



All Aboard

Tracking Our Magnet[®] Journey

Vol. 8 April 2021

Safety is Everyone's Job

When a staff member has demonstrated exceedingly high efforts outside of regular job responsibilities to prevent harm to patient(s), they can be nominated for a **Safety Star**.

A staff member who proactively identifies and takes action to avoid an adverse event which could cause patient harm is eligible for a **Good Catch** award.

Emily Crespo, RN (Emergency Department) recently received a Patient Safety Star award. When a patient presented with concerns about abdominal pain, Crespo identified and escalated a seemingly unrelated concern, later diagnosed as a vascular issue that threatened the patient's life and mobility. Congratulations!



Spring Renewal



As we enter our second spring with this pandemic, I want to extend my continued gratitude for your remarkable persistence. Though COVID-19 case numbers are fluid, I am hopeful that normalcy will be restored to our campus soon.

Self-care is key to our own springtime renewal; it makes it possible for us to maintain such a high level of commitment to our patients. I hope that this new season — my favorite season of the year — will bring you an opportunity to focus on yourselves after so many months of focusing tirelessly on others.

I encourage our team to take advantage of the self-care resources from the Johns Hopkins Medicine Office of Well-Being!

In this issue, we celebrate some quiet forces that have kept us afloat this past year: front-line leaders from the PCU who have stepped into new roles and extra shifts in a constantly changing environment; and the SICU staff, who have seamlessly swept up details great and small that others typically manage — holding our continuum of care together like glue.

Finally, if you haven't had a chance to see it, please take a moment to watch the COVID retrospective video that Dr. Bennett released a few weeks ago, examining how our MICU colleagues have responded to COVID-19 over the past year. Their words could have been spoken by any of us, and represent the emotional spectrum that we've all experienced since April of 2020 — from initial anxiety to the capable confidence that we all show today.

Pandemic fatigue is real, and we must take care of ourselves and our colleagues to be able to take care of our patients. I am grateful for the moments between nursing colleagues that I get to witness during rounds, and look forward to a time when I can see more of you in person. I am proud to lead our team of extraordinary nurses and grateful for the directors, managers and bedside staff who sustain the Hopkins legacy throughout all our seasons.

Best wishes,

Maria V. Koszalka, Ed.D., RN

Chief Nursing Officer and Vice-President, Patient Care Services

Coming Right Up

Nominations are now being accepted for the Nurse of the Year as well as Support Staff of the Year awards, both of which recognize excellence in professional clinical practice. All nominations must be submitted by April 16, 2021

Nursing Week begins May 6

Next Stop

Employee Experience, Safety Culture and Nursing Excellence Survey will be held Wednesday, April 21, through Sunday, May 9. A link to the survey will be emailed.

Charge Nurse Workshop will be held on April 21. Register in MyLearning.

Congratulations to the VP Award Winners

Innovator Award: The Patient Care Coordinators of the Nurse Staffing Office

This team is using real-time metrics to track performance on five key performance indicators. Their success is home-grown and their solutions were identified, built and sustained as a team.

Award: Respiratory Care & Covid-19: Respiratory Care Services

Respiratory is an exemplary team, well-regarded by the units in which they're embedded, and critical to our success with COVID.

Bullseye Award: On the Move in 6 Surg

During COVID, 6 Surg strengthened their own care and they identified creative ways to engage the patients in their own recovery, while improving their routinely stellar communication on their unit.

Unsung Hero: Director of Nursing for Medicine Michelle D'Alessandro, DNP, RN, NEA-BC

Although her days are long, D'Alessandro has been a warrior throughout this year of pandemic, and comes up with innovative solutions on the fly, as new problems present themselves. She is a Hopkins Hero!

Spirit of Service: NICU's lactation consultants Alice Dawkins and Denise Perseghin

During COVID, NICU lactation consultants Alice Dawkins, BSN, RN, ILBC, and Denise Perseghin, RN, ILBC, won a grant to support moms providing breast milk for their babies in the NICU, around our campus and out in the community.

PCU Front Line Leaders Stretch Into New Roles

Transformational Leadership

What is it about the Progressive Care Unit (PCU) that fosters such elasticity?

The team of 75 sees every level of patient acuity- acute, intermediate and hosted intensive care beds during the pandemic. They care for patients with many conditions: cardiac, pulmonary, med-surg and now COVID. And they have the confidence to take on new things, knowing that they have a team behind them that feels like family.

"They come in each day not knowing what types of patients are in the beds, or how their unit will be configured," says Patient Care Manager **Chrissy Kontogeorgos, DNP, RN, PCCN**.

"The PCU nurses have redeployed, retrained and upskilled to take care of critical patients when they were needed last spring and summer. We carved out ICU beds on our unit for patients who would normally be served by the MICU. Our IMC-level patients are now sharing space with less acute patients. Our team created an overflow COVID IMC unit on the Wenz orthopaedic unit, in a physical environment that wasn't designed for that type of care. I've learned that these nurses can figure out literally anything on their own. They have stepped up, completely independently."

Though the arsenal to battle against COVID has grown, and we see hopeful signs that the pandemic may soon decline, the pandemic-forged family ties on the PCU, and throughout the house, will persist. Learn about a few of the PCU nurses who continually shine, and what keeps them motivated one year into the pandemic.



Chrissy Kontogeorgos, second from right, leads the Progressive Care Unit.



A Gift of Personal Connection



Christina Smythe, RN
Charge Nurse on Wenz IMC

A PCU nurse for more than two decades, **Chris Smythe, RN**, has run charge on the Wenz IMC unit for COVID patients since October. A people person who loves to chat, she was drawn to nursing for the work schedule (three 12-hour shifts), and stayed for the connections she has formed with her colleagues, who are like family to her.

When the PCU was asked to staff a new bio-mode IMC unit on Wenz, Smythe jumped in. She now works four shifts a week. She thinks that COVID has brought out the best in people who cope well with chaos and are able to accept change. After so many years of working on PCU exposed her to a broad spectrum of disease, Smythe was confident that she could work with a new team of colleagues and travel nurses to staff the new unit.

Says Smythe, “With the unpredictable nature of COVID, patients can turn bad so quickly! We watch them really carefully, since it takes a lot of work just to get in and out of the patients’ rooms. It’s a constant state of heightened awareness and is such a blessing to see these patients go home.”

“Perception is how you make your own happiness.”

A Family Affair

“Taking care of each other— not just our patients—really contributes to the longevity of our staff on the PCU,” says charge nurse **Lynnika Branch, MSN, RN**. A nurse on the unit for 11 years, Branch was a tech before that; her now-manager Kontogeorgos was her preceptor. She counts her sister and her niece among her colleagues at Johns Hopkins Bayview.

She has known since childhood that she wanted to help people, and feels like she was built for times like these. “I signed up to help people, regardless. It was never in doubt that I would be on the front lines of the pandemic, although I was concerned for my family at the beginning.”

As a nurse, Branch has continually worked her way up through patient care, from Baltimore City Public Schools through a master of science in nursing at Notre Dame.

As someone who has been in a supporting role, now leading charge, Branch tries to lead by example, supporting new RNs and new graduates personally, to show them what teamwork looks like on their unit. “No question is a dumb question,” she tells her newest coworkers. “I still have questions every shift!”



Lynnika Branch, MSN, RN, pictured center
Charge Nurse on PCU

“We lead by example and are all in this together.”



Leila Laya, BSN, RN, PCCN, pictured center,
New Charge Nurse, night shift

Hesitant, but Willing to Lead

Leila Laya, BSN, RN, PCCN, was visiting her parents in her native Philippines in November 2019 when COVID struck, stranding her more than 8,600 miles from Johns Hopkins Bayview. She was watching the international news on YouTube, trying to keep up with the pandemic as it spread across the world while she was on lockdown in the South Pacific. In June 2020, she was finally able to travel to the U.S., where she has worked as a nurse for more than 16 years, including eight on the PCU.

“We were already a few months into the pandemic by the time I returned, and we knew what we were doing. We all want to step up and be flexible, and it was about time for me. Before, I was working only in my comfort zone.”

As a new charge, Laya says she is “hesitant, but willing. I thought I was ready. I love to take care of people—it’s challenging and fulfilling. People are so appreciative of our care.”

Laya says that the PCU team is motivated by Kontogeorgos’ confidence in them “She knows we can do it. We want to do our best for her—she has faith in us, and we can see it. Our patients are hard and the workload is heavy, but our teamwork makes it seem a little lighter.”

“Something about the pandemic triggered my interest in going a little further.”

Become a Better Version of Yourself

When charge nurse **Nyeisha Benton**, graduated as a new RN, only night shift assignments were available, so working at nights became her life's routine. After starting as a patient care technician and monitor tech, Benton worked her way through nursing school, including the on-campus Notre Dame cohort where she completed her BSN.

Now a kindergarten mom, Benton has grown in many ways, and credits her PCU family with motivating her to become a better version of herself—as a person and as a nurse. In a teaching hospital, she explains, “people don't judge you for not knowing everything. I was in that same position at one time, with those same feelings, and my team embraced me and helped me understand that it's OK to not know everything.”

The strength of their family bonds isn't limited to the PCU staff. “Our patients are our priority. They can't have their families with them right now, so I am here to be their family. They are loved by someone, and while I am with them for my 12 hours, I am going to love on them like they're my own.”



Nyeisha Benton, BSN, RN, pictured left,
Charge Nurse, night shift

**“This is definitely my purpose—
this is what it's all about.”**



Congratulations to **Kristen Beaver, RN**, from the labor and delivery unit of maternal-child health. She was nominated for a DAISY Award by a colleague for her quick thinking and compassionate care for a patient in crisis.

SICU Holds the House Together

Exemplary Professional Practice

Specialties are their specialty!

The staff of the surgical ICU (SICU) is a small, nimble team that cares for surgical and trauma patients along with overflow from the other ICUs. During COVID, this the team has to handle critical patients who are commonly admitted to other specialized units: neuro, burn, cardiac and medicine, caring for a medically diverse census that averages nearly 20% higher than usual.

Now that resources are so lean across the Medical Center, the SICU nurses' agility and broad skillset often requires them to tackle cases that stretch their scope of practice: different procedures, new equipment, locum tenens providers, novel medications, unknown conditions. Even the most seasoned nurses have gained new knowledge and insight.

They've grown their complex critical care skills that are specialty care native to different ICUs, like transcutaneous pacing, monitoring diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA), conducting post-stroke neurologic assessments and burn care.

However, the SICU team is known for an adaptable spirit of service, and in 2020, they used it to benefit their community right on campus.

Rapid Response Team

The SICU exclusively answers rapid response calls, taking over a responsibility that was held by the MICU staff for more than a year. Many of the RRT calls escalate to be Code Blue calls instead, as the patients are in more critical condition than the RRT can safely manage. Additionally, the SICU nurses had to pause their role assisting the ER with level one trauma patients to assume the RRT responsibility, which was a great sacrifice for them.

COVID care overflow

During COVID, the SICU staffs “COVID crash beds” on their unit, where they care for COVID positive patients in two existing negative pressure rooms. In addition to taking on the role of hosting COVID crash beds, the SICU cares for their own surgical COVID patients as well as COVID patients who have had neurosurgical interventions and burn injuries. This presents a complicated division of labor on their unit, and also includes the challenge of responding quickly to patients with surgical stressors while grappling with PPE and masking.

Training and Supporting New Colleagues

Advanced hire orientees, new grads, float pool, travelers and redeployed nurses from the PACU all receive weeks of training from the SICU team, which features clinically advanced senior nurses who have extensive knowledge about the institution and its people.

Says float pool patient care manager **Nicci Domanski, MSN, RN**, “The SICU has gone above and beyond to help to meet the orientation needs of new FP staff, Advanced Hires, and Travelers. They ensure that the orientees feel welcomed and part of the team from day one. I was especially moved by a recent collaboration. When I reached out to them, the entire team- **Julie Keenan** the PCM, **Yvette Wilson** the CNS, **Bonnie Hall**, the educator, and **Stephanie Deighton**, ACE nurse, all rallied together and came up with a plan to help a new nurse succeed. They have positive energy, a “can do” attitude, and an inclusive spirit. Working with them is never work at all!”

Says Director of Nursing **Kim Goldsborough, DNP, RN**, “I think this is the spirit of the unit, one that has grown in the face of the pandemic. This group has pulled together, grown as a team and rallies in the face of challenges. I am sincerely proud of this team and their ‘we can do it’ culture.”

The SICU team serves the whole house. We celebrate the SICU for their service to their colleagues, for using their skills for the good of both patients and coworkers, and for quietly, consistently doing extraordinary work.



A Few Fun Facts About Chakhan Smith, RN

Favorite vacation spot: I want to go to Africa someday.

Restaurant I always go to with friends: Anything Tex-Mex, especially La Tolteca.

Next up in nursing: I am not really sure! I just started picking up some PRN shifts doing PICC lines, which has been on my radar for a while as a new skill set that I wanted to obtain. I just plan to continue learning and helping wherever I can.

Coworker who most inspired me: Lt Radcliffe Antoine, a PA I met on a joint assignment in Honduras. He was the person who helped me understand I could become whatever I wanted to be. He listened to the same kind of music. He acted like me. He looked like me— we were the only minorities at that time, and I was still a teenager. His testimony was believable—he had been where I've been. It was the first time I saw an African American provider and it made it realistic for me that I could do that, too. At that young age, I wouldn't have believed it, without knowing him.

I would tell my 16 year old self to learn as much as you can. Enjoy life. Treat people how you want to be treated.

Music that I listen to: R&B, jazz, soul— everything except country. My kids keep me up to speed on the latest.

A book that I like: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks. It's a great story, but after reading it, I also understand some of the interactions I have when talking to patients of a certain age: reservations to accept certain treatments, medications, etc. I can see their history through that story, especially in the city where we work.

When I am not at work (and not home-schooling) I am trying to have more "me time" to find out what I like! I found out from COVID that I don't have any hobbies. Being a dad and watching my youngest son play soccer year round is how I spend my time right now.

My super power is remaining calm in chaos, going with the flow and seeing the bright side of all situations.

Proudest moment at work is when someone calls me as a resource nurse, and they need help. If I can do that thing, whether that's inserting a difficult IV or NG tube or just helping them to navigate the hospital better— that's a win for me. Using my ability to connect and to make things go better for others is what I do best. I am known for my relationships. I like to help, and people like to help me.

Magnet Champion Spotlight

Chakhan Smith, RN

Exemplary Professional Practice



Float Pool's
Chakhan Smith, RN

"Find a way or make a way."

-Chakhan Smith, RN

This ancient quote reflects an ethos common to many soldiers, which was Chakhan Smith's first job. He started his career right after high school as an Army medic— a role similar to an EMT—serving for eight years, including tours in South Korea, Guatemala and Honduras. Smith, the father of three young men, works exclusively at night and supports COVID patients on the Wenz overflow unit.

As a medic, Smith independently supported 300 soldiers at a time in the field, a role that could include acting as a pharmacist, lab tech and provider, supported by a PA who could be reached via a radio call back to the aid station. It was this autonomy that fostered Smith's ability to thrive in "organized chaos." "I am used to doing the most we can with what we have," says Smith. "Whatever time, staff or supplies you have on hand, you have to be willing to give it a shot."

As his service commitment wound down, Smith had to choose between becoming a PA or a nurse. As the parent of young children at the time, he had to earn a living to support his growing family. Studying nursing gave him the chance to work and complete his RN at the same time.

An RN since 2005, he arrived at Johns Hopkins Bayview a few years later when a nursing student he was training at his old hospital referred him to her clinical instructor who was opening up a brand new medicine unit on campus. Smith was one of Rona Stewart-Corral's first hires on the Carol Ball Medicine Unit.

Smith's Army-honed flexibility makes him especially suited to the Float Pool, where he is assigned to a different unit each time he walks in the door. He especially gravitates to the emergency department and pediatric emergency department, but also volunteers to work on the COVID floors like NP3 and NP4, as well as the PACU/ICU temporary space last summer and IMC beds such as the Wenz unit, where he runs charge overnight.

Smith's embrace of fluid situations makes him a natural to lead from the front lines during a pandemic, especially while home-schooling teenagers. Organized chaos, indeed!

"No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn."

-American author Hal Borland

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