “That’s when I realized it was coming from the seats behind me. This was definitely not a situation I had experienced before, but we do train for this so I knew what I had to do.”

Khamari Haughton, ATC, with the Hartford HealthCare Rehabilitation Network, throws out the first pitch at the Futures Collegiate Baseball League All-Star game at New Britain Stadium.

Photo by Ken Harrison

Springing into action, Haughton rushed to find a spectator in cardiac arrest. He immediately began performing CPR on the man and realized he’d need to employ an AED defibrillator. Managing to keep calm despite the turmoil around him, he administered what turned out to be a lifesaving jolt of electricity. Within several minutes, first responders arrived to transport the man to the



hospital where he eventually made a full recovery.

"It's not something you expect to happen at a game," he said. "Up until that point, the worst injury I had treated was a broken bone, but in the moment I didn't really have time to think. It was just 'let's get to work.'"

As a way of thanking him for his heroic efforts, the Bees invited Haughton back to throw out the ceremonial first pitch at the Futures Collegiate

Baseball League All-Star game in July. Following the pitch, Haughton was presented with the Connecticut Athletic Trainers' Association President's Award for outstanding contributions to the profession.

"That was very cool," Haughton said. "My family was there, so it was great to celebrate the moment with them."

—Ken Harrison

Fairy Tails at Beardsley Zoo

Children from across the state visited Beardsley Zoo in September, dressed as Marvel characters, firefighters, princesses and other special people for Fairy Tails. The event was sponsored by the

Pediatric Care Alliance, a partnership between Hartford HealthCare and Connecticut Children's. There were adventures and fun for all ages at the Bridgeport zoo.



Photos courtesy of Beardsley Zoo



Vans Narrow Gap Between Communities, Care

One year after Hartford HealthCare clinicians took COVID-19 testing to the urban Open Hearth Shelter, a sleek new white van with colorful system decals pulled up outside to launch the era of mobile healthcare there.

Open Hearth, as both leadership from the men's shelter and HHC noted, is a perfect example of people who go without quality healthcare for a variety of reasons.

First COVID testing, then vaccine clinics and, this August, the shelter became the site for HHC to launch its Neighborhood Health Program and CareVans being deployed across the state to address the gap in healthcare access for the people who need it most.

"We couldn't be more excited to activate our mobile health strategy," said HHC President and CEO Jeffrey Flaks. "This is a good example of how we are already better than normal — committed to leaving no community and no person behind."

Keith Grant, senior system director of infection prevention at HHC, said data long before the pandemic indicated a stark difference between life expectancy in Connecticut based on ZIP code. The pandemic, he explained, further highlighted this disparity.

"Normal is the space we're comfortable in. We're changing that to bring healthcare and bridge that gap so if we experience another pandemic, people will experience it significantly differently," Grant said.

The Neighborhood Health Program begins with two vans making scheduled stops in underserved areas. The first targeted areas are Hartford, Torrington, Winsted and Thomaston. Flaks said he expects the program to expand with more vans and clinics in the future.

Services available through the clinics are for people age 16 and older, and include:

- Screenings for conditions such as diabetes, prostate cancer and breast health
- Mental health counseling
- Medical referrals, including to primary care providers
- Patient education, counseling and support
- Lab tests
- Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines on select dates

The innovative health clinics will be adaptable, flexible and open to feedback to ensure access to the most necessary services and programs. Walk-ins and appointments for clinic stops are accepted. For more information, go to <https://hartford-healthcare.org/neighborhoodhealth>

—Susan McDonald



Two CareVans are making stops in the Hartford and Northwest regions, with more vans planned for other areas in the future.

Photo by Chris Rakoczy

Every day, our colleagues do amazing things to benefit patients and the community. Email your moments that matter to susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org.



MOMENTS THAT MATTER

HVI First in New England to Earn Joint Commission Designation

The Heart & Vascular Institute (HVI) at Hartford Hospital earned Joint Commission Comprehensive Cardiac Center Certification, the first in New England and one of only 16 nationally to earn this prestigious designation.

In collaboration with the American Heart Association, this is the premier cardiovascular certification for hospitals demonstrating high-quality care using evidence-based, guidelines-driven treatment and fostering collaboration throughout the system of care.

“It is an honor to be recognized by the Joint Commission for the exceptional care our heart and vascular team provides,” said Hartford Hospital President Bimal Patel. “This designation is a testament to the amazing skill, dedication and collaboration of our entire cardiac team and their commitment to high-quality care.”

To earn CCC certification, Hartford Hospital

had to demonstrate excellence in treating every type of heart issue at any point in the disease process — from prevention through diagnosis, treatment and recovery. The program was required to exceed quality measurements in cardiac rehabilitation, heart failure, cardiac arrest, coronary artery bypass, diagnostic cardiac catheterization, valve replacement, percutaneous coronary intervention, ST elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI), arrhythmia management and acute myocardial infarction.

“This designation truly demonstrates the expertise and collaboration of our entire team and their commitment to excellence at every touch point in the continuum of care,” said Sabet Hashim, MD, FACS, HVI co-physician-in-chief.

—Steve Coates



The Joint
Commission



American Heart
Association

CERTIFICATION

Meets standards for

Comprehensive Cardiac Center

Bucketful of Birthday Fun in Bloomfield

“You are an essential piece of our team.”

That’s the theme behind the Hartford HealthCare at Home Bloomfield office team’s “Birthday Bucket,” a creative way colleagues developed to celebrate each other. Everyone celebrating a birthday picks a prize from the bucket, choosing from items that were donated or purchased by team members.

“Our office has always been social. In the past, we had monthly pot luck birthday parties but, due to COVID, we could not continue with those type of celebrations,” explained Bridget Kennedy, clinical team manager. “The Birthday Bucket was started as a way to say happy birthday to staff we love and to remind us we are all part of the puzzle that makes us great.”

—Ken Harrison



Devon Davis, East Hartford team manager, left, with Regional Director of Operations Kristen Murphy pose at Hartford HealthCare at Home’s Bloomfield office. The puzzle pieces on the wall note which colleagues have birthdays each month.

Photo by Ken Harrison



Mums Pay Tribute to Recovering Foundation Leader

Autumn at Windham Hospital means mums and lots of them, thanks to long-time Foundation Executive Director Shawn Maynard.

When Maynard went on sick leave over the summer, the fall beautification process might have been scrapped had it not been for his caring colleagues and friends who launched Mums for Maynard. The tribute raised more than \$4,000 for the colorful flowers that were placed along the

front driveway and walk and elsewhere to brighten the space.

Maynard is known for beautifying his community hospital inside and out. Whether it's decorating the hospital corridors with local art, choosing holiday decorations or meticulously tending to flowers on the grounds, he takes great pride in ensuring that Windham Hospital is as inviting and attractive as it can be.

Maynard, who is doing well and making great progress, was touched by the outpouring of support and love.

"Thank you for the amazing love and kindness you have shown me," he wrote to the Windham team. "I usually like to fly under the radar, but beautifying our campus has always been a passion of mine. I will be forever grateful for your commitment to continuing this tradition in my absence."

—Shawn Mawhiney



Dozens of mums arrived as part of a tribute to Windham Foundation Executive Director Shawn Maynard, who is recovering from an illness.

Photo by Jeff Evans

Bliss Expansion: 'Beacon of Hope'

Two years in the making, the September unveiling of the four-story Bliss Expansion building at Hartford Hospital was dubbed an "architectural marvel."

The expansion — housing cardio-thoracic surgery, cardiac and neurologic intensive care, and advanced MRI technology — meant a 20-percent expansion of the intensive care unit, 25-percent increase in MRI and diagnostic capabilities, and 10-percent increase in operating room capacity.

The 50,000-square-foot building, designed and built by MBH Architects and FIP Construction, is

available to patients across Hartford HealthCare needing tertiary care.



“This building became a beacon of hope, when most of all activities and commerce came to a halt in the city and state,” said Hartford Hospital President Bimal Patel, referring to the pandemic. “It is a testament to our tenacity and determination to complete the project.”

Design efficiencies, layout and flow intentionally support staff, patients and their families, offering connectivity with core efficiencies in hospital functions. The facility boasts the largest rooms at the hospital with adjoining spaces for visitors.

The attention to detail is not limited to the interior. Atop the building, a verdant, environmentally-friendly roof is planted with thousands of square feet of sedum to provide thermal insulation, noise reduction and a natural habitat for wildlife.

—Brenda Kestenbaum

The ribbon cutting at the Bliss Expansion at Hartford Hospital.

Photos by Chris Rakoczy



Doggone Good Teamwork at Windham

Caregivers strive to provide very best patient care and experience to every person who walks through the hospital doors, but what about dogs?

When a frequent visitor to the Windham Hospital Emergency Department needed to be admitted for treatment, the question of what to do with his support dog, Cleo, arose.

Colleagues from multiple departments answered the call, and within hours, a temporary home was found for Cleo while her human stayed in the hospital. It was good news for Cleo to have a safe and welcoming place to stay, and great news that the situation prompted the Windham team to draft



an emergency plan should the need arise again.

“This is such a heartwarming example of colleagues doing the best thing, the caring thing, the right thing, the safe thing and the just thing,” said social worker Megan Kokofski of “Operation Cleo.”

According to the new plan, staff has contacts with area veterinarians and residents who foster dogs and could be called upon in an emergency and at no cost to the patient, said Kelcey Johnson, director of human-centered care for the East Region.

Operation Cleo couldn’t have happened without: Kokofski; Johnson; Jill Nickerson, ED nurse manager; Kathy Fahey, ED social worker; Robin Mott, manager of Women’s Health Services; Adrianna Figueroa and Kevin “Big Chips” Wilbur from Public Safety; and Jason Landry and Javier Diaz from Food and Nutrition Services.

—Elissa Bass

Cleo was showered with love in the Windham Hospital Emergency Department.



The Beat Goes On: 500th Heart Transplant at Hartford Hospital

On Thursday, Sept. 30, in a Hartford Hospital operating room, a milestone was achieved, as Drs. Ayyaz Ali and Jonathan Hammond successfully transplanted the program's 500th heart.

"This is a truly amazing achievement for our hospital and health system," said President Bimal Patel. "We celebrate the entire team's efforts to make our hospital one of the top transplant hospitals in the nation. We also recognize the great history of the program and all of the lives saved because of our team's skill and dedication."

Heart transplant requires a team with a very deep bench and versatile skillsets, including surgeons, cardiologists, financial coordinators, social worker, psychologist, dietitian, nurse coordinators, advanced providers and pharmacists. When a match is made and the donation accepted, inpatient, operating room and recovery teams coordinate everything taking place behind the scenes to ensure a smooth heart transplant.

This particular transplant process began at another hospital, when Dr. Hammond recovered the donor heart and brought it to Hartford Hospital for surgery. Dr. Ali performed the transplant, one of three he undertook that week.

"I am often in awe of how much effort is involved in performing even a single heart

transplant, the fact that this has been undertaken 500 times within the walls of Hartford Hospital is a truly remarkable achievement," Dr. Ali said. "There is nothing more satisfying than seeing a smiling patient soon after their transplant procedure. They are so excited about the future and the opportunity to enjoy good health and an active life."

Hartford Hospital has currently performed more heart transplants than any other program in New England.

"Performing 500 heart transplants speaks to our historical success dating back to 1984 when we performed the first successful heart transplant in Connecticut," said Dr. Andrew Feingold, medical director. "This represents 500 new leases on life which we all enjoy seeing longitudinally as they are forever appreciative of receiving and making the best use of their gift."

Andrzej "Andy" Buczek of Farmington was the first successful heart transplant recipient in Connecticut when a Hartford Hospital team led by Dr. Henry B.C. Low performed the procedure. At the time of his death in 2017, Buczek was among the five longest-surviving heart transplant recipients in the U.S.

—Brenda Kestenbaum

Sharing Friendship and a Kidney

An administrative associate with the Hartford Hospital Transplant Program, Ana Guarino works every day around life-saving procedures, and her professional life recently meshed with her personal life when she learned a friend needed a kidney.

In February 2020, her friend found out she needed the transplant and she was placed on dialysis. Several family members began the process of becoming donors but it was not possible. Without her friend's knowledge, Guarino made a decision

that would change both their lives forever, initiating the process of becoming a donor and learning she was a match.

"I had several tests including CT scan, pulmonary function test, chest X-ray and more bloodwork," Guarino recalled. "I also met with different members of the transplant team for additional evaluation. All told, the preparation for surgery was about six month from start to finish."

She was placed on her right side for the

operation, which took a couple of hours. Three small incisions were made and Guarino's left kidney was removed laparoscopically. She said the biggest challenge post-surgery was discomfort when moving from lying down to standing. With each passing day, she improved and, within two weeks, she was able to drive again.

Guarino qualified for Hartford HealthCare's leave of absence policy that pays colleagues who donate an organ and qualify for the Family Medical Leave Act 100 percent of their pay for up to six weeks.

The experience, she said, was a blessing in her life. She recovered at home with her children, doing a lot of walking while mending slowly. As for her friend, she said, "She's had some bumps along the way but, with each day, she's doing better. She's no longer on dialysis and the kidney is doing just fine."

Anyone interested in learning more about the living donor process can visit Hartfordhospital.org/livingdonation or call 833.222.7770.

—Brenda Kestenbaum



Ana Guarino walks the walk when it comes to promoting organ donation.

Photo by Brenda Kestenbaum

Sowing Seeds of Hope

Gardening and plants have a known positive impact on mental health, something Amy Meiners, a nurse manager at The Hospital of Central Connecticut, considered when she launched a weekly planting group on the hospital's 32-bed adult inpatient behavioral health unit.

With assistance from nurse techs, nurses and the unit's behavioral health educator, Meiners invites patients into the day room to plant different seeds in Styrofoam cups. Once planted, patients take the cups to their bedroom windows

to get sunlight and grow, watering them regularly.

Launched during the summer, the planting group has helped patients grow sunflowers, marigolds, calendula and pansies. The group is well liked by patients and staff alike, drawing a large number of participants each time it meets. The sessions allow for good conversation while eventually bringing new life into the unit. Patients also receive something special to bring with them as they transition out of inpatient care.

—Brian Spyros



Amy Meiners, right, helped launch a gardening program on the inpatient behavioral health unit at The Hospital of Central Connecticut. With her and some of the seedlings, from left, are: Jessica Bobko-Quintiliano, Shawnda Bennet and LaQuaddeya Rodriguez.

Photo by Brian Spyros



Many refer to their units, departments or hospital as “one big family.” Maybe it’s because we spend so much time together, or because some invite relatives to apply because it’s a great place to work. This section is about those connections. We want to hear your story. Email susan.mcdonald@hhchealth.org.

It All Comes Out in the Wash: DNA Test Reveals HH Connection

By Brenda Kestenbaum

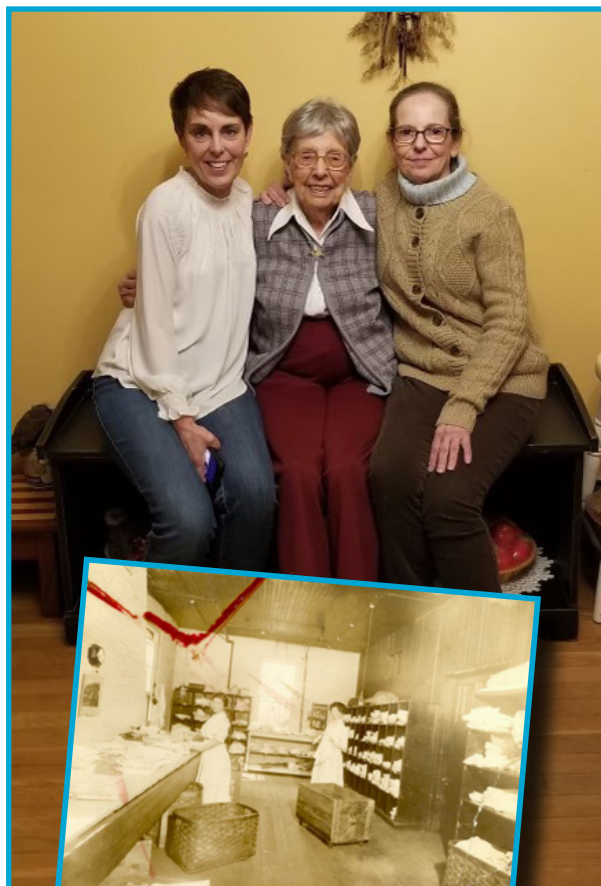
When her son gave Lisa Tarala a DNA test, she looked forward to learning more about her genetic makeup but never expected to find a Hartford Hospital connection dating back to the turn of the 20th century.

Tarala, RN-CC, on Hartford Hospital’s North 8 unit, processed the test and was soon contacted by a cousin previously unknown to her. Her maternal grandfather and the cousin’s mother were siblings. Plans were made to meet and Tarala also met a great aunt, who is now 98 years old.

During the meeting, the great aunt, Adeline Caruso Clark, told Tarala things she didn’t know about her ancestors, including the fact that her maternal great-grandmother, Elisabeta Caruso, worked in the Hartford Hospital laundry for more than 40 years.

The Carusos lived on Dean Street, a very short walk from the hospital, and Elisabeta’s job was to operate the mangle, a tool used to remove water from wet laundry, to launder nurses’ uniforms. Tarala’s great aunt worked weekends in the laundry when she was 16 years old, and was assigned to give nurses freshly pressed uniforms and caps from their designated cubbies.

Tarala has enjoyed a new relationship with her family members, who live in Massachusetts, and said she loves knowing as she walks the campus that her ancestors are a part of Hartford Hospital’s long and storied history.



Top: Lisa Tarala, left, met a great-aunt, Adeline Clark, center, and a cousin, Rose Clark McKenzie, she never knew she had after taking a DNA test.

Bottom: In researching this story, the writer reached out to Lisa Carter and Lori Hayes at Hartford Hospital’s Hamilton Archives for images of nurses in the early 1900s to illustrate the uniforms laundered by Elisabeta Caruso and her colleagues. They also found a photo of the Hartford Hospital laundry dated 1906 featuring a woman who bears a resemblance to Caruso. Due to the quality of the image, Lisa Tarala can’t be completely sure, but it might be her great-grandmother, seen on the left in this photograph.

Bottom photo courtesy of the Hartford Hospital Hamilton Archives.

thank you



THANK YOU NOTES

You are laser-focused on me and your head is on me. You have helped me considerably in the tackling of this scary and ever-moving disease. I listen to you very intently when with you as you are a very astute APRN and have great knowledge of the disease. You have taken the time to get to know me, and how the disease affects me. I am truly thankful and blessed to have you as my advocate.

—Patient at the Movement Disorders Center,
Ayer Neuroscience Institute

My husband and I are moving to Florida full-time. If I cannot find a lymphedema therapist that is close to (as good as) Lynn in Florida, my husband and I will fly up to Connecticut and stay in a hotel for two weeks, just so that I can get therapy from Lynn. She is THAT good, and this disease is SO BAD — chronic and progressive. She is critical to my quality of life.

—Patient in the lymphedema program in Meriden

I had excellent care and the nurses, staff and doctors made my experience less stressful and were very informative. They answered all my questions before I could ask them. It was a very good experience.

—Ambulatory surgery/endoscopy patient
at Windham Hospital

(My husband) arrived in MidState's ER with chest pain, tingling in his left arm, numbness in his right leg and blood pressure alarmingly dropping....We are so thankful for your quick reaction and explaining what would happen next. We were so impressed with your professionalism, your skills and sincere kindness we both needed in that distressing time. He underwent emergency surgery and is doing well.

—Patient and wife to Dr. Max Goldstein

I want to thank Claire Lembo for staying with me during a (diagnostic imaging) procedure and helping me relax. She explained everything that was to be done from the beginning to my home procedures. You have a gem in Claire. Dr. Patel did the procedure and she also explained everything from beginning to end. Because of the care I received, I'm so glad I made the decision to go there.

—MidState Medical Center diagnostic imaging patient



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