

CUTE® Readers Honor Oncology Nurses / Volume 14

With the Extraordinary Healer® Award for Oncology Nursing, we at CURE® present our readers with a unique opportunity each year to honor oncology nurses who have helped guide them through the cancer experience. This year, many patients, survivors, caregivers and health professionals submitted inspirational essays describing the compassion, expertise and helpfulness that these special nurses exhibited. We have compiled their tributes in Extraordinary Healers®: CURE® Readers Honor Oncology Nurses, Volume 14, which celebrates the extraordinary men and women who make a difference in patients' lives. Coupled with compelling photography, these moving stories of oncology nurses are told in CURE® readers' own words.

To read these essays online, along with many more that were submitted to this year's contest, please visit curetoday.com. Click on "magazines" and then on "Extraordinary Healers Volume 14."

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CURE® Readers Honor Oncology Nurses

Volume 14



# CURE® Readers Honor Oncology Nurses

Volume 14



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This	book is	dedicated	to all	oncology	nurses	who	bring	hope	and
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If you would like to give this book as a gift to your extraordinary healer, we've provided this page for your message.

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#### **Table of Contents**

# 1 ONCOLOGY NURSES DESERVE OUR RECOGNITION FOR ALL THEY ACCOMPLISH

By Mike Hennessy Jr.

ESSAY WINNER

#### 7 CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

By Lynne O'Connor, M.S.N., RN, nominating Christie Santure, B.S.N., RN

#### 12 LIVING HER DREAM

An interview with Christie Santure, B.S.N., RN

ESSAY FINALISTS

#### 14 NURSE GODDESS

By Laurie Loe, RN, OCN, nominating Vicki Dodson, B.S.N., RN, OCN

#### 18 A PASSION FOR PEOPLE

An interview with Vicki Dodson, B.S.N., RN, OCN

#### 21 THE BEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED

By Laura Brinkley, B.S.N., RN-BC, OCN, nominating Maria Rodriguez, B.S.N., RN

#### **24** HEALING HANDS

An interview with Maria Rodriguez, B.S.N., RN

#### FINEST HOUR ESSAY WINNER

#### 29 THE HUMAN TOUCH

By Evangelina SantaTeresa, CCRN, nominating Elizabeth "Liz" Farrat, B.S.N., CCRN

#### 32 THE POWER OF NURSING

An interview with Elizabeth "Liz" Farrat, B.S.N., CCRN

#### . . . . . . . .

#### **CHAPTER 1: IN OUR CORNER**

#### 37 CHAMPIONING PATIENT MILESTONES

By Elizabeth Perkins, RN, nominating Courtney Ebbeskotte, RN

#### 41 A HEALING HEART

By Timothy Green, nominating Nadeen Robinson, M.S.N., RN, OCN

#### 45 KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE FOR PATIENTS

By Clare Bowe, nominating Mary Schueller, M.S.N., RN-BC, AOCNS, CHPN

#### **48** WHY I WANT TO BE A NURSE

By Hallie Bea Barnard, nominating McKenzie Siegmund, B.S.N., RN

#### 52 AN EXCEPTIONAL COMFORTER AND HEALER

By Tesla Graham, D.N.P., RN, OCN, nominating Deborah Austin Thompson, B.S.N., RN, OCN

#### . . . . . . . .

#### **CHAPTER 2: TOUCHING THE SPIRIT**

#### 57 CARING AND EMPATHETIC

By Howard Campbell, nominating Jennifer Becker, RN

## 60 COMPOSURE, KINDNESS AND PROFESSIONALISM

By Brianna Salinas, M.S.N., RN, CNL, nominating Molly Conklin, B.S.N., RN, PCCN

#### **64** ILLUMINATING LIFE'S BEAUTY

By Rea Shqepa, nominating Daria Mlynarski, B.S.N., RN, OCN

#### 69 MY HERO, OUR ANGEL

By Tracey Lang, nominating Diane Nechi-Fragassi, B.S.N., RN, OCN

# 72 A COMFORT AND A TRUE FRIEND

By Marlayne Sick, nominating Leslie Smith, RN

#### 77 LIKE A SECOND MOM

By Heather C. Roessler, nominating Alice Vandermeer, B.S.N., RN, OCN

#### **81** BECOMING FAMILY

By Roseanne Maro, B.S.N., RN, OCN, nominating Maura Znavor, B.S.N., RN

#### **CHAPTER 3: ABOVE AND BEYOND**

#### **87** ADORED BY ALL

By Amanda Badal, nominating Dioanne Adsuara, B.S.N., RN, CCRN

#### 91 A MISSION TO TEACH

By Fred Hardwicke, M.D., nominating Alicia Castanon, M.S.N., OCN, APRN, FNP-C

## 95 SUPPORTING PATIENTS AND HER COMMUNITY

By Yvonne McLean Florence, nominating Joy V. Hepkins, M.S.N., RN, OCN

#### 99 TENDING TO UNSPOKEN NEEDS

By Michelle Sottile, B.S.N., RN, OCN, nominating Ellen Mulkerrins, B.S.N., RN, OCN

#### 105 A SPECIAL UNDERSTANDING

By Mary Hassler, nominating Joan Rataczak, B.S.N., RN, CPHON

#### **CHAPTER 4: LEADING BY EXAMPLE**

#### 111 GIVING WITHOUT RESERVATION

By Phyllis Yount, LCSW, nominating Elaine Demeyer, M.S.N., RN, AOCN, BMTCN

#### 115 A SUPPORTIVE COMPANION

By Stephanie Russell, Psy.D., nominating Susan Long, RN

# 119 COMPETENT, COMPASSIONATE AND SELFLESS

By Aimee White, B.S.N., RN, CPHON, nominating Kim Moore, RN, CPHON

## 122 KNOWLEDGEABLE, REFLECTIVE AND THOUGHTFUL

By Kathleen Considine, B.S.N., RN, OCN, nominating Heather Van Den Bergh, B.S.N., RN, OCN

#### 126 MAKNG NURSING AN ART FORM

By Dawn Jourdan, B.S.N., RN, nominating Sue Wardian Hartung, M.S.N., RN, OCN

2020 NOMINEES

131 NOMINEES FOR THE 2020 EXTRAORDINARY HEALER® AWARD FOR ONCOLOGY NURSING



# Oncology Nurses Deserve Our Recognition for All They Accomplish

It takes a special person to be an oncology nurse.

Throughout the 14 years *CURE®* has hosted the Extraordinary Healer® Award for Oncology Nursing, we have heard incredible stories about the lengths to which these selfless professionals go to support their patients, improve programs of care at their facilities, mentor their colleagues and volunteer within the cancer community.

Through hundreds of essays describing extraordinary healers who have gone above and beyond the call of duty, we have read awesome examples of their dedication: showing up after hours to celebrate a patient's birthday, arranging a bedside wedding for a dying patient, driving through 16 inches of snow on Christmas Eve to bring a patient information about treatment options or taking calls around the clock on personal time. Many nurses earned additional certifications so they could better serve their patients, and some launched programs to aid overlooked groups, including caregivers, the children of patients with cancer and people from Spanish-speaking countries.

Across the board, these caring professionals provide the emotional support patients need to stay committed to grueling treatments — and to life.

Despite their important work and significant achievements, oncology nurses remain humble. Ask them about their accomplishments and they will say that they're just doing their jobs or mention colleagues they claim do even more. »

But they won't argue about how much they love what they do. That passion is universal, and it shows.

At our annual Extraordinary Healer® event, we feel privileged to honor a winner and two finalists, spending time getting to know them and hearing about and recognizing their contributions. But on this special day, we strive to do even more. As we speak to an audience of oncology nurses, all of whom quietly make a difference every day for people touched by cancer, we aim to honor each of them — and their whole profession.

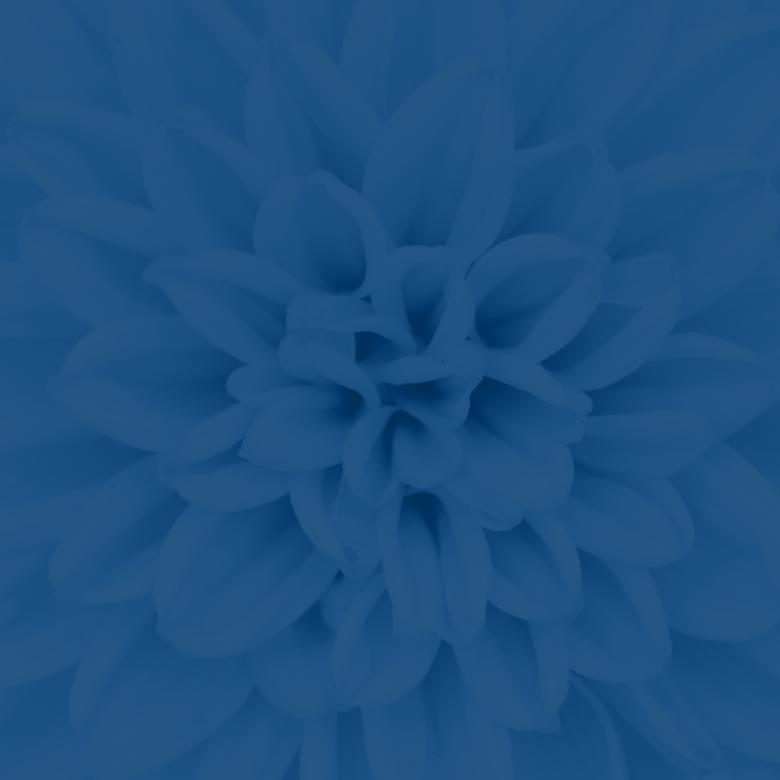
Theirs are the first faces patients see at the start of treatment and the ones closest at hand during the most frightening, painful and devastating experiences — and the most joyous moments — along the cancer journey. Often, these nurses continue to offer care years after treatment has ended, keeping tabs on patients in survivorship or checking in with the families of patients who died of their disease. That support can be life-changing and unforgettable, and each oncology nurse deserves recognition.

As one of this year's nominators wrote, an oncology nurse can provide a silver lining that gives meaning to the randomness of cancer. "I was comforted by the care she had shown my dad during the last month — the joyfulness, the smiles, the long talks and all the extra time she took to tell us stories and help us believe in miracles and love," the daughter of a patient wrote. "While we were surrounded by white, cold hospital walls, she showed us a world full of colors and how beautiful life can be.

"I cried even more the night that my father passed away because the world had lost such greatness, and everything was going to be darker. It took me months to understand and accept that, by meeting (our oncology nurse), life had taught me that my father was leaving behind a trail of great people, and my parents and I were lucky to have met them, despite the circumstances. ... How were we ever so blessed?"

#### - Mike Hennessy Jr.

President and CEO of MJH Life Sciences™





# Our Winners & Finalists



# CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

#### **CHRISTIE SANTURE, B.S.N., RN, OCN**

[UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH MEDICAL CENTER HILLMAN CANCER CENTER, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA]

Written by Lynne O'Connor, M.S.N., RN, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Hillman Cancer Center

orking in the infusion room at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Hillman Cancer Center can be extremely busy, but that did not stop Christie Santure, B.S.N., RN, OCN, from sharing her dream of having a caregiver program. Christie approached me, her unit director, three years ago about starting Caring for the Caregiver.

Christie communicated that, time and time again, she noticed that caregivers did not have the tools to take care of themselves while caring for the patient. They often told her that they didn't receive enough support and were unable to take care of themselves because they were so worried about their loved one. Wanting to help those who were helping others, she researched how to start the support group, found a sponsor to help her and ran with it.

The first sessions took place once a month and had low attendance. That did not deter Christie. She advertised the sessions on all three floors of the Hillman Cancer Center and at other sites in our network. She also attended nursing huddles to help promote her program. Through her belief in this program and her perseverance, the sessions began to thrive. Now, three years later, Christie offers the sessions twice a month at the Hillman Cancer Center. Additionally, »

#### TEACHING MOMENT

I've been part of the group for a only short period of time, but I can tell you without reservation that had Christie not started this group and thrown the doors open to everyone like me, I would be in a dark place, maybe not able to help my wife and certainly not able to help myself. There are times in life when saying thank you to someone who has suddenly appeared in your life and straightened things out just doesn't seem to be enough.

she has worked with leadership at two of our network sites to start the Caring for the Caregiver program at those locations.

The group offers support and education to those whose loved ones are battling cancer. Members not only discuss topics and practices around self-care, mindfulness, stress management, compassion fatigue and nutrition but also support each other by sharing personal stories and struggles, so they experience the comfort of knowing they aren't alone. Christie constantly works to improve the program, researching topics, resources and teaching materials for the caregivers. This is done outside her normal business day.

Caregivers in the Pittsburgh region are thankful for Christie's kindness and dedication to this often overlooked population in the medical setting. Here are thoughts from some of the caregivers Christie has helped through this valuable program. »



**Facilitator Joni Sturgill:** Christie is one of the kindest, most compassionate people I know. I've seen her, time and time again, go out of her way to help connect caregivers with the resources and support they need, as well as offer a listening ear to caregivers who just need to talk. Her knowledge, dedication and compassion are an asset to the Pittsburgh oncology community and to anyone who is a caregiver.

A caregiver: Caring for the Caregiver is a unique group in the Pittsburgh area and perhaps beyond, because it takes the time and effort to reach out to people in an oncology unit who are often not seen although they're standing in plain sight: the caregivers. In most places in the cancer world, we caregivers are just there. We're the concerned spouse standing in the corner. We have a name but not a story because we don't have cancer. Many people see us, and some might even understand our burden, but few reach out. They don't have the time or tools to do anything. Thank God that Christie came along and reached out with this group. Putting together Caring for the Caregiver wasn't mandatory in her everyday job, but it was necessary for us. Christie saw us walking in numbers through hospitals, doing everything for our loved ones and nothing for ourselves. She understood we were tired/empty/confused and decided we needed help, too.

I've been part of the group for a only short period of time, but I can tell you without reservation that had Christie not started this group and thrown the doors open to everyone like me, I would be in a dark place, maybe not able to help my wife and certainly not able to help myself. There are times in life when saying thank you to someone who has suddenly appeared in your life and straightened things out just doesn't seem to be enough. The Extraordinary Healer® Award would help a lot of us say thank you in a special way to a deserving woman.

**A caregiver:** One topic we often discuss in our caregivers' group is gratitude. I am grateful at each meeting that Christie started this group. For the last year and a half, I have felt supported

and encouraged by Christie and our facilitator, Joni. I have learned many ways of taking care of myself during my husband's illness. Numerous times, Christie has explained medical procedures and aspects of treatment that have allayed my fears and helped me face whatever we had to deal with, one day at a time, regarding Dave's esophageal cancer. This group is a true blessing. Christie's passion for helping the caregivers — those who are often forgotten in the process — along with her perseverance to make the program a success make her a great candidate for the Extraordinary Healer® Award.

#### TEACHING MOMENT

The group offers support and education to those whose loved ones are battling cancer. Members not only discuss topics and practices around self-care, mindfulness, stress management, compassion fatigue and nutrition but also support each other by sharing personal stories and struggles, so they experience the comfort of knowing they aren't alone.

#### WINNER INTERVIEW

# LIVING HER DREAM

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTIE M. SANTURE, B.S.N., RN, OCN

By Stacy Willingham



hristie Santure, B.S.N., RN, OCN, started her career as a candy striper — red-and-white-striped jumper, white tights and all.

"I have always known, from the beginning, that I wanted to be a nurse," she says. "I started out in high school, volunteering at the local hospital. Since the age of 15, that's all I have ever wanted to do."

This year, Santure celebrates 40 years as a nurse. After earning her Bachelor of Science in nursing at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, she spent five years involved with medical and surgical nursing and then 25 years on the American Red Cross blood collection staff. It wasn't until she had a personal brush with oncology that she decided to make the move to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Hillman Cancer Center, where she currently works.

"I had a family member get cancer," she says. "At the time, not knowing much about oncology made me want to learn more to be able to support my family. Everyone appreciated so much what the oncology nurses did to help them through that difficult time, and I just wanted to be able to help families who were going through a similar situation, the way those nurses helped us."

Santure was relocating to Pittsburgh because of her husband's job, so she used the impending move to switch to oncology nursing and never looked back. Three years in, she became oncology

#### WINNER INTERVIEW

certified; today, she spends her days administering chemotherapy. Although the position can be "emotionally and physically exhausting," she says, it also gives her strength.

"I've become such a better person because I appreciate things so much more now than I did before I went into oncology," she says. "I appreciate the preciousness of life and the importance of being there to support your family." That includes all her patients, whom she says "become like family."

Her goal is to walk in the shoes of the nurses who inspired her along the way. "Watching those nurses, I was so in awe of what they were doing, both the nursing practice and the clinical expertise, as well as the fact that they were just so compassionate," she says.

Three years ago, Santure carried that compassion forward by launching a Caring for the Caregiver program at her institution, which previously did not offer a support group for that population.

"It all began with an interaction with a caregiver of a patient who said she needed support but didn't want to burden her family, and she felt guilty telling her family she was feeling very stressed, anxious and overwhelmed," Santure recalls. "Caregiver research has shown they are 'silent patients,' as they many times forgo their own doctors' appointments and health care because they are so consumed with caring for their loved one, and, in turn, their own health suffers. Being together in a group gives them a safe environment to talk about their feelings and not feel guilty for having those feelings."

Outside of work, Santure has been involved in the Greater Pittsburgh Chapter of the Oncology Nursing Society for the past 10 years; this is her third year serving on its board and her second as treasurer. She takes the lead in planning the chapter's annual nursing conference and other community service projects.

Although she is living her lifelong dream through nursing, Santure is quick to point out that her career isn't her only wish come true: She has been married almost as long as she has been working. "I'm married to my college sweetheart," she says, "married 38 years, and we have three wonderful children."

#### FINALIST ESSAY

# **NURSE GODDESS**

#### **VICKI DODSON, B.S.N., RN, OCN**

[PROVIDENCE SACRED HEART MEDICAL CENTER, SPOKANE, WASHINGTON]

Written by Laurie Loe, RN, OCN, Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center

Ticki Dodson, B.S.N., RN, OCN, has been serving oncology patients for over 35 years. I first met Vicki when I started working on the oncology inpatient unit at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane, Washington. She was on the day shift and I was on evenings. I kept hearing about this person known as the "nurse goddess," and it didn't take me long to figure out that that was Vicki's alter ego. As she introduced herself to her patients, sometimes that was the icebreaker she used, along with a huge smile and an infectious laugh that could be heard throughout the unit. Coming in for a first chemotherapy treatment or receiving a diagnosis of cancer can be a stressful time for patients, but Vicki made them feel at ease with her care and compassion. To this day, she keeps in touch with some of her patients with whom she had a special bond.

A few years ago, Vicki decided to become an oncology nurse navigator. In this role, she is able to take more time to listen to patients verbalize their fears, frustrations and concerns. She helps them figure out the confusing health care system and educates them on the treatments, routines and chemotherapy drugs they will be receiving. She also provides her card in case they ever have questions or need anything. Sometimes we take for granted that this may just be part of the job, but Vicki gives so much of her time and self to her patients, not because she has to, but because that's who she is. She is filled with caring and compassion for these patients. »



#### FINALIST ESSAY

We treated a young woman in her early 20s whose cancer had relapsed. The doctors all said that even with the chemotherapy and radiation, this patient had just weeks to live. She was engaged to be married, but it didn't look like she would make it to the intended date. Vicki, knowing how important it was to the young woman, planned the wedding and made it happen in the hospital. I later found out she has planned a few other weddings, too. I also know that Vicki has taken home and washed the clothing of a wife who didn't want to leave her husband's bedside.

In the navigator role, Vicki meets with many patients, some of whom don't speak English. She once came into work two hours before her shift started to meet with a non-English-speaking patient to ensure that he could successfully navigate the hospital and make it to his procedure on time.

Recently, I called on Vicki for help on a couple of occasions. Once it was for a gentleman whose mother had a new cancer diagnosis but lived in a different state. He wasn't able to be with her because his wife was pregnant and expected to give birth soon, but he wanted some information about the diagnosis. I tried to find some brochures but we didn't have any, and I couldn't find the exact information I wanted, so I called Vicki to see if she could point me in the right direction. Instead of just giving me a message to relay, she came right up and met with this man, who was clearly upset, with tears in eyes. After just a few minutes, she was able to give him the information he needed and the reassurance that his mom was going to be OK: Treatment might be difficult, but she would probably do just fine. As he left, you could see that a little weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

The second occasion when I needed Vicki's help was around Christmas. We had a very sick stem cell transplant patient who needed extra care, and there was talk of sending him to the intensive care unit. In the process of getting him there and having the doctors see him, his wife was becoming overwhelmed. Vicki was at the desk, and I asked if she had a minute. She said she was pretty busy but asked what was up. I explained, saying the wife might need a little more support as we worked with her husband. She said nothing but got up and followed me, knowing it was important for that family to have support. Her calm manner with the wife was invaluable. She explained what we were going to do while we took time with the patient. In the end, the wife felt more confident about the care her husband was receiving, and the patient was calmer, too.



Vicki's passion doesn't end at work. Recently she found out that a cancer support group had lost its facilitator. The patients showed up but found the doors locked and the room empty. The thinking was that the meeting would have to be canceled until a replacement could be found, but Vicki spoke up and said, "Our patients deserve better." She volunteered to run the support group until a permanent solution could be found. That meant committing to five meetings a month, which she did without hesitation.

Vicki also belongs to many outside organizations. She's a board member with Cancer Can't, a local foundation; a Boy Scout leader; and a member of the Oncology Nursing Society and another local foundation, Because There Is Hope. Once, for a community project, Vicki had her group of Scouts clean the yard of a man who had cancer. He usually kept a very neat yard, but because of his diagnosis and treatment, he wasn't able to do so at that time. He was feeling some stress because a windstorm had littered his yard with branches and leaves. By providing help, Vicki and her Scouts alleviated this man's worry.

I could go on with countless examples of how Vicki gives of herself to help others. She is a wonderful mentor, a great nurse and the true definition of an extraordinary healer. I feel privileged to be able to call her my friend.  $\blacksquare$ 

#### FINALIST INTERVIEW

# A PASSION FOR PEOPLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH VICKI DODSON, B.S.N., RN, OCN

By Stacy Willingham



icki Dodson, B.S.N., RN, OCN, credits her career in nursing to one thing: a love of people. She had her first encounter with oncology as a teenager, when she watched a 10-year-old girl she babysat fight and ultimately die from cancer.

Dodson had been in the babysitting role since the little girl was born and remembers her as "just an incredible child."

The experience touched Dodson, but it wasn't until she was in college, when she volunteered to tutor some nursing students in chemistry and math, that she learned more about the profession and realized her desired path.

"I just really enjoyed being with people and helping others," she says. "I was really into volunteer work, and there was just this moment when I thought, 'This is right up my alley. This is where I need to be.'

After attending Highline College, a community institution near Seattle, Dodson attended nursing school at Washington State University in 1982. Her first job was on the acute care floor in the oncology center at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center in 1984; 36 years later, it remains her home away from home.

#### FINALIST INTERVIEW

Today, Dodson works as a nurse navigator at the medical center. She took the job thinking it would "fulfill my OCD need to organize everybody else's lives," she says, but it was the people who made her fall in love with the position.

During her time in this role, Dodson has orchestrated three weddings for patients in her care, doing everything from decorating the waiting room and buying cake to "playing bouncer," making sure that all guests wore masks and washed their hands. She speaks fondly of the joys she helped generate for patients in their final days, such as the wedding of a man in his late 70s and his long-time girlfriend, as well as a ceremony for a young woman who had been engaged prior to diagnosis.

In every case, Dodson takes pride in stepping in to get things done. "It's been a wild adventure, because every single time I walk into a room, it's something new," she says.

Dodson's regular duties include meeting with patients to talk them through treatment and networking to ensure that they are properly set up and in the right place at the right time. She also attends to the logistics of a cancer diagnosis, including treatment, financial assistance and connecting with resources for therapy.

Outside of work, Dodson volunteers with a variety of organizations. She serves on the boards of Cancer Can't and Because There Is Hope and is involved with Relay for Life, multiple food drives and Boy Scouts, helping to get young people ages 11 through 18 involved in oncology-related volunteering.

Through volunteering, she gained the nickname "nurse goddess." Because both her husband and son have cardiac issues, Dodson was eager to teach her Scouts first aid and CPR, and she did the same for her student nurses to make sure they were well-rounded professionals. "I got the reputation of 'Ask Vicki — she'll know what to do,'" Dodson recalls.

"My career started out as this need to organize people's lives, but now I'm just trying to make their lives a little easier," she says. "I go in with the idea that I'm going make somebody's day a little bit better today, and everything is going to be OK."



# THE BEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED

#### **MARIA RODRIGUEZ, B.S.N., RN**

[THE CANCER CENTER - TEMPLE UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA]

Written by Laura Brinkley, B.S.N., RN-BC, OCN, Temple University Hospital

ou have a new cancer diagnosis that stops you in your tracks. You are sick, afraid, vulnerable and in pain when you come to the cancer center at Temple University Hospital. The first advocate you will meet on your cancer journey is your nurse navigator, Maria Rodriguez, B.S.N., RN. Fortunately, she has been expecting you and researching your case. Maria is an integral part of the plan, and she is ready to help you every step of the way to obtain care.

Nurse navigators like Maria break through barriers to obtaining care. What makes Maria different is that she looks beyond your diagnosis and treats you like a human being. Great nurses heal the sick, soothe the spirit and treat illness. Maria also honors what makes you an individual. The cancer center at Temple University Hospital in North Philadelphia is in an area rich in diversity. We have a large population of Hispanic patients. Prior to Maria's arrival, these patients fell through the cracks. They needed services, but they did not have an advocate to make sure they received that care. Because she is Hispanic, Maria understands the fears and myths associated with cancer in this community and is able to explain them to clinicians and physicians. She provides a clear picture of what's being communicated to both the patient and the medical providers, generating trust. »

#### FINALIST ESSAY

Although Maria is fluent in Spanish, she took the steps beyond her job requirement to become a dual-role medical interpreter to make sure she used and translated the correct words and messages to our Spanish-speaking patients, who come from various countries. She handles her role with integrity, ensuring that bad news is delivered with compassion and sensitivity. As a testament to how well she is loved, numerous patient photos and mementos, with many notes of appreciation and thanks, adorn her office.

Maria also made our cancer center's yearly holiday-meal food drive for patients more inclusive. Foods like boxed stuffing, gravy and cranberry sauce are common on American holiday tables. However, Maria made sure that the drive included culturally specific culinary items for the traditional Hispanic holiday feast, such as "sofrito," rice, certain seasonings and "tembleque," a traditional dessert, to be distributed to families in need. The center's patients and families greatly appreciated these familiar and welcoming items.

Maria also spearheaded the Feliz Navidad celebration. This program featured the Christmas traditions of Spanish-speaking countries, including nostalgic songs and cuisine cooked by the patients and staff. Meaningful gifts including hats, scarves and Christmas ornaments were distributed. The patients were very thankful, appreciative and overjoyed that the cancer center's staff took the time to make them happy. This event allowed them to forget about the seriousness of their illness for a moment. Overheard during the joyous and festive celebration was a nursing colleague's remark that "Maria is the best thing that ever happened to our patients." I agree, because she has the ability to reach out and meet patients where they are mentally and emotionally. She shines above others because of her warm hospitality and inviting nature.

Although caring takes its toll on Maria, she never shows that to her patients. She always finds the time to make people laugh. She has a joie de vivre that helps patients focus on healing, and her infectious laughter is a balm in stressful situations. Maria can make you laugh when you want to cry.

As an experienced triage nurse, Maria can quickly decipher when patients require emergency care necessitating a lifesaving rapid response. Many times, patients come to the cancer center with advanced stages of disease and visible signs of progression. An example of her compassion



and nursing skills was seen when a patient with head and neck cancer and a tracheostomy was waiting for an appointment with his physician. Maria quickly identified the patient's swollen lips and protruding tongue and knew that angioedema was likely the cause of his presentation. Quick action was taken with the rapid response team to address his symptoms. If it were not for Maria's intervention, his airway would likely have collapsed, putting his life at risk.

Many times, patients require resources to help them during treatments, like skin cream to tolerate the effects of the chemotherapy agent Erbitux (cetuximab) or a hat on a cold winter day after they have lost their hair due to treatments. Patients come to Maria, and she makes sure the resources go where they are needed the most.

Maria is most deserving of the *CURE®* Extraordinary Healer® Award because she truly exemplifies what it means to be a compassionate and skilled nurse. Her competence across all cultures and her desire to go the extra mile for all our patients demonstrate her selflessness. She gives of herself without thought of a reward or accolades. Our patients love her, and the cancer center would not be as successful without her kindness, thoughtfulness and compassion. She serves as a role model for others because of her selflessness, and, as a result, our patients are well served. ■

#### FINALIST INTERVIEW

# HEALING HANDS

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIA RODRIGUEZ, B.S.N., RN

By Stacy Willingham



aria Rodriguez, B.S.N., RN, had always wanted to be a nurse. However, she didn't go to nursing school until the age of 40, after years of taking care of her mother and grandmother when they were sick convinced her of her calling.

"One day, I was rubbing my grandmother's back because she was having a hard time breathing," she says. "And she said, 'I feel so good when you do that; it makes me feel so much better. You have healing hands, and you should share those hands with other people."

Rodriguez, who previously ran a furniture store with her husband, decided to enroll at Community College of Philadelphia. Being older than most of the other students was difficult, and she faced other challenges: Her mother and grandmother both died before she received her associate degree in nursing, and she took custody of her newborn granddaughter while working toward her degree. The memory of her mother and grandmother kept her reaching for more during that time and continues to motivate her today.

Rodriguez started her new career as a nurse extern at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital; three years later, she moved into neurological trauma, then infection control and, ultimately, oncology. After five years as a gastrointestinal nurse at Thomas Jefferson, Rodriguez felt that something was missing. She enjoyed helping people but again felt called to do more. When she saw an opening for an oncology nurse navigator at Temple University Hospital, she decided to take a chance.

#### FINALIST INTERVIEW

"I always wanted to do more for the Hispanic community," she says, "and I knew that if I could get this job, I would be in a minority area of Temple. I saw the need to not only know Spanish but (also) be certified in the language and really help the Hispanic community — help them as they walk through the door, help them talk to the doctor and really feel comfortable saying how they feel."

Rodriguez got the job and used her understanding of the Hispanic community to make a holiday food drive more inclusive. While giving out the fixings for Thanksgiving meals, she said, she noticed that only American foods were included. "I knew that Hispanic families don't use many of these items, so I made a list of foods that Latino communities use," she said. "Many of my colleagues donated items so that families would be able to make the traditional meal of 'arroz con gandules' (rice and pigeon peas), which is on every table for Thanksgiving in the Latino community."

Rodriguez also launched a Christmas party, "Fiesta Navidena," when she realized that many of her Hispanic patients would be unable to travel to their homelands for the holiday. "My goal was to give the patients a feel of being back home by sharing their music, food, memories and traditions," she says. "Patients brought in traditional meals, and we shared them together. One patient said the event made her forget for a while that she had cancer, and another commented that 'the love that was shared brought tears to our eyes."

Over the past four years, Rodriguez has found her position at Temple as rewarding as she had hoped. She enjoys helping and learning from people from all walks of life, including teenagers, new parents and older individuals, and has discovered that no two patients are ever the same.

Whenever Rodriguez meets a new patient, she makes sure to listen, follow up and find the answers they seek or locate someone who can. It's as though she cares for every patient with the same level of love and attention she showed while rubbing her grandmother's back.

"It just gives me such a great feeling, being able to help other people at a time when it's needed in their life," she says. "I want them to know that someone has them in mind. Someone is actually watching their back."



## Extraordinary Healers®

# Finest Hour Award





## THE HUMAN TOUCH

#### **ELIZABETH "LIZ" FARRAT, B.S.N., CCRN**

[MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER, NEW YORK, NEW YORK]

Written by Evangelina SantaTeresa, CCRN, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

y colleague, Elizabeth "Liz" Farrat, B.S.N., CCRN, has been a nurse at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center for over 15 years. She was re-deployed to the newly created critical care area during the COVID-19 pandemic, functioning as a resource registered nurse.

Liz had to teach critical care nursing to a staff who had never provided care for this patient population. She was always calm and patient while teaching about emergency scenarios. Liz was able to communicate the importance of connecting with each patient. She provided personal grooming items to make the patients who were sedated, intubated or on breathing tubes feel alive, although many were to die or become ventilator-dependent. She purchased razors, shaving cream and beard oil and created comfort.

Liz taught the importance of recognizing that each patient requires dignity throughout all procedures. While putting patients in a prone position, she ensured that each was comfortable before being paralyzed. She provided AROM (active range of motion exercises) by seating the patient with COVID at the side of the bed, working while wearing full personal protective equipment, sweat streaming down her body, even though we needed to limit our exposure time. »



She showed the staff the importance of communication with iPad technology. Prior to intubation of one patient with COVID-19, she took the time to FaceTime with the woman's husband, as this would be the last time they would speak. Liz held the patient's hand and prayed with her prior to intubation. She brought the human touch to each nurse and patient.

Liz's eyes are always smiling, and that didn't change when she self-quarantined from her husband and two children, including a 9-year-old son who has autism. I could see daily how

#### WINNING ESSAY

much she longed to see her family. She could have exempted herself from caring for people with COVID-19, but instead she did not hesitate to care for some of the sickest patients in history.

In addition, Liz opened her home to me for a month so that we could care for the patients together. On her off days, she prepared meals for her neighbor who had lost his job and whose family tested positive for COVID-19. She also prepared meals for other nurses who needed to feel love after a 12-hour shift. Liz's energy is one of love, and all who came in contact with her could feel it daily.

We can't provide nursing care from a distance, nor can we fear the unknown. By providing a physical or spiritual touch daily, Liz makes our challenges easier to face. ■

#### TEACHING MOMENT

Liz taught the importance of recognizing that each patient requires dignity throughout all procedures. While putting patients in a prone position, she ensured that each was comfortable before being paralyzed. She provided AROM (active range of motion exercises) by seating the patient with COVID-19 at the side of the bed, working while wearing full personal protective equipment, sweat streaming down her body, even though we needed to limit our exposure time.

#### WINNER INTERVIEW

# THE POWER OF NURSING



AN INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH "LIZ" FARRAT, B.S.N., CCRN

By Beth Fand Incollingo

lizabeth Farrat, B.S.N., CCRN, grew up hearing from her godmother, a nurse practitioner, that she should join the profession. But when Farrat went to Hunter College in New York City, she started studying to become a teacher.

Unmoved by the material, she switched to Hunter-Bellevue School of Nursing and found the setting "where my heart becomes alive." She threw herself into a career that allows her to pursue the mission at her core: helping others. Farrat chose oncology because a close friend spoke often about her experience with cancer and how her oncology nurse changed her life. "That made such an impact on my heart and mind," Farrat said. "I wanted to join the ranks of nurses who cared so completely."

Her fierce dedication to caring for patients and 13 years of experience as an intensive care unit (ICU) nurse explain why she volunteered to serve on a COVID-19 unit this spring at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, where she has worked her entire career and serves as an operating-room nurse liaison. The deployment meant risking her own health and self-quarantining from her husband and two children, but she never questioned whether the sacrifice was worth it.

"When you have the ability to do critical care, which not a lot of nurses have," Farrat explains, "your whole being says 'I know that I can care for these people, and I need to do it." Furthermore,

#### WINNER INTERVIEW

she recalls, "I knew a lot of the nurses that worked in ICU. I worked with them for a long time, and they're like my family. I couldn't say, 'Oh, no, I'm not going to come help you.'"

Farrat's role in the COVID-19 unit involved teaching nurses from a step-down unit to provide intensive care to patients who had cancer in addition to a perplexing new virus, one that could leave them appearing healthy when they were profoundly oxygen deprived, cause their blood pressure to fluctuate wildly or vastly lower their heart rate. She taught the nurses not only how to manage arterial lines and assist with intubation, but also connect with patients on a personal level.

"It was really important, because people couldn't have visitors, so you were the visitor; you were the family," she recalls. "People were in true isolation, and the psychological pain they were in is something I don't think the survivors will forget, because they were just alone and gravely ill."

To help preserve their will to survive, Farrat and her fellow nurses gave the patients "spa days," washing and braiding their hair or shaving their beards. "It was important that they felt like themselves," she says, including those who were delirious. She remembers one man who, despite being disoriented and agitated, calmly allowed a shave and then, surprisingly, remembered the experience after he had recovered. "That's the power of nursing," Farrat says. "When you humanize people, it's so healing."

She applied the same idea when treating a woman who needed to be intubated and ultimately died from COVID-19. Although medical staff hovered around the patient's bed, eager to administer aid, Farrat delayed the procedure until the woman had had final conversations with her daughter and husband via FaceTime. Then she joined the woman in a prayer for peace and protection.

"I know from my years of experience that, before you put someone on a ventilator, you have to give them those moments," she says. "They'll never get them back. They have the rest of their life to be on a machine."

Although the work was draining, Farrat continued to offer aid to others during her time off, inviting a colleague to self-quarantine with her and cooking bone broth and other immune-boosting foods for neighbors facing unemployment and COVID-19, as well as for her brother and sister-in-law, both registered nurses working in intesive care units in New York who were treating patients with the virus.

"That was how I was raised — that if you have, you give," Farrat says. "If people are in need, I can't just sit by and not help. It's not in my DNA."



# In Our Corner Corner



# CHAMPIONING PATIENT MILESTONES

#### **COURTNEY EBBESKOTTE, RN**

[FUSION MEDICAL STAFFING, OMAHA, NEBRASKA]

Written by Elizabeth Perkins, RN, Nebraska Medicine, Omaha, Nebraska

s oncology nurses, we know that birthdays are a privilege denied to many. Our stem cell transplant unit has been fortunate to have had a great champion of birthdays in Courtney Ebbeskotte, RN.

On one occasion, she noted that one of our patients was about to turn 21 and discovered that on his birthday, he would be admitted to the hospital for his final round of chemotherapy. During his second-to-last hospital stay, Courtney made arrangements with his mother and her fellow staff members to throw a surprise party during his next admission. When he arrived, he was met with streamers, a cake and enthusiastic nurses and patient-care techs shouting "Surprise!" It made his birthday and final hospital admission an experience to remember.

Another time, she found that she and one of her patients shared a birthday the upcoming week. Although not scheduled to work on her birthday, Courtney came to the floor and delivered a bouquet of balloons to the patient. She has wholeheartedly celebrated patient milestones and was among our unit's most enthusiastic participants whenever a patient completed the 5K, half-marathon or full marathon that are part of our unit's walking program. If she wasn't the nurse »

to send a group text arranging the finish-line celebration, she would most certainly be one of the first to respond and stand by, ready to cheer.

Courtney has been a champion not only of current birthdays but also of patients reaching more birthdays. Every shift, she would strive to motivate her patients to do what was in their best interest for recovery, whether that meant eating and drinking more, walking just a few laps in the halls or sitting up in a chair for at least one meal. She is particularly effective in motivating noncompliant patients. When she served as our unit representative on the pressure ulcer prevention team, she strove to motivate her fellow workers in an effort to help us help them. She accounted for the patients needing frequent repositioning and placed reminders, which she designed and redesigned, on the patient doors and inside the rooms. She would hold us accountable and inspire us to be better healers.

Many patients owe their birthdays, both the ones celebrated now and those they can celebrate in the future, to the compassion, work ethic and healing nature of Courtney Ebbeskotte. ■

#### TEACHING MOMENT

Courtney has been a champion not only of current birthdays but also of patients reaching more birthdays. Every shift, she would strive to motivate her patients to do what was in their best interest for recovery, whether that meant eating and drinking more, walking just a few laps in the halls or sitting up in a chair for at least one meal.





## A HEALING HEART

#### NADEEN ROBINSON, M.S.N., RN, OCN

[NEWYORK-PRESBYTERIAN, NEW YORK, NEW YORK]

Written by **Timothy Green** 

y name is Timothy Green. I am 39 years old. When I was a patient in the oncology unit at NewYork-Presbyterian's Columbia University Irving Medical Center in New York City, I had the privilege of having Nadeen Robinson, M.S.N., RN, OCN, as my nurse. I strongly and wholeheartedly believe that she is deserving of recognition for so many reasons.

I have extreme anxiety, depression and PTSD and now am dealing with a disease in my brain and lymphoma, as well, my doctors believe. In addition, now I am deaf and severely vision impaired. This may sound cliché, but there is just something about Nadeen. In a world where so many are succumbing to mental illness — specifically, suicide — that calm is refreshing to me. To be completely honest, I was scared out of my mind, but there was something about her coming in with that smile and that infectious energy that calmed me and put my mind at ease.

She constantly sought ways to help me improve my ability to communicate with the staff and elevate my vision. Nadeen got me whiteboards, markers and an eraser so I could communicate with the nurses and doctors and know what was going on. She would sit with me and use the whiteboard to tell in detail the plan for the day as she broke down the doctor's findings. I know that seems like a normal thing to do for a deaf person; however, it was her action, her time and her intent that made the difference to me. It gave me a sense of security and control in a world where one can easily get lost with full vision and hearing, let alone impaired. »

As if that was not enough, Nadeen would excitedly come in each day with a new kind or color of marker with a built-in eraser, decorated board or something else that was fun to make me smile. One day she had a rolling iPad she borrowed from another nursing unit. She was so excited, as if it was something that would benefit her, and that was truly amazing. We used the iPad to connect face-to-face with a hearing-impaired person and use sign language. I am just learning sign language, as this is all new for me, and though my ability to communicate was limited, her effort made me feel so cared for and that she had my best interest in mind. It made me feel like I mattered in a way that encouraged me to want to be better each day. Her willingness to go above and beyond is as amazing as her bedside demeanor and above anything I have ever encountered.

Nadeen's attention to detail, willing attitude, knowledge and generosity, both on and off the clock, seem far superior to those of most in the medical field. She has been exceptional at working with me in my time of need to help with both my disability and personal care. She got me out of my room and into the hallways each day to walk around as she had everyone cheer me on, encouraging me to stay independent and not fall victim to my disability. I was in need of some personal items because I was staying longer than expected, and I didn't have help because my girlfriend left while I was in the hospital due to her anxiety about all that was happening. Nadeen noticed my struggles and used her own time and money to get my clothes laundered. When you are 6 feet, 3 inches tall and 303 pounds, it's hard to fit into a hospital bed and even more so the gowns, so you can understand how important it is to have your own clothes. Nadeen added some extra items I needed to help me feel normal throughout my stay in the hospital.

After my discharge, I needed to go to another unit, and Nadeen reached out to the admitting staff there to make sure I did not lose my bed. She assisted me with the entire process until I was in my room because I had no one with me who could help. This was not your everyday act of kindness, and it really means a lot to me that I matter to someone so special.

Health care needs more Nadeens. Her level of care is unmatched, and her endless energy and eagerness to care for her patients go far beyond expectations and the call of duty. She is not just extremely knowledgeable and professional; she has what nursing is all about, taking her oath to



heart and beyond. The oncology team is fantastic, but Nadeen is definitely an example for all. I am happy to have met her. I feel like she is not only my nurse but also my dear friend. The love she displays for her job and people in general goes far beyond extraordinary. Nadeen literally changed my life.

I was feeling extreme anxiety and depression when I was in the oncology unit, and deaf is a strange place to be, but Nadeen helped me find peace with who I am and how to cope. I could write all day about how important she is, not just to me but to all the cancer patients, as well as to the hospital itself, based on her quality of work. I am asking with my whole heart and soul for you to consider her for this award, because she sets the gold standard for nursing and is the glue that holds her unit together. C



## KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE FOR PATIENTS

#### MARY SCHUELLER, M.S.N., RN-BC, AOCNS, CHPN

[HOSPITAL SISTERS HEALTH SYSTEM, EASTERN WISCONSIN DIVISION, KOHLER, WISCONSIN]

Written by Clare Bowe

y sister, Mary Schueller, M.S.N., RN-BC, AOCNS, CHPN, is a great example of what it's like to devote your career to helping others. She truly cares for those in her path and tries to help in whatever way she can. She tirelessly helped our family navigate all the difficult and winding roads when dealing with cancer diagnoses that affected all our lives. Her nonstop efforts helped resolve many of our family's daily concerns.

In 1994, our father, who was a dairy farmer and vegetable grower in rural Wisconsin, received a diagnosis of multiple myeloma. He underwent numerous rounds of radiation and chemotherapy in a town that was more than 20 miles from the farm he ran with our mother. They both taught us to be hard workers and support one another, no matter what it was we were going through. Our mother, for the most part, transported him to and from appointments, but it was Mary who immediately gave us other five siblings folders filled with papers and articles to explain the process. Because of her position as an employee of Hospital Sisters Health System, she was able to share a lot of information with us and »



attend many of our father's appointments and treatment sessions. She was very patient with our mother and answered many of our family's questions when we didn't understand things.

Sadly enough, our father passed away in 1996 under hospice care after numerous attempts at treatments. Then, in the early 2000s, our mother received diagnoses of various medical issues, the last of which was vulvar cancer, and we started the whole cancer journey again. As the one who lived nearest our mother, who had moved to an assisted living facility closer to her doctors and hospitals, Mary ended up responsible for most of her care. Mary worked tirelessly in her own daily job as an oncology clinical nurse educator, which involved traveling several days a week to another major Wisconsin city through rain, sleet and snow, and then came back to our mother to continue nursing her through all the daily events that are involved in cancer care and treatment.

I honestly can say that I never heard her complain about being the one responsible for our mother's care. She set up a page on the CaringBridge website so that we would all get updates and could help in small ways, which was so wonderful for those of us who did not live close by. Our mother underwent various radiation, surgical and chemotherapy modalities, which Mary so expertly navigated because of her experience in the field. Whenever one of us had a question, we posted it on the CaringBridge site, and she would explain it to us in lay terms. I don't know where

we would have all been had Mary not been there to help with all this. Going through this cancer journey for the second time with our other parent was taxing, to say the least, and Mary provided the comfort and support we needed until our mother passed away in 2017, also under hospice care.

Besides holding a bachelor's and a Master of Science degree in nursing, Mary has various oncology and gerontological certifications that demonstrate her continual pursuit of knowledge in the ever-changing medical world. She has held many positions throughout her more than 41 years of employment at Hospital Sisters Health System, including nursing assistant, staff registered nurse, oncology nursing specialist and even interim chief nursing officer, giving her a vast amount of knowledge that she is happy to share.

Mary is a member of many different organizations, including the Oncology Nursing Society; the Southeastern Wisconsin Oncology Nursing Society, of which she is past president; the Northeastern Wisconsin Oncology Nursing Society; and the Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association. As a member of the Oncology Nursing Society, Mary was part of the first delegations of nurses to visit China and Cuba. As if she didn't already have enough to fill her hours, she also stays involved in her community by being an American Red Cross blood donor; a participant in the PROMISE study, which is testing healthy people for signs of multiple myeloma; a Sheboygan County Cancer Care Fund board member; an Alverno College school of nursing volunteer assessor; a volunteer with the American Cancer Society; and past chair of the Wisconsin State leadership board. She was actively involved in the Tobacco-Free Sheboygan County Coalition and served as co-chair for many years. She continues to be involved with many of the American Cancer Society Relay for Life events and has been on various additional committees.

Whew! I'm exhausted just writing down some of the things she does. I don't know how she keeps going. Cancer is exhausting, time-consuming and unforgiving at times. I thank God all the time that Mary was able to help my large, extended family navigate our cancer journey while providing support for our parents. She showed great medical knowledge, patience and love and continues to be incredibly helpful on a daily basis to everyone she touches. She is truly an extraordinary healer on so many levels!

## WHY I WANT TO BE A NURSE

#### MCKENZIE SIEGMUND, B.S.N., RN

[COOK CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, FORT WORTH, TEXAS]

Written by Hallie Bea Barnard, age 11



i, my name is Hallie Bea Barnard. I have been sick with Diamond-Blackfan anemia my whole life, waiting for my bone marrow match, and more recently found out I have cancer in my thighbone.

Last November, I was admitted to the Cook Children's Health Care System (don't worry — they don't really cook children!) for my bone marrow transplant. Before I was admitted, I told my bone marrow transplant doctor, Dr. (Gretchen) Eames, that I wanted to grow up and become a doctor but that I didn't know if I could do it, because I don't have a good bedside manner. When my brother fell off the stool at our house, there was so much blood, I told him he was going to die. But Dr. Eames said that I would meet so many doctors and nurses, learn from them, and take what I liked the most from each of them. She was right. »





#### TEACHING MOMENT

She encouraged me to be my best and try my hardest, and she believed in me so much that I started to believe in myself. I don't want to be a doctor anymore; I want to be a nurse — a nurse just like McKenzie, so I can help children who are sick and I can believe in them the way she believed in me.

I spent 60 days in isolation. I had only my mom, dad, granny, and aunts Micki and Brandi to visit me. The doctors and nurses who worked with me became my friends and family. My most favorite nurse is McKenzie Siegmund, B.S.N., RN. She is nice, beautiful, smart and funny. But what I really like is that she is my friend, and she listens to me and helps me. When I got my chemotherapy, I had really bad mucositis and I couldn't swallow at all. I had an NG (nasogastric) tube placed for 30 days because I couldn't eat. Nurse McKenzie told me that she believed in me so much and knew that I could do it.

She taught me how to swallow. She encouraged me to be my best and try my hardest, and she believed in me so much that I started to believe in myself. I don't want to be a doctor anymore; I want to be a nurse — a nurse just like McKenzie, so I can help children who are sick and I can believe in them the way she believed in me. I also think that nurses should get paid more than doctors, but that is a different essay.

# AN EXCEPTIONAL COMFORTER AND HEALER

#### **DEBORAH AUSTIN THOMPSON, B.S.N., RN, OCN**

[ATLANTA VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER, DECATUR, GEORGIA]

Written by Tesla Graham, D.N.P., RN, OCN, Atlanta Veterans Affairs Medical Center

have known oncology nurse Deborah Austin Thompson for over 30 years. I will tell you her story in the words of a patient, Naomi Gibbons Williams:

I have known Deborah Thompson, B.S.N., RN, OCN, since Dec. 9, 2009, the day I received a diagnosis of stage 4 breast cancer at the oncology clinic of the Atlanta Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Georgia. Although she was not assigned as my nurse at the time, I immediately noticed how professional, kind and caring she was — so much so that, after a few months, I asked for Deborah to take care of me whenever my assigned nurse was off duty. Deborah accepted the responsibility of caring for me without hesitation. Then, when my original nurse retired five years ago, Deborah accepted me as one of her many patients. Since then, I have been truly blessed to have such a wonderful nurse of her caliber, expertise and caring nature take care of me during chemotherapy infusions every three weeks. Deborah provides the same great care to all her patients, and I have never seen her out of sorts. I have seen her interact with other patients, nurses and doctors with so much respect, and she always has encouraging words for patients, co-workers

and others whenever needed. She has earned the respect, admiration and love of all her peers in the oncology clinic and throughout the VA hospital. I have become a better person since I have known her. On many occasions, she has encouraged me to go out on speaking engagements, informing others of the warning signs of cancer. Because of Deborah, I have learned to encourage hope in others by telling them my story.

Deborah not only gives her all to patients at the VA but also volunteers for outside cancer groups and holds several positions within her community. She has been a bright light for me and many other patients at the VA, encouraging us to keep going and not give up. Without a doubt, Deborah Thompson is worthy of recognition because of her expert patient care, professionalism, compassion, ability to solve problems and, most of all, her heartfelt concern for all patients.

Naomi's story speaks volumes, especially the part about being inspired by Deborah to encourage hope in others — something I can vouch for. I have known Naomi for the past nine years, and she was my rock when my brother was battling cancer. She gave me hope and encouragement that he would make it when I thought there was no hope. Today, I celebrate nine years with him in remission. She continues to be my rock now that my son is fighting cancer. She is always happy, joyful and welcoming, living life to the fullest, because she sees life as fulfilling no matter what the odds are.

Deborah Thompson brings joy, hope and compassion to her patients. She takes the time to listen to their concerns and advocate for their care. She recognizes her patients as individuals and treats each with respect and dignity. Her patients look forward to her care at each visit. She makes them comfortable and at home. She interacts with patients and families by educating them on post-treatment protocols, and they appreciate how much she cares. When patients go into remission, they come back to thank her for her care and support throughout the cancer journey. Family members who have lost their loved ones also return to let her know and to thank her for helping them.

Deborah Thompson is indeed an extraordinary comforter and healer.



### CHAPTER 2

# Touching & the Spirit





#### TOUCHING THE SPIRIT

## CARING AND EMPATHETIC

#### JENNIFER BECKER, RN

[NOVANT HEALTH ONCOLOGY SPECIALISTS — WILKESBORO, NORTH WILKESBORO, NORTH CAROLINA]

Written by **Howard Campbell** 

irst, an introduction: I am an 80-year-old patient who received a multiple myeloma diagnosis in 2012. In the past seven years, I have been treated with a variety of chemotherapy drugs — orally with Revlimid (lenalidomide), Pomalyst (pomalidomide) and Ninlaro (ixazomib) and by injection or infusion with Zometa (zoledronic acid), Velcade (bortezomib) and Darzalex (daratumumab). My current treatment regimen is weekly infusions of dexamethasone and Cytoxan (cyclophosphamide).

In my 80 years, I have been exposed to many nurses. In my estimation, there are two areas of concern when I think of nurses. The first, of course, is their medical expertise. I have enough faith in the medical system to assume that a nurse who goes to school and passes the appropriate tests and on-the-job training well enough to be granted the honor to be called a registered nurse is qualified from a technical standpoint. However, there is a second side to the role of being a nurse that, to me, is at least as important as the technical side, perhaps even more important.

In my opinion, some people in the medical field have a tendency to be somewhat impersonal in their dealings with patients. The nurse is at the bottom of the contact line and the one person who can best understand the needs and concerns of the patient. The average patient, I am sure, has questions and concerns that cause worry and nervousness. Jennifer Becker, RN, has been treating »

#### TOUCHING THE SPIRIT

me for the entire seven years since my diagnosis. I have absolutely no doubt about her technical capabilities. The others in the office come to her for advice and counsel. But the area in which she really excels is what we used to call "bedside manner" (I am not sure if that term is used today).

Jennifer always makes sure to check in with all the patients, even those whose treatment she is not directly involved with on that particular day. She wants to ensure that we have no questions that have not been answered and that our needs have been addressed. Beyond that, she is actively involved in making sure that those who accompany the patient are comfortable and their needs are satisfied. It is a great comfort to me, as a patient, to know that my wife is considered an important part of my treatment.

I have never spent even one day in treatment when Jennifer was any different from her caring and empathetic self. She has never failed to satisfy any and all questions and concerns that I have had over the years. If she did not have the answer or felt that it should come from elsewhere, she made sure that it was resolved in the end. I am proud to tell the oncology community that she deserves recognition as an extraordinary healer.

#### TEACHING MOMENT

Jennifer always makes sure to check in with all the patients, even those whose treatment she is not directly involved with on that particular day. She wants to ensure that we have no questions that have not been answered and that our needs have been addressed. Beyond that, she is actively involved in making sure that those who accompany the patient are comfortable and their needs are satisfied.



# COMPOSURE, KINDNESS AND PROFESSIONALISM

#### **MOLLY CONKLIN, B.S.N., RN, PCCN**

[THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MD ANDERSON CANCER CENTER, HOUSTON, TEXAS]

Written by Brianna Salinas, M.S.N., RN, CNL, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

y role as a clinical nurse leader has provided me with the opportunity to observe patient interactions, meet with patients about their experiences, and coach and mentor staff members. Molly Conklin, B.S.N., RN, PCCN, is one of many excellent nurses I have worked with in my career, but what stands out is her unconditionally compassionate nature. Molly is loved by all her patients, and there has not been a single complaint about her from patients or her peers. When things get chaotic, Molly keeps her composure, remains kind and exudes the professionalism we all aspire to have.

We cared for a very sick patient who spent several months in the hospital and was deconditioned as a result. The patient had lost motivation and no longer wanted to participate in physical therapy. Given her condition and surgical implications, physical therapy was paramount to her recovery and ultimately her discharge home. Although the therapists and family tried to encourage this patient to participate, she would intermittently decline.

The entire staff came to know this patient and developed a great rapport with her, but on one particular day, she decided that enough was enough. She closed herself off, didn't want »





to interact with anyone and refused to work with physical therapy multiple times that day. The holidays were nearing, and the patient expressed her desire to return home, but she had lost sight of the light at the end of the tunnel. A physical therapist, the patient's daughter and I talked with her in an attempt to get her out of bed, but we were unsuccessful.

Molly was informed of this but would not take no for an answer. She was determined to find a way. The patient's daughter brought treats for the staff as a token of appreciation, and Molly took that opportunity to motivate her patient. She asked the patient to walk the unit and pass out her treats instead of having staff come to her room. Initially, the patient was reluctant, but Molly

kindly pressed on and was successful. She gathered a team to get the patient out of the room and arranged a holiday parade of sorts, comprised of her walker, her wheelchair and the treats. With family at her side and staff cheering her on, the patient walked not just one unit but two. She hand-delivered the goodies with bells and applause before returning to her room.

Molly made her patient feel extra special that day. The woman's daughter, nearly in tears, told me how thankful she was for the care and attention delivered to her mom. The patient was able to go home a few days later, just in time for Thanksgiving — and what a time to be grateful!

This is just one moment out of so many in which Molly has gone above and beyond for her patients. She does what is best for every patient and encourages them to do the same for themselves. As a nurse certified in adult progressive care nursing, Molly proved that she has solid assessment and critical thinking skills that allow her to proficiently care for patients. As a sweet, compassionate and caring person, Molly proved to this patient and to her peers that she will always advocate for their well-being.

### TEACHING MOMENT

What stands out is her unconditionally compassionate nature. Molly is loved by all her patients, and there has not been a single complaint about her from patients or her peers. When things get chaotic, Molly keeps her composure, remains kind and exudes the professionalism we all aspire to have.

# ILLUMINATING LIFE'S BEAUTY

# DARIA MLYNARSKI, B.S.N., RN, OCN

[BRIGHAM AND WOMEN'S HOSPITAL, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS]

Written by Rea Shqepa

have found it very difficult to write anything about Daria Mlynarski, B.S.N., RN, OCN, for words are so meaningless in describing the person and the nurse that she is. Who she is and what she does are intertwined, and we are gifted with one of the most intelligent, compassionate, humble and hardworking nurses I have had the great pleasure of knowing. Almost a year and a half after my father's passing, my mother and I continue to be grateful for the care and love Daria and the wonderful nurses at 4C showed for my father and my family.

My father courageously fought acute leukemia for 14 months in four hospitals and under the care of countless doctors and nurses. The uncertainty and aggressiveness of the disease were made worse by my parents' inability to communicate in English and our lack of family support because of our immigration to the United States a few years ago. I had to learn early on to assertively advocate for him and teach myself everything I could about the disease, its behavior and its treatment and the side effects of every medication. I was determined to place his care in my own hands, not only because I wanted him to live, but also because along the way, I lost trust and faith in the medical community that was often overworked due to many patients with countless questions. I believed that my love was going to be enough to save him, and I was going to do so »



by controlling every step I could, by relying only on myself and often not trusting the care team. I was wrong.

My father's last month of life was spent in 4C for reinduction chemotherapy after a failed stem cell transplant. This was not the first time we met the wonderful team at 4C, for my father had been admitted there before. The first time, Daria was the assigned nurse, and I remember my father commenting in our language about how intelligent and precise she was. That was not a compliment that he gave freely, and I smiled looking at Daria while she, paying attention to every detail around her, was trying to understand what was going on. She knew how to understand my father's needs and body language, how to communicate with him while speaking a different language and how to care for the pain that he, the proud man that he was, would often not share he was having. She knew what he was feeling, she knew him and she knew us, and she became family when we had no one else to comfort us.

She is exceptional at what she does, and her gifts and professionalism are supported by an equally caring team. Although my father was her patient, she showed love and understanding to my mother and me, and we never felt that we were alone in this fight.

I cried in Daria's arms the night we took my father into intensive care for the last time. She, being Daria, told me what to expect without taking my hopes away and taught me how to fight without giving up. I cried in her arms and the arms of every 4C nurse for the next four days as my father was slowly passing away. The night that he died, my mother and I were surrounded by the nurses of 4C. Daria was not working that day, but I felt her with me. I was comforted by the care she had shown my dad during the last month — the joyfulness, the smiles, the long talks and all the extra time she took to tell us stories and help us believe in miracles and love.

While we were surrounded by white, cold hospital walls, she showed us a world full of colors and how beautiful life can be.

I cried even more the night that my father passed away because the world had lost such greatness and everything was going to be darker. It took me months to understand and accept that, by meeting Daria and the team of 4C, life had taught me that my father was leaving behind a trail of great people, and my parents and I were lucky to have met them, despite the circumstances. And what a way to leave this world, under the presence and care of Daria and her team! How were we ever so blessed?

### TEACHING MOMENT

She knew how to understand my father's needs and body language, how to communicate with him while speaking a different language and how to care for the pain that he, the proud man that he was, would often not share he was having. She knew what he was feeling, she knew him and she knew us, and she became family when we had no one else to comfort us.



# MY HERO, OUR ANGEL

# **DIANE NECHI-FRAGASSI, B.S.N., RN, OCN**

[NORTHSHORE UNIVERSITY HEALTHSYSTEM, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS]

Written by Tracey Lang

July 1, 2020, marked 15 years since I received my breast cancer diagnosis. I was young, only 31. I was facing multiple surgeries, three chemotherapies, radiation and countless appointments. Luckily, my second round of chemotherapy with Cytoxan (cyclophosphamide) and the red devil, Adriamycin (doxorubicin), would not be the same as my first. I was not the ideal patient during my first round. I think back and can see that I was labeled as difficult by my first oncology nurse. She was not there for round two. A different, more seasoned oncology nurse was assigned to deal with me.

This is when Diane Nechi-Fragassi, B.S.N., RN, OCN, entered not only my chemotherapy room but my life. Diane's demeanor and smile instantly brought me a feeling of calm. This woman standing before me exuded a genuinely kind and caring nature. She introduced herself, and I remember telling her that she must have drawn the short straw that day to be stuck with me. My comment did not rattle her at all.

Of course, Diane did everything she was required to do for my treatment; however, she also did so much more. She communicated with me and kept on top of everything and, in so doing, kept me on top of everything, as well. She sat with me, anticipated my needs, calmed my nerves, »

eased my fears, informed, listened, advocated and never let much time go by without checking on me if she had to leave my side.

Later that day, I left with a much different feeling and mindset than I had the first time. I was getting dose-dense chemotherapy at first, so I was not due back for a couple of weeks. Diane made me aware of what to expect in the coming days, and during those two weeks, she called every couple of days to check up on me. I went in for my next treatment, and when it was Diane who brought me back to have poison infused into my body, I found myself smiling at the sight of her. After that, I made it a point to request that Diane be my oncology nurse, always to find out that she had already been assigned to me.

I have known many people who have faced cancer and cancer treatments, and let me tell you, I was not that patient coming in dressed all in pink and wearing a tiara or in a superhero cape or cowboy boots, ready to show cancer who was boss. It was not long before I realized that it was "My Diane" who deserved the cape. She was an unexpected, uniquely magnificent, superhuman being whom I was lucky enough to encounter because of my diagnosis. Diane can be described as a cross between a superhero and an angel walking among us. I am not the only person who recognized this about Diane; on many occasions I heard others talking about how magnificent their nurse was, only to find out they too had My Diane.

Diane was with me throughout all my treatments and beyond. She sent cards, made countless phone calls, was there for me whenever I reached out, and stayed loyal and steadfast to me long after she was "obligated" to do so. I don't know many people who still have their chemotherapy nurse calling them a few times each year, more than a decade later. That is what My Diane did, and I'm certain not only for me.

Over the years, I have stated that anyone facing this horrid nightmare of a disease should have a Diane with them as they fight. My birthday came and went in 2019 and, for the first time since 2005, My Diane didn't call. I knew something was wrong. Soon I would find out that My Diane had received a diagnosis of a very aggressive late-stage lung cancer.

Diane remained dedicated to her patients. She had a couple of treatments and wanted to return to work and to her patients as she fought her own disease. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to the effects of her treatment.

Never did I think the day would come when I would find out that My Diane had been taken from this world, far too young at age 62. I am still in shock and disbelief. Diane being gone has been more difficult and brought me more tears than my own cancer diagnosis. To say that I feel less safe with her gone is an understatement. Diane was like a tiny pebble dropped into the vast ocean: She created powerful ripples that are endless. I am so thankful for Diane Nechi-Fragassi. My life would not be the same without her.

Diane mattered to this world. Her life had significant meaning because she made a difference. Diane will be missed and never forgotten. She was not only an extraordinary healer but also an extraordinary human being. "My Diane," my hero, is now our angel.

### TEACHING MOMENT

I have known many people who have faced cancer and cancer treatments, and let me tell you, I was not that patient coming in dressed all in pink and wearing a tiara or in a superhero cape or cowboy boots, ready to show cancer who's boss. It was not long before I realized that it was "My Diane" who deserved the cape. She was an unexpected, uniquely magnificent, superhuman being whom I was lucky enough to encounter because of my diagnosis.

# A COMFORT AND A TRUE FRIEND

# **LESLIE SMITH, RN**

[CANCER TREATMENT CENTERS OF AMERICA, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA]

Written by Marlayne Sick

y living angel is my oncology nurse, Leslie Smith, RN.

I met Leslie in March 2016 when I received a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer and made my first trip to Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) in Philadelphia. My cancer had come back after 20 years, and I was scared. Leslie was one of the first people I met at CTCA. She is part of my amazing group of doctors, surgeons, a physician assistant and all others who are a part of Team Marlayne. Leslie is the "holder of the keys," so to speak. I can get in touch with her via phone, text or email anytime I have a question or concern, feel overwhelmed or just need her and the compassion she exudes even over a text.

The team at CTCA has started bringing nurses into the appointments to hear what the oncologists/physician assistant are speaking about and respond to any questions or concerns the patients might have. The first time this happened, I thought something was wrong and turned to Leslie and asked, "Why are you here?" She smiled at me and said, "Because I love you." Plain and simple ... because she loves me ... and she truly does. ">



There have been times when things have not turned out the way I wanted them, and she stayed with me as I cried on her shoulder. She was and is a comfort and a true friend. I believe nurse Leslie Smith is an extraordinary healer because she goes above and beyond what is expected of her with grace and dignity, love and compassion. I feel safe with Leslie. She is my living angel!

### TEACHING MOMENT

The team at CTCA has started bringing their nurses into the appointments to hear what the oncologists/physician assistant are speaking about and respond to any questions or concerns the patients might have. The first time this happened, I thought something was wrong, and I turned to Leslie and asked, "Why are you here?" She smiled at me and said, "Because I love you."





# LIKE A SECOND MOM

# **ALICE VANDERMEER, B.S.N., RN, OCN**

[ST. LUKE'S CANCER INSTITUTE, MERIDIAN, IDAHO]

Written by **Heather C. Roessler** 

lice Vandermeer, B.S.N, RN, OCN, has been there since the beginning of my treatment for stage 2, grade 3 invasive ductal carcinoma and actually helped me make the decision to start therapy.

I had a pretty bad meltdown in May 2012, the night before chemotherapy started. I was screaming that I was not doing it. Even when I got there the next morning, I planned to tell them thanks, but no. Alice was there. When she's around, it feels like having a mom right there, which was nice for me because my mom was at her home in Mississippi at that time. Alice's entire demeanor was able to quiet me and, I would suspect, the others starting chemotherapy. After talking with her, I felt myself cave in, and I started chemotherapy. So far so good, with no recurrence.

Alice is the nurse everyone has contact with. She gives the pretreatment class at St. Luke's Cancer Institute in Meridian, Idaho, for all types of cancer. She must do a lot of volunteering, because she seemed to be at all the extra classes we had. She was there for a course called Look Good, Feel Better. (Kudos to the Look Good Feel Better Foundation for that class — I might be vain, but losing my hair was very traumatic for me.) She was there at every event I attended that dealt with cancer treatment. »

I also saw Alice in the breast cancer portions of the hospital. She always seemed to be there at different stages of my care, throughout the treatment process. At one point, I ended up with an infection and needed a treatment administered daily for two weeks. Alice was made available for that, as well. Whether she arranged that or God had a hand in it, I don't know. I just thank God every day that she was there for me.

Alice just has a wealth of knowledge! Her demeanor of kindness, caring and gentleness is real.

I am not her only patient, I know, and I'll bet that every patient who deals with Alice feels the way I do about her. Physical support comes and goes, but emotional support stays with a person for a very long time. I know that I always had Alice's emotional support, and that was the part I needed the most. My post-cancer world, and that of many others, would not be the same without her presence, always at just the right times.

TEACHING MOMENT

Alice just has a wealth of knowledge! Her demeanor of kindness, caring and gentleness is real.





# **BECOMING FAMILY**

# **MAURA ZNAVOR, B.S.N., RN**

[UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH MEDICAL CENTER HILLMAN CANCER CENTER, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA]

Written by **Roseanne Maro, B.S.N., RN, OCN,** University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Hillman Cancer Center

met Maura Znavor, B.S.N., RN, when I interviewed her for a position in our treatment room. The only two things I knew about her were that she was oncology certified and her father was receiving care in our treatment room.

Since that day, she's become so much more than that to me. She is a caring, exuberant, charismatic and kind nurse who uses all her strengths to care for our patients every day. She cries with them and holds them when they get bad news but also laughs with them, celebrates with them and encourages them.

One of our regular patients, Danny, was visiting almost daily for IV fluids while getting treatment, and she adopted him into our little treatment-room family. It may seem like a small gesture, but she bought over 1,000 stickers to share with our patients and decorated their charts or wristbands. Danny lived for those stickers. He used them to decorate the baseball cap that he wore every day when he came to see us. He expanded his collection with every visit. »

Then the day came when he got to ring our end-of-treatment bell, a day everyone laughs and cries together. Danny was saying goodbye to the nurses he saw almost every day, and he cried. Maura took the time to kneel by his wheelchair and share loving words. Danny said, "Maura told me I will always have a special place in her heart." Later, he told me, "She has been with me since the start of my treatments. She has always been compassionate and caring, from the heart. She brightens all my days here and gives me hope for a healthy future."

That is Maura: loving, genuine and certainly an extraordinary healer.

### TEACHING MOMENT

He told me, "She has been with me since the start of my treatments. She has always been compassionate and caring, from the heart. She brightens all my days here and gives me hope for a healthy future."





# Above & Beyond



# **ADORED BY ALL**

# **DIOANNE ADSUARA, B.S.N., RN, CCRN**

[MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER, NEW YORK, NEW YORK]

Written by **Amanda Badal**, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

ioanne, or "Jojo," as she is known throughout the department of dermatology here at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK), came to our team about two years ago and has been loved and cherished ever since. She is 110% dedicated to the care of our patients and goes above and beyond to make sure all have the appropriate wound-care supplies, medications and appointments.

Jojo spends countless hours doing things that are not in her job description, such as calling insurance companies to make sure there are no discrepancies or interruptions in patient care. She is a storehouse of wisdom and knowledge; with her background in acute urgent care, she was the perfect addition to Dr. Alina Markova's team. She is easily one of the hardest-working and sweetest people I've ever had the pleasure of working with. Our patients absolutely adore her, to the point where some actually refuse to speak to any other nurses if she is not available. And whenever she's not here, the impact is definitely felt throughout the clinic.

Although Jojo holds the title of being Dr. Markova's primary nurse, she never hesitates to extend herself where needed throughout the department. Often during her administrative days, I get a call or email from her telling me that a doctor has pulled her into another clinic »

or that a patient wanted to see her on a different floor. She is in such high in demand here that sometimes she has to try to hide out from the other medical doctors so she can get her administrative work done.

Over the past two years, Jojo has become not only one of my favorite nurses but also an amazing friend and confidant. She has made my time working here at MSK so amazing with her high energy and "I'll get it done" attitude. I truly cannot think of anyone more deserving of recognition.

## TEACHING MOMENT

She is easily one of the hardest-working and sweetest people I've ever had the pleasure of working with. Our patients absolutely adore her, to the point where some actually refuse to speak to any other nurses if she is not available. And whenever she's not here, the impact is definitely felt throughout the clinic.





# A MISSION TO TEACH

# **ALICIA CASTANON, M.S.N., OCN, APRN, FNP-C**

[UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER HEALTH SYSTEM, LUBBOCK, TEXAS]

Written by Fred Hardwicke, M.D., University Medical Center Southwest Cancer Center, Lubbock, Texas

Back when we had a hematology/oncology fellow from Myanmar, we had the curious irony of a young woman from Myanmar winding up in our hospital with a new diagnosis of acute myelogenous leukemia. She knew almost no English and little of the official language of Myanmar but was very fluent in her own local language. Substantial communication over the next several months could occur only on Saturdays, when someone was available and fluent in both English and the patient's native language. Far more common, however, is when I try to work with my "little bit of Spanish" and my patient's "little bit of English" and manage to pretend that proper communication has taken place. All too often, of course, something is lost in translation.

Alicia Castanon, M.S.N., OCN, APRN, FNP-C, is an extraordinary person and an extraordinary healer who has opened the lines of communication between our patients and staff.

Over 45 years ago, I took Texas' famous River Road from Presidio to Lajitas, and I still clearly remember the ups and downs and the unique wilderness beauty of the area. The Rio Grande is the 20th-longest river in the world, starting at the foot of some of those "fourteeners" in Colorado and going through a series of dams in New Mexico. There is usually no water at all from El Paso to Presidio, but there the mighty Rio Conchos from Mexico brings the water that gives life to the canyons of the Big Bend. On River Road is a small community called Redford, »

and Alicia grew up there with Spanish as her native tongue. Thanks to the river, her experiences were largely agricultural, with a diet supplemented by fish, chicken, hogs, goats and deer. Chasing chickens was fun, but Alicia had dreams of something else.

After working as a teacher's assistant and striking that one off the list, she ended up with an associate degree in business and computers and was able to work in retail for a few years. Then something dreadful happened, and the painful memory lives on to this day. Alicia's only son became ill in 2001, and soon the dreaded diagnosis of severe aplastic anemia rocked the family. There was a temporary ray of hope because her 8-year old daughter was a perfect match for a stem cell transplant, which happens in about 1 in 4 cases. However, her son died after the transplant due to lung complications, just two months after diagnosis at the age of 14.

Sometimes tragedy can be a catalyst for change. It was during this trial and afterward that the thought of being a nurse came into Alicia's mind and heart. She had seen some good nursing and some not-so-good nursing and was convinced that she could become a good and compassionate nurse. According to Alicia, "God insisted to make me understand my mission, as painful as it was."

She didn't like to see pain or blood, and English was her second language, but she kept pushing herself, and that brought her to where she is today. Alicia became an oncology-certified nurse in April 2012 and has been a consistent presenter and participant at the annual regional Oncology Nursing Symposium since that year. Along with other oncology nurses, she served Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners to the local Hope Lodge residents from 2012 to 2019. Our Hope Lodge, sponsored by the American Cancer Society, provides lodging to a large number of patients with cancer and their families who live 40 miles or more from Lubbock, Texas. She worked at the Covenant Medical Center in Lubbock for about five years, was involved with hospice nursing for about one year and came to the Southwest Cancer Center (SWCC; now UMC Cancer Center) and the University Medical Center, or UMC, in 2011. She has been a part of eight committees here and has received numerous awards, including the UMC All-Star of the Month, Guardian Angel Award and Employee of the Month, all in 2015, and the Guardian Angel Award again in 2016. Most impressively, she was named the SWCC Nurse of the Unit for 2014.



At our cancer center, she focused on chemotherapy administration for about two years, and then Alicia used her excellent bilingual skills as a patient and staff educator for about two years. In June 2015, she became our assistant director of nursing and a clinical educator. Two years later, Alicia became the community outreach coordinator for our center. In a curious life twist, she didn't enjoy teaching at the beginning of her career and yet has been quite a teacher for the past six years.

What is it that she treasures the most about her nursing career? In Alicia's own words: "When I teach Spanish-speaking individuals (about their cancer, treatments and side effects) and I see the light of understanding in their eyes, that is priceless to me." Alicia has helped as translator for me on multiple occasions. She speaks Spanish in a way that is effortless, emotional, expressive, thorough and accurate, and she looks into people's eyes to see that they understand. About one-third of our patients are Hispanic, and half of those are quite fluent in English. But for the rest, Alicia's skills are priceless.

Alicia pushed forward yet again to get her family nurse practitioner degree in May 2019. She has a new interest in cancer survivorship to add to the list of what she is already doing. On a personal note, she has been married for 33 years, and her daughter has continued the tradition of providing compassionate and excellent care as a nurse.

Alicia Castanon is always willing to go the extra mile, and for that she deserves recognition.



# SUPPORTING PATIENTS AND HER COMMUNITY

# **JOY V. HEPKINS, M.S.N., RN, OCN**

[MERCY CATHOLIC MEDICAL CENTER — MERCY FITZGERALD CAMPUS, DARBY, PENNSYLVANIA]

Written by Yvonne McLean Florence

met Joy V. Hepkins, M.S.N., RN, OCN, an oncology nurse navigator at Mercy Catholic Medical Center — Mercy Fitzgerald Campus in Darby, Pennsylvania, in 2012 when I received a diagnosis of breast cancer. Hearing the words "you have cancer" is overwhelming. In a quest to get some additional information, I decided to join a cancer support group, and Joy was the facilitator of the group at Mercy Fitzgerald. When I met her for the first time, she put me at ease about my upcoming treatment schedule and surgery.

As things progressed with my treatment, I could not attend the meetings. Months went by, but I could always count on a call from either Joy or someone from the group to see how I was doing. Once I was able, I went back to the support group, and, as before, Joy received me with open arms. It was great being back with this joyful group of cancer patients and survivors.

In 2014, I began the process of establishing Sisters R Us Circle of Survivors (SRUCOS) as a non-profit organization to help other women affected by a diagnosis of breast cancer. Joy agreed to be the keynote speaker for our first fundraiser. Then, in 2015, she joined our board of directors to »

help us support underserved patients who have received a diagnosis of breast cancer, providing financial aid, survivorship resources, mammograms and efforts to connect survivors with other breast cancer patient advocacy organizations. As an oncology nurse, Joy has helped SRUCOS meet the needs of patients with cancer and survivors in the most effective of ways.

Joy received bachelor's and Master of Science degrees in nursing from Gwynedd Mercy University in 2014 and 2019, respectively, and now dedicates her professional time to supporting patients as they receive diagnoses, undergo treatment and live beyond a cancer diagnosis. She continues to impress SRUCOS with her commitment to help patients with all types of cancer. Joy is a member of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), serving as newsletter editor for the Penns Wood Chapter and a member of the leadership team for the ONS Nurse Navigator Special Interest Group. Additionally, she is a member of the National Coalition of Oncology Nurse Navigators and the Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators.

I believe that Joy's background as a nurse navigator, coupled with her passion to support non-profit organizations in her community, make her an ideal oncology professional who is worthy of the highest recognition.

### TEACHING MOMENT

In 2014, I began the process of establishing Sisters R Us Circle of Survivors as a nonprofit organization to help other women affected by a diagnosis of breast cancer. Joy agreed to be the keynote speaker for our first fundraiser. Then, in 2015, she joined our board of directors to help us support underserved patients who have received a diagnosis of breast cancer.





## TENDING TO UNSPOKEN NEEDS

#### **ELLEN MULKERRINS, B.S.N., RN, OCN**

[MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER, NEW YORK, NEW YORK]

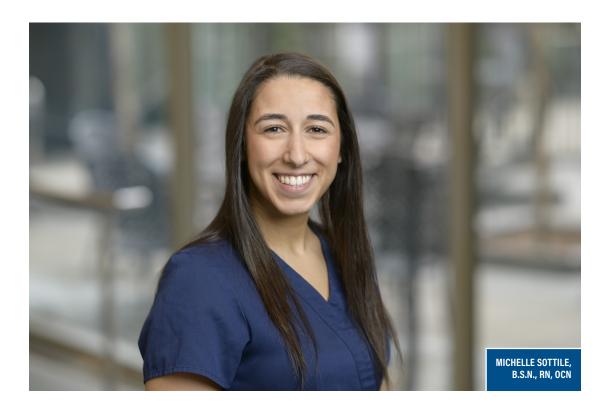
Written by Michelle Sottile, B.S.N., RN, OCN, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

very day at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, I have the privilege of being surrounded by extraordinary people. When I reflect on exactly what it means to be an extraordinary healer, one person in particular comes to mind. Ellen Mulkerrins, B.S.N., RN, OCN, is a dynamic, compassionate and empathetic nurse who leaves a grin on the face of each of her patients.

Ellen has many exceptional qualities. Her focus is on the highest standard of patient care. I have seen this consistently while working side by side with her in many challenging and difficult patient and family situations. But I personally saw Ellen's true gift when she cared for my own family member. Nothing was too much for her to make sure my family member was comfortable, monitored closely and, especially, could laugh, making his hospital stay easier. Her compassion, kindness and dedication will never be forgotten.

One of the things that set Ellen apart from other nurses is her ability to sense unspoken needs. As the unit representative for the supportive care committee, Ellen places the utmost importance on the care of the suffering and dying patient. No one will ever forget how she made one of her patients' last requests possible. This patient came into the hospital, took »

a turn for the worse and spent the remainder of his life there. He formed a special bond with Ellen. Between Ellen as his nurse and the Hulk doll that never left his side, he said he felt as secure as could be. He confided in Ellen, telling her that the one thing he regretted was not marrying his lifelong partner. One afternoon, Ellen coordinated a wedding ceremony in the room. Complete with music, flowers and two nurses walking the woman down the "aisle," the event left us all with tears running down our faces and a sense of warmth. Before Ellen completed his care, the patient entrusted his precious Hulk doll to her, telling her that he now had all that he needed.



Ellen not only provides exemplary care for patients but also truly embodies the "care of colleague" tenet of our Memorial Sloan Kettering professional practice model on relationship-based care. Ellen and I were co-chairs for our inpatient nursing recruitment, retention and recognition council, through which she worked tirelessly to make sure that nurses received recognition for excellence in care. During her time as co-chair, she helped support and expand the department's recognition programs, including the Daisy Award for Extraordinary Nurses and our Shining Star Award for exceptional ancillary staff. Additionally, she leveraged the council structure to make each inpatient unit the best environment in which nurses can practice. Ellen's dedication and compassion for both patients and colleagues are beyond reproach, and she truly exemplifies the attributes of an extraordinary healer.

The words below, from some of Ellen's other colleagues, describe the impact she leaves on all she meets.

Virginia Pfeifer, B.S.N., RN, OCN, CWOCN: To Ellen, caring for patients is not just a job but a passion. She treats each patient as if they were her own family. There is no request from a patient that is too big for Ellen. If there is anything she has taught our staff over the years, it's that the small things count. All her patients are left smiling, asking for pillows to brace their fresh surgical incisions as they try not to laugh. No matter how difficult the day, Ellen's passion and joy for the patients and their families is evident. We always tell Ellen that her sense of humor is unprecedented. It is a trait that has lifted the spirits of even the most downcast patients. She embodies the qualities of a nurse who goes above and beyond in everything she does, whether it be leadership, patient care or care of a colleague. Everyone Ellen encounters is left with a sense of comfort and a lifted spirit. Ellen has a way of getting to the heart of the matter and finding out what is most important to the patient. She not only completes the necessary tasks to make the patient well but also tends to the unspoken needs. Ellen takes care of her patients in a holistic manner, treating their emotional needs with the same level of intentionality as their physical ones. The bonds she forms with her patients last beyond their stays. »

Cortney N. Miller, M.S.N., M.P.A., RN, CPHON, nursing specialist, magnet program and nursing engagement: Ellen is a natural-born healer. She has an extraordinary gift for internalizing her patients' feelings and uses that as a guide to support and facilitate their healing on an often deeper level. Through this intuitive ability, she often heals with a simple touch, taking her patients outside or spending extra time sitting at the bedside, helping them navigate their emotions. She serves as a channel of healing and light not only for our patients through a time that is dark and scary but for her colleagues, as well. She provides a spiritual, supportive environment day in and day out.

**Lisa Ruggerio, M.S.N., FNP-BC:** Ellen is truly a transformational individual and nurse. She exudes compassion, empathy and an ability to tend to unspoken needs. Everyone she encounters is left with a sense of peace and comfort. I cannot think of a person more deserving of accolades.

TEACHING MOMENT

One of the things that set Ellen apart from other nurses is her ability to sense unspoken needs. As the unit representative for the supportive care committee, Ellen places the utmost importance on the care of the suffering and dying patient.





### A SPECIAL UNDERSTANDING

#### JOAN RATACZAK, B.S.N., RN, CPHON

[CANCER AND BLOOD DISORDERS CENTER, CHILDREN'S MINNESOTA, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA]

Written by Mary Hassler

oan Rataczak, B.S.N., RN, CPHON, is an extraordinary oncology nurse at the Children's Cancer and Blood Disorders Center in Minneapolis. Put simply, Joan gets my special kid, Liza, and we feel loved in her care.

Liza has a cognitive disability that challenges her understanding of the sweep of time, meaning that she doesn't understand how long a three-hour chemo treatment really is. She watches the clock and asks over and over again how much longer it will be until she can leave. Joan exhibits the following qualities:

**Helpfulness.** Joan truly understands that Liza's biggest stressor around treatment is being in the bed at the clinic for a very long time, so she does everything she can to make our visits as short as possible. She anticipates our infusion session, getting the anti-nausea medications and portaccess tray ready and requesting the chemotherapy drugs from the pharmacy before we arrive.

**Expertise.** Joan is an experienced and skilled oncology nurse. She carefully and expertly accesses Liza's port, distracting her and then counting to make the needle poke less painful. She gets blood return the first time, every single time. **»** 

Most importantly for our family, Joan keeps things moving. She minds the beeping pumps better than any other nurse who has cared for us. She appears in our room when the pump beeps and starts the next medicine or bag of fluid without delay, every single time. I don't know how she responds so quickly, because she cares for other patients, too. Maybe it's because she knows that saving time is what Liza needs most.

Joan watches Liza's condition from week to week and notices changes over time. She has given us advice on concerns including irritated skin around the gastronomy tube, rashes, dehydration, recognizing C. diff (Clostridioides difficile) and anticipating scan results. It's always helpful, practical and spot on.

#### TEACHING MOMENT

Joan listens and understands
Liza. This is not easy
because of Liza's speech
articulation challenges;
other caregivers often look
to me for translation. Joan
senses how important it is to
give Liza time to answer.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY HASSLER



**Compassion.** Joan listens and understands Liza. This is not easy because of Liza's speech articulation challenges; other caregivers often look to me for translation. Joan senses how important it is to give Liza time to answer. Joan asks her about her week, remembering important events from previous discussions, like prom, Liza's birthday, graduation, a new job rotation, school events and her Make-A-Wish trip. She spends time looking at photos with us — lots of photos. She shares our joy in Liza's accomplishments and milestones. She appreciates Liza's unique humor.

Joan supports our whole family. If Liza's dad, sister, brother or a family friend drives her to chemotherapy, Joan knows our drill. She supports my integrative philosophy and clean enteral food preferences. She shares our relief when scans show no evidence of disease — and shared our fear, dread and worry when Liza relapsed.

Liza had 11 months of front-line treatment for rhabdomyosarcoma, seven months of relapse treatment until her body could no longer tolerate it and 12 months of maintenance chemotherapy through September 2019. That's about 30 months and probably nearly 100 clinic visits. Joan was likely our nurse for half those visits. That's a whole lot of loving, extraordinary care!



# Leading by Example



# **GIVING WITHOUT RESERVATION**

#### **ELAINE DEMEYER, M.S.N., RN, AOCN, BMTCN**

[NATIONAL ONCOLOGY NURSE CONSULTANT BASED IN TEXAS]

Written by Phyllis Yount, LCSW, Mary Crowley Cancer Research, Dallas, Texas

have had the privilege of knowing Elaine DeMeyer, M.S.N., RN, AOCN, BMTCN, for 27 years. During this time, she has worked alongside me in blood and marrow transplant at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas. Her job as educator led her to encourage change that provided patients with a better quality of life.

In the past, the unit did not use physical therapy to help individuals maintain strength during a 50- to 60-day hospital stay. Armed with research data and a willingness to help get this program started, Elaine approached the physicians. This led to individuals leaving the hospital with the strength and endurance necessary to face their lengthy post-recovery period.

Elaine has always sought to make sure the patient perspective is included in her educational efforts, from teaching nursing students to writing curriculum for advanced training to teaching Oncology Care Model preparatory classes to registered nurses. She learned the importance of this perspective from a personal journey with her mother, who died of breast cancer when Elaine was in her teens, and also through the death of her father, who had head and neck cancer. One example of this is the countless hours Elaine has devoted to teaching other nurses how to put a curriculum together for cancer survivors about the benefits of research. She volunteered to »

partner with Cancer Support Community North Texas to bring speakers to the nurses' facilities to present on this important topic.

She has also given in a very real way to the Dallas community. Elaine volunteered to help me with a health initiative for Ethiopians in the Dallas metroplex. This area has one of the largest groups of Ethiopian immigrants in the nation. The health and well-being of this group are sadly lacking, largely due to lack of knowledge about health care, especially cancer prevention. She spent hundreds of hours selecting educational sessions that would be meaningful to this group and assisting in the development of a large health fair. She did this at great sacrifice to herself and her family, because this was not an easy organizational feat. The end result was an energized group that has formed a coalition dedicated to starting a church-based health clinic and carrying on with the health fair annually. Elaine assisted in getting four nurses from that population trained by Faith Community Nursing to help them develop a strong, well-organized health plan.

I believe that Elaine embodies the traits of an extraordinary healer. Her willingness to lead with heart and knowledge will be carried on by many who have been taught by her, and through those nurses, patients will receive better care.

#### TEACHING MOMENT

Elaine volunteered to help me with a health initiative for Ethiopians in the Dallas metroplex. This area has one of the largest groups of Ethiopian immigrants in the nation. The health and well-being of this group are sadly lacking, largely due to lack of knowledge about health care, especially cancer prevention.





## A SUPPORTIVE COMPANION

#### **SUSAN LONG, RN**

[ST. CHARLES MEDICAL CENTER, BEND, OREGON]

Written by Stephanie Russell, Psy.D.

y life abruptly changed in late spring 2019. At 45 years old, I had been clipping along well overall, although I had a lingering cough and neck and shoulder pain that felt nerve-based. Instead, it resulted in a diagnosis of primary mediastinal type B lymphoma. Mine was a very aggressive lymphoma identified as stage 4 because it was both above and below the diaphragm. I was described by my oncologist as "falling apart" before his eyes and started treatment within two days of the official diagnosis.

My treatment plan involved chemotherapy infused 24 hours a day, five days at a time. I would then spend 12 days at home and return to the hospital for another cycle. In all, I underwent six cycles that concluded on Sept. 27, 2019. On my second day of hospital treatment, in walked Susan Long, my nurse for the next 12 days. Little did I know how meaningful this oncology nurse would become in my life. I immensely respect the work of chemotherapy nurses and their level of compassion, care and attentiveness, and Susan embodies these traits. A chemotherapy nurse for 40 years, she has the ability to touch the lives of her patients. She listens, provides encouragement, consults, advocates and educates. Susan answered my many questions regarding the fairly foreign world of oncology that I instantaneously was immersed in. »



While I was in the hospital, my visitors — rotating friends who spent the night to keep me company — and my walks around the floor helped keep me sane. Susan delighted in my family and friends and provided a smile, support and kindness to my children, husband, parents, siblings, nieces and friends. She remembered our conversations from one cycle to another, and we would pick up where we'd left off. From the second cycle and through each one thereafter, she was my admitting nurse and always made sure I had an IV pole that could be pushed easily on the floor. (Not all IV poles are created equal!)

Susan supported me emotionally. She listened to my fears with empathy and commended me for my positivity. I spoke often about a positive mindset and the significance of it for me, as

I knew, as a psychologist, the importance of the power of the mind to aid with healing. We spoke about the movie "Heal" on Netflix and how it served as an empowering tool to aid my outlook. We also talked about my determination to defeat the cancer and live cancer-free.

On three separate occasions, I had a chemotherapy leak due to faulty IV parts. One of them involved a bag explosion that sprayed all over Susan, her chemotherapy gown and the counter. It happened about two hours before Susan was going off shift. She went beyond the call of duty and stayed until the incident reports were written, a new bag was ordered for me and things had settled down in my room. The grace and dignity with which she handled the situation and spillage were remarkable.

In late October, my PET scan showed no evidence of disease. I'm now in post-chemotherapy recovery, and Susan and I have spoken about what I would like to do and the services I'd like to offer in my therapy practice when I return to work. I know I want to make an impact on others in the oncology world in the manner in which Susan has made an impact on me. She is a remarkable caregiver, supporting her patients in an authentic and genuine way. I feel lucky to have had her as a part of my treatment team and fortunate to have her as one of my nurses. I am tremendously grateful and proud to now be able to call her a friend!

#### TEACHING MOMENT

Susan delighted in my family and friends and provided a smile, support and kindness to my children, husband, parents, siblings, nieces and friends. She remembered our conversations from one cycle to another, and we would pick up where we'd left off.



# COMPETENT, COMPASSIONATE AND SELFLESS

#### KIM MOORE, RN, CPHON

[MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER, NEW YORK, NEW YORK]

Written by Aimee White, B.S.N., RN, CPHON, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

im Moore, RN, CPHON, is truly an exceptional pediatric oncology nurse. She provides outstanding and compassionate care every day in every way. One of my colleagues said it best: "Kim is the most patient, kind, selfless and caring nurse I have ever met."

I have worked with Kim as a nurse for over 20 years in the pediatric ambulatory care center at MSK (Memorial Sloan Kettering) Kids. I have watched her get engaged and married, have five beautiful children and maintain an incredible work-life balance. Kim has worked at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center for 24 years and is our highest-level and most senior nurse. She has multiple certifications, including as a pediatric hematology oncology nurse and in pediatric advanced life support and advanced cardiovascular life support. She works full time and often volunteers to do overtime shifts. Kim volunteered to work the night shift for a few months to get us through a period of time when we were very short staffed.

She is regularly our charge nurse, serves as a preceptor to students and is a resource about best patient care practices for all her co-workers in pediatrics — nurses, nurse practitioners »

and doctors. Kim is also our committee chair for the pediatric practice council. She is constantly reviewing our policies and improving them according to evidence-based research.

Our patients and families consistently request that Kim be their primary nurse. Many will ask to have treatment on the days that she works. Kim always makes her patients and families her top priority. She regularly uses a multidisciplinary team approach, reaching out to colleagues in social work, child life and psychology and whomever else she deems appropriate to provide the best care for her patients. Kim is so committed to her patients that she will often miss her lunch and leave late to provide the very best care.

Kim has exceptional peripheral IV skills. On multiple occasions, I have heard people make statements such as "Kim could get blood from a rock." Countless co-workers, in all areas of our hospital, have requested time to orient with Kim, hoping to one day obtain similar IV skills. I once heard a co-worker say that "we should insure her fingers" because she is capable of feeling veins that no one else can get. She is the first person we reach out to in emergency situations, such as when we need access on a difficult child. I have witnessed her get IVs in

#### TEACHING MOMENT

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emergent situations when I did not think it would be possible. When asked how she is able to perform such extraordinary practices, Kim will humbly shrug her shoulders and state, "I said a Hail Mary."

I truly believe that Kim Moore is a gift to our patients and co-workers. There could not be another nurse more deserving of acclaim.

# KNOWLEDGEABLE, REFLECTIVE AND THOUGHTFUL

#### **HEATHER VAN DEN BERGH, B.S.N., RN, OCN**

[MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING CANCER CENTER WESTCHESTER, WEST HARRISON, NEW YORK]

Written by Kathleen Considine, B.S.N., RN, OCN, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center Westchester

eather Van Den Bergh, B.S.N., RN, OCN, is the person you would choose to be your nurse if you had the choice and were diagnosed with breast cancer. She is knowledgeable, reflective and thoughtful in every interaction. Her calm confidence allows patients to feel comfortable instantly during visits or telephone calls.

Working at a busy outpatient cancer center in breast medicine, Heather provides sensitive, compassionate care in highly emotional situations in a clinic that treats a variety of patients — women of all ages, some with metastatic disease and others who are newly postpartum, as well as men with breast cancer. Yet, she is able to convey to each individual a sense of hope and security about how their disease will be managed. Heather ensures that these patients and their families receive exceptional follow-up care. With her background as both an oncology certified nurse and working in bone marrow transplant, she brings to breast medicine a wealth of knowledge and skills from her experience caring for patients with complex health issues. »





As the mother of two young children, she has an extensive amount of energy. Her patients and colleagues are amazed at her ability to always be cheerful and positive. She constantly demonstrates all the qualities nurses are most beloved for, exuding hope and positivity to patients who desperately seek optimism. Many patients with breast cancer report severe side effects from both chemotherapy and hormonal therapy that affect their quality of life. Heather's smile and gentle tone encourage patients to reveal concerns they might not otherwise share, providing the opportunity to promote wellness in ways they might not have considered.

Heather can offer practical recommendations and reassurance to physically and psychologically fragile patients, which helps preserve their emotional well-being. Never judgmental, she is always able to filter through remedies patients may be using while making them feel supported and educated but not criticized. Her ability to troubleshoot with optimism is a huge asset as she cares for her patients.

The personal connection she makes with both patients and their family members is invaluable. The bond between an oncology nurse and patient is so precious, and she provides stability during that psychologically overwhelming experience. Heather often will drop in on patients during their chemotherapy sessions for unscheduled nursing visits to assess their well-being and needs,

providing both patients and families with a feeling of supported, comprehensive care. Patients are disappointed when they don't get to meet with her at their scheduled visits and always ask for her when she is not in clinic. Her consistency to follow through on her patients' current or anticipated needs and side effects makes her irreplaceable to her patients and colleagues.

Heather has played a pivotal role in establishing a committee for reducing patient falls and improving safety at her ambulatory center. Through her exceptional interpersonal skills, she has been able to connect leadership, physicians, nurse colleagues and other staff members to foster a sense of connection for this shared goal. As co-chair for more than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years of a multidisciplinary committee charged with creating a culture of safety and sensitivity, she has been instrumental in the outstanding progress made in fall reduction at her center. Throughout her stewardship, she has engaged all staff with respectful, open dialogue. Her ability to seamlessly integrate feedback into a structured plan ensures continued patient safety. Through her work on the committee, she continues to collect data to increase physical therapy services and remind other staff to appropriately screen patients who would benefit from therapy. Last summer, Heather and her co-chair initiated a highly successful pilot program allowing student nurses to participate in interventions to identify patient safety and decrease falls. Regardless of what she is working on, patients always come first!

A recognized and reliable resource for new and established staff, Heather is a constant support for colleagues experiencing unique situations. An advocate for professional nursing, she supports nursing advances and adherence to evidence-based care, frequently reminding colleagues to attend research presentations and recognizing the efforts of those who present and share their findings. She recently presented evidence-based research to nursing colleagues about the importance of meeting patients' emotional needs through social work referrals and the benefits that patients will experience if connected.

She is a role model for other nurses, and her consistent ability to provide such warm, compassionate care to any patient she meets is inspirational to all who are lucky enough to encounter her. Heather is the definition of an extraordinary healer!

### MAKNG NURSING AN ART FORM

#### **SUE WARDIAN HARTUNG, M.S.N., RN, OCN**

[NEBRASKA MEDICINE, OMAHA, NEBRASKA]

Written by Dawn Jourdan, B.S.N., RN, Nebraska Medicine, Omaha, Nebraska

It is with great pride and respect that I recognize my colleague and friend, Sue Wardian Hartung, M.S.N., RN, OCN. Over the past 45 years, Sue has devoted her career to caring for and improving the quality of care for patients with cancer at Nebraska Medicine.

Her professional nursing career began in 1975, and over the next several years, Sue developed a love of caring for oncology patients. Her professional responsibilities have varied over the years, from assistant inpatient unit director to staff nurse, infusion nurse and, most recently, coordinator of patient and family education. Sue has been a longstanding member of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) and its Metro Omaha Chapter, for which she has served in a variety of leadership roles, including president. Sue is also involved in community activities focused on cancer prevention and screenings. She helps coordinate volunteers for many events and gives of her time, as well.

Over the years, Sue has been instrumental in developing many oncology patient educational materials and patient/family classes at Nebraska Medicine. When staff members identify the need for a patient teaching sheet, Sue seeks out the required information and develops appropriate resources in light of current literature and health literacy. She routinely conducts two patient/caregiver education classes focused on the needs of patients undergoing stem cell transplant.

Sue has an uncanny ability to quickly assess learning needs and develop an individualized plan to increase patients' and caregivers' knowledge and comfort level. Her organizational skills, mastery of content and creative ways of presenting information give Sue a definite edge. She structures classes in a variety of ways to reach individuals who may learn differently and has the patience to allow learning to occur at each member's pace. Sue leaves a lasting impression on those in her classes, and patients are often heard starting sentences with: "When Sue told us how to do this ..." Perhaps Sue's greatest gift is the sense of humor she brings to this difficult work and the sheer fun these educational sessions hold for our patients. "

#### TEACHING MOMENT

Sue has an uncanny ability to quickly assess learning needs and develop an individualized plan to increase patients' and caregivers' knowledge and comfort level. Her organizational skills, mastery of content and creative ways of presenting information give Sue a definite edge. She structures classes in a variety of ways to reach individuals who may learn differently and has the patience to allow learning to occur at each member's pace.

She treats her patients and their families with the utmost dignity and respect. It is as though the people for whom she's caring are the only ones who matter. Her calm, quiet manner rubs off on patients and caregivers, quieting their nerves and helping them feel competent in their newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Sue's expertise in cancer care, coupled with her gift for teaching, not only benefit our patients at Nebraska Medicine but also have helped influence cancer care in our state. Sue was the first nurse in Nebraska to be trained for the American Cancer Society's I Can Cope program. For many years, she served as an instructor for the ONS chemotherapy and biotherapy certification class, teaching our own nurses and those across Nebraska. She is our institutional expert on chemotherapy administration and has been instrumental in ensuring that our organizational policies align with the American Society of Clinical Oncology/ONS chemotherapy administration standards.

Sue has authored numerous posters and presented at various local, regional and national conferences on critical issues affecting oncology nursing. In 1999, she co-chaired the first international symposium on peripheral stem cell transplantation, held in Omaha, Nebraska, and willingly agreed to co-chair the second symposium in 2002. Sue has helped coordinate the oncology portion of one of the Optum conferences held every other year in Omaha and looks for innovative programs and evolving technologies to showcase. Sue ensures that participants leave with a wealth of new knowledge.

Not only is Sue dedicated to advancing cancer nursing, she also takes responsibility for her colleagues' growth. She is always willing to answer questions about chemotherapy and ensures that the staff member fully understands the answer. Through the years, Sue has taken new employees, student nurses and visiting nurses under her wing, sharing her time and talents. As an oncology certified nurse, she is a mentor and highly regarded by all members of the health care team.

Although Sue devotes her heart and soul to nursing, she strives to maintain a sense of balance, practicing what she preaches to the patients. Her incredible love for family is ever present. She loves spending time with family and planning family gatherings. Sue is a die-hard Huskers fan

(please don't hold that against her) and loves baseball almost as much, some days maybe more. All these activities reenergize her to deliver the highest level of care.

It is impossible to adequately describe in less than 1,000 words the type of nursing professional that Sue Wardian Hartung embodies and what she has done for oncology nursing at Nebraska Medicine. Her passion for nursing and the quality she brings are the cornerstones of care. Sue elevates nursing to an art form that is desperately needed. In today's world, it is uncommon to find someone who has dedicated her entire career to one organization and one specialty area of nursing, particularly one as challenging and yet rewarding as caring for patients with cancer and their families. On a daily basis, Sue delivers on Nebraska Medicine's promise of "serious medicine, extraordinary care."

#### TEACHING MOMENT

Her passion for nursing and the quality she brings are the cornerstones of care. Sue elevates nursing to an art form that is desperately needed. In today's world, it is uncommon to find someone who has dedicated her entire career to one organization and one specialty area of nursing, particularly one as challenging and yet rewarding as caring for patients with cancer and their families.



# List of All 2020 Nominees





List of the

2020 Nominees

#### Dioanne Adsuara, B.S.N., RN, CCRN

New York, New York

#### Kate Bearry, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

#### Patricia Beaty, M.P.H., RN, OCN Ohio

#### Jennifer Becker, RN

North Wilkesboro, North Carolina

#### Marzanna Bendeth, RN

East Hills, New York

#### Alicia Castanon, M.S.N., OCN, APRN, FNP-C

Lubbock, Texas

#### Tina Chacon, B.S.N., RN, OCN

West Jordan, Utah

#### Catherine M. Concert, D.N.P.,

RN, FNP-BC, AOCNP, NE-BC, CNL, CGRN, FNAP, FNYAM

New York, New York

#### Molly Conklin, B.S.N., RN, PCCN

Houston, Texas

#### Elaine DeMeyer, M.S.N., RN, AOCN, BMTCN

Texas

#### Vicki Dodson, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Spokane, Washington

#### **Courtney Ebbeskotte, RN**

Omaha, Nebraska

#### Sandi Godfrey, RN

Joplin, Missouri

#### Kelley Greel, RN, OCN

Gloucester, Massachusetts

#### Sue Wardian Hartung, M.S.N., RN,

OCN

Omaha, Nebraska

#### Tonya Helmstetter, RN, OCN

La Mesa, California

#### Joy V. Hepkins, M.S.N., RN, OCN

Darby, Pennsylvania

#### Nicole Heston, RN

Wichita, Kansas

#### P.J. Hetkey, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Uniontown, Ohio

#### Joelle Hicks, B.S.N., RN

Uniontown, Ohio

#### Naureen Ismail, M.P.A.-H.C.A., B.S.N., RN, OCN

Houston, Texas

Atlanta, Georgia	RN, OCN	New Mexico
	New York, New York	
Susan Long, RN		Cassandra Stephens, B.S
Bend, Oregon	Maria Rodriguez, B.S.N., RN	RN, OCN
	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	Temple, Texas
Patty Manea, B.S.N., RN, CCRP		
San Antonio, Texas	Lindsey Roy, RN	Molly Szuminski, M.S.N., I
	Dallas, Texas	Oakland, California
Betsy Mitchell, M.S.N., B.S.N., RN,		
ANP-BC	Beth Sandy, M.S.N., CRNP	Deborah Austin Thompso
Chicago, Illinois	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	RN, OCN
		Decatur, Georgia
Daria Mlynarski, B.S.N., RN, OCN	Christie Santure, B.S.N., RN	
Boston, Massachusetts	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	Heather Van den Bergh, E RN, OCN
Kim Moore, RN, CPHON	Mary Schueller, M.S.N., RN-BC,	West Harrison, New York
New York, New York	AOCNS, CHPN	
	Kohler, Wisconsin	Alice Vandermeer, B.S.N.,
Julie Morrissette, B.S.N., RN		Meridian, Idaho
Lowell, Massachusetts	Megha Shah, B.S.N., RN, OCN	
	Geneva, Illinois	Pat Wilson, CRNP
Ellen Mulkerrins, B.S.N., RN, OCN		Birmingham, Alabama
New York, New York	McKenzie Siegmund, B.S.N., RN	
	Fort Worth, Texas	Heather Woods, RN
Diane Nechi-Fragassi, B.S.N.,		Porterville, California
RN, OCN	Wyndelon "Nikki" Simmons,	
Chicago, Illinois	B.S.N., RN, OCN	Maura Znavo, B.S.N., RN

Jackson, Mississippi

Leslie Smith, RN

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Nadeen Robinson, M.S.N.,

Gretchen P. Jackson, RN

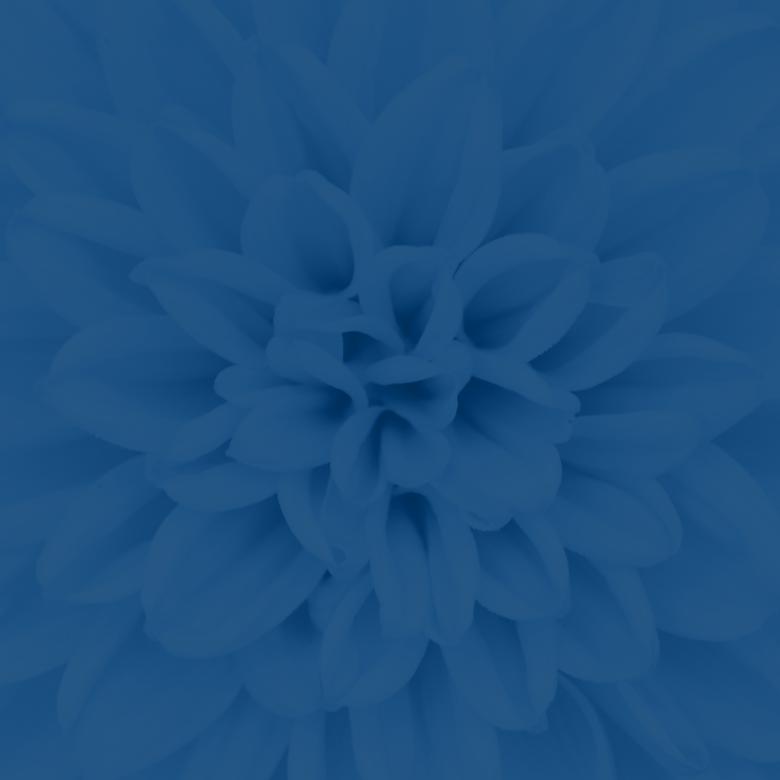
Joan Rataczak, B.S.N., RN,

Minneapolis, Minnesota

**CPHON** 

Sally Stade, RN w Mexico issandra Stephens, B.S.N., I, OCN mple, Texas olly Szuminski, M.S.N., RN, CPNP kland, California eborah Austin Thompson, B.S.N., I, OCN catur, Georgia eather Van den Bergh, B.S.N., I, OCN est Harrison, New York ice Vandermeer, B.S.N., RN, OCN eridian, Idaho t Wilson, CRNP rmingham, Alabama

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



CURE® combines science with humanity to empower patients with cancer and their caregivers by offering the latest information on every aspect of the disease, from the technical and scientific to the social and emotional.

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Extraordinary Healers\*: CURE\* Readers Honor Oncology Nurses Volume 14 is a collection of inspiring essays written by patients, survivors, caregivers and colleagues about the oncology nurses who touch lives while caring for those affected by cancer. These essays offer lessons about healing in the face of adversity, persevering against the odds, and discovering that kindness and compassion can be part of top-notch cancer care.

"We treated a young woman in her early 20s whose cancer had relapsed. The doctors all said that even with the chemotherapy and radiation, this patient had just weeks to live. She was engaged to be married, but it didn't look like she would make it to the intended date. (The nurse), knowing how important it was to the young woman, planned the wedding and made it happen in the hospital."

- ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY HEALER FROM SPOKANE, WASHINGTON

"She encouraged me to be my best and try my hardest, and she believed in me so much that I started to believe in myself. I don't want to be a doctor anymore; I want to be a nurse — a nurse just like (her), so I can help children who are sick and I can believe in them the way she believed in me."

- ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY HEALER FROM FORT WORTH, TEXAS

"She knew how to understand my father's needs and body language, how to communicate with him while speaking a different language and how to care for the pain that he, the proud man that he was, would often not share he was having. She knew what he was feeling, she knew him and she knew us, and she became family when we had no one else to comfort us."

- ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY HEALER FROM BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



