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Extraordinary
HEALER[®] 2021



cure[®] Readers Honor Oncology Nurses / Volume 15

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 15, 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 the essays online, along with many more that were submitted to this year's contest, please **scan the QR code** and click on "Extraordinary Healers Volume 15."

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CURE® Readers Honor Oncology Nurses

Volume 15

Extraordinary **HEALER**[®] 2021

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A graphic logo for Cure. It features a dark blue silhouette of a hand reaching upwards, with a teal hand reaching up to it from below. To the right of the hands is a yellow and orange flame-like shape.

CURE[®] Readers Honor Oncology Nurses

Volume 15

cure[®]

Cranbury, New Jersey

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This book is dedicated to all oncology nurses who bring hope and healing to patients with cancer and their loved ones.

If you would like to give this book as a gift to your extraordinary healer, we've provided this page for your message.

This book honors:



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Oncology Nurses Rise Above Challenges of Cancer Treatment and a Pandemic

As oncology nurses answer their call of duty to help patients during cancer treatment, they epitomize going “above and beyond.” That phrase came up repeatedly as we read the nominations for this year’s Extraordinary Healer® Award for Oncology Nursing, for which we received a record number of submissions in 2021.

Throughout the 15 years *CURE*® has hosted this event, we have heard incredible stories of oncology nurses opening their arms and hearts to help their patients. This includes offering a warm blanket, lending a shoulder to cry on and even opening a garden so patients could spend time with their families when the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted visitation. It takes a special person to be an oncology nurse who can influence a patient’s cancer journey and beyond, especially for a patient who requires extra, personalized care.


“(She) had to be a very special person as well as a great medical nurse to have won Earl over the way she did,” a family member of a patient wrote in her submission. “He was always concerned about what she thought, and she wouldn’t sugarcoat any of the facts. She always laid it on the line to him, and he knew she would. One week before passing in 2019, Earl ended up in another county hospital. ... (She) was in touch with him through that, and it gave him comfort to know he was well taken care of. Earl came home with hospice two days before passing, and (she) was by his side during that time. She had been a true friend and comfort to him.” »

Nurses affect the lives of not only patients and families but also their co-workers. It's inspiring to see colleagues nominating each other and learn how impactful their stories are to those of us reading their essays and to the patients and families they see on a daily basis. Here's just one of the many nurses who had an impact on her fellow nurses:

"I am awed by (her) initial and ongoing devotion to her patients," a nurse wrote in her submission. "She has opened her heart to them with access to her direct phone lines, office and clinic time, and even after-hours time. She has gone above and beyond on more than one occasion, helping and teaching patients how to live their best life."

The U.S. has been affected by the pandemic since March 2020, with widespread shutdowns and rampant fear about the unknowns of the virus. Despite ongoing concerns, nurses adapted their care practices during what might have been the most overwhelming time of their life.

Last year, we honored a nurse regardless of their specialty with the Finest Hour Award, and we continue that this year. The nominating essays this year are true examples of how adaptable nurses are, especially during a pandemic. This year's winner says her previous experiences as a caregiver to patients in Africa and as an employee at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention influenced her work as a crisis response critical care nurse in New York when COVID-19 was severely affecting health care systems there.

Although this year's Extraordinary Healer® event will be held virtually again, that doesn't mean it will be short of inspirational stories that empower us to do good, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Here's hoping we can hear these nurses' stories in person next year. 

— **Mike Hennessy Jr.**

President and CEO of MJH Life Sciences™





Extraordinary Healers®

Our Winner & Finalists





From left: BRADFORD EVANS and MARIA LIM,
B.S.N., RN, OCN, BMTN

PHOTOS BY ARIELLE GALLIONE

ANGEL OF THE BATTLEFIELD

MARIA LIM, B.S.N., RN, OCN, BMTCN

HEMATOLOGY/ONCOLOGY/INFUSION CLINIC NURSE

[CAPTAIN JAMES A. LOVELL FEDERAL HEALTH CARE CENTER,
NORTH CHICAGO, ILLINOIS]

Written by **Bradford Evans**

Maria Lim, B.S.N., RN, OCN, BMTCN, is the guardian angel in the oncology clinic at the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, formerly the VA Medical Center, in North Chicago, Illinois. Her patients include those on active duty, dependents and veterans like me. There are many veterans who have honorably serviced this great nation, have experienced traumatic events during their service and now face an invisible battlefield called cancer. Like Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, who earned the title of “angel of the battlefield” during the Civil War for helping wounded soldiers, Ms. Maria has earned this enduring title today. She is a true angel of the battlefield in the fight against cancer. Instead of carrying a weapon, she carries her helping hands, professionalism, a caring attitude and a warm smile with humor tossed in, and she actually listens to her patients.

Ms. Maria has been my attending nurse for just over four years, and although chemo is not always at the top of my “want to do” list, Ms. Maria makes it a somewhat enjoyable event. Even when I’m feeling down a bit, Ms. Maria always manages to cheer me up, just as she does with other patients who visit her daily. She is always upbeat and meets everyone with a warm, »

WINNING ESSAY

sincere smile and a cheery “good morning” or “good afternoon.” That sets the tone for the chemo infusion for the day. For us old veterans who like to talk about our days on active duty, Ms. Maria will try to place us across from each other where we can talk and swap our tales (true or false) as any good veteran will do. Although this is a relaxing interaction in itself, Ms. Maria brings it all together and reassures each member that everything is all right and it’s going to be a good day, and we all know we’re in great, caring hands. During our interactions, we all agree that Ms. Maria is an expert in her field.

With my chemo cycle of seven days on and 18 days off, the oncology clinic is my home away from home, and the supporting staff — in particular Ms. Maria — make me feel comfortable. I know I will be cared for and that I truly do matter, not just as a patient, but also as a human and a veteran. At almost 71, I lost my wife, my support system, and I don’t know how I would have fought this battle this far without Ms. Maria’s support. There truly aren’t enough words to express my gratitude.

Although deep down, I and my veteran friends acknowledge it’s through the grace of God that we’re still here, we all can agree that Ms. Maria is God’s emissary at the VA. Whatever the future may hold for me, I will always be indebted to Ms. Maria for assisting and guiding me in my fight on this medical battlefield.

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce this exceptional nurse. It is greatly appreciated. 



PROVIDING PATIENTS WITH HOPE

AN INTERVIEW WITH **MARIA LIM, B.S.N., RN, OCN, BMTCN**

By Mark Cantrell



Maria Lim, B.S.N., RN, OCN, BMTCN, took an unusual path to nursing: First it took her through engineering. Growing up in her native Philippines, the girl dreamed that she would someday immigrate to the U.S., and an engineering degree seemed like a good way to facilitate that. Lim enrolled in a technical school, studied electronics and, after three years of instruction, began on-the-job training, installing speakers and paging systems on light rail trains.

“After doing that for a while, I realized it wasn’t the job for me,” she remembers. A relative who worked 10 months a year as a contract nurse in Saudi Arabia told Lim about her career. That sounded intriguing, so when she was due to enter engineering school, Lim decided on nursing instead — but there was a fly in the ointment. Her parents had paid for her education until that point, which is customary in the Philippines. “I asked my parents if they could pay for four more years of education, and they almost gave up,” she says with a chuckle.

It was also a custom for the eldest sibling to finance a younger sibling’s education if the parents couldn’t. “That’s when my brother stepped in,” she says. Lim was soon enrolled at the University of St. La Salle in Bacolod, Philippines and became a registered nurse in 1993. Two years later, she finally realized her dream of coming to the U.S.

WINNER INTERVIEW

There was a nursing shortage in the 1980s, and many Filipino nurses were recruited to work in the U.S. When Lim graduated, demand had softened, so she hired a placement agent, who found a job for her at Hampton Plaza Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Niles, Illinois. She then moved to Lutheran Home and Services for the Aged in Arlington Heights, Illinois, which helped her get her green card in the early 2000s. “I applied to the oncology department at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, Illinois (now Advocate Aurora Lutheran General Hospital), got my OCN, and eventually, my certificate in transplant nursing. I worked there for 16 years before moving to the VA,” she says, referring to the Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, formerly the VA Medical Center, where she works now.

With oncology, Lim felt she had found her niche. “You’re dealing with patients not just on a physical level but also a psychological level,” she says. “When they (receive a cancer diagnosis), it seems like the end of the world. But as a patient advocate, you can give them hope and help them deal with their psychological issues as well as the physical ones.”

As an infusion clinic nurse, Lim sees seven to 10 patients a day. “We have seven recliners and each one is in a separate bay,” she says. “For patients with long infusions of four or five hours, we try to schedule appointments as early as possible in the day. Last year, we started seeing nononcology patients as well, such as those with Crohn’s, so ... we cater to those patients as well.”

Infusion clinics can be dreary places, so Lim does what she can to lighten the mood. “I try to make it as nice an experience as possible, instead of a scary one,” she says. “We always like to have something to laugh about. We also like to get patients to interact, so when we get ‘frequent flyers,’ I introduce new patients to them. They talk to each other and share stories.”

Those victories make Lim’s job rewarding; for example, consider one patient with testicular cancer. Before treatment, Lim suggested sperm banking, but that did not occur due to issues with collection. After he completed his regimen, the patient and his girlfriend visited the clinic with news: She was pregnant. Another patient with pancreatic cancer was treated for two years and then learned that he was in remission. “We were still under pandemic protocol, but he couldn’t help himself,” she says. “He gave me the good news and then hugged me.” 🇵🇭

DEDICATION BEYOND MEASURE

JESSICA ELLISON, M.S.N., B.A., RN

TRANSPLANT COORDINATOR

[UNIVERSITY TRANSPLANT AND FIBROLAMELLAR HCC PROGRAM, RUSH UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL CENTER, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS]

Written by **Dr. Paul Kent**, Medical Director, Fibrolamellar HCC Program, Rush University
Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois

It is with the strongest possible enthusiasm that I wish to nominate **Jessica Ellison, M.S.N., B.A., RN**, for the Extraordinary Healer® Award for Oncology Nursing because of her critical role in allowing Rush University Medical Center to quickly grow to become a national leader in the treatment of the very rare and very terrible cancer called fibrolamellar carcinoma. Fibrolamellar carcinoma is a devastating cancer of the liver that affects young, healthy children and adolescents. Most oncologists have never seen this disease and therefore do not know how to treat it. Consequently, most patients are told they are incurable. Jessica has been instrumental in setting up Rush University as a center of excellence for this rare disease to allow patients to get the multidisciplinary and coordinated care they need from a team with expertise in fibrolamellar carcinoma.

Because of Jessica, in four years we went from seeing our first patient with fibrolamellar carcinoma to seeing over 60 patients from 32 states and five countries. We have become the epicenter in the U.S. for patients with the most difficult-to-treat cases of fibrolamellar carcinoma whose cases are the most difficult to treat. Although this disease was new to »



From left: DR. PAUL KENT and
JESSICA ELLISON, M.S.N., B.A., RN

PHOTOS BY ARIELLE GALLIONE

FINALIST ESSAY

TEACHING MOMENT

Most importantly, Jessica treats the scared patients like they are her own family. Most of the patients she sees have been told they are going to die. Jessica gives them hope and optimism that they can and will effectively fight this terrible cancer.

her, Jessica stepped up to do all the complex coordination of care for all these patients. She is the first one to contact the patients, put their mind at ease and reassure them that we have a plan, that we know what we are doing, that they are not alone and that we can help them. She must coordinate all the care — scans, records, insurance approvals, appointments, operating schedules, bloodwork and rehab — as well as collection of fresh tissue taken directly from the operating room to be sent to fibrolamellar carcinoma research organizations. Because of Jessica, more tissue has been collected and sent to fibrolamellar carcinoma researchers from Rush and our patients than from everywhere else in the U.S. combined. Most importantly, Jessica treats the scared patients like they are her own family. Most of the patients she sees have been told they are going to die. Jessica gives them hope and optimism that they can and will effectively fight this terrible cancer. Our patients range in age from 6 to 54. Although not trained as an oncology nurse nor in pediatrics, Jessica is there for everyone, comforting and giving hope, from long before they meet the doctors to long after. She has nearly doubled her workload without any extra pay.



It is no exaggeration to say that without Jessica, there would be no fibrolamellar carcinoma program at Rush and there would be a huge deficit in basic fibrolamellar carcinoma research and fibrolamellar carcinoma clinical care in this country. I have been a pediatric oncologist for 21 years, and I cannot think of a better example of an extraordinary healer. Please consider Jessica for this prestigious honor. 🇺🇸

TREATING WITH KINDNESS

AN INTERVIEW WITH **JESSICA ELLISON, M.S.N., B.A., RN**

By Mark Cantrell



Jessica Ellison, M.S.N., B.A., RN, began college as a biology major, but her decision to switch to nursing would eventually have major positive implications for patients with a little-known type of liver cancer. “After finishing my liberal arts and science degree with a focus in psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago, I went into nursing school and obtained my B.S.N. from Olivet University,” she says. Ellison earned her M.S.N.-CNL from Rush University in December 2020 and recently earned her clinical nurse leader certification.

While attending nursing school, Ellison also pursued a certified nurse assistant certification at a community college, first working at a local hospital and then at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Upon graduation, Ellison took a job at Northwestern in the congestive heart failure unit. “My interest in heart disease and cardiac problems led me to a job in the (cardio-thoracic intensive care unit), where I was able to work with heart and lung transplant patients,” Ellison says. “I stayed there for about a year and then took a lead RN transplant coordinator position at Rush University Medical Center with a focus in kidney pre-transplant. That’s been my role for about eight years.”

FINALIST INTERVIEW

At Rush, Ellison had her first encounter with fibrolamellar carcinoma, the cancer that would change the course of her career. “My first interaction with fibrolamellar (carcinoma) started when I scheduled a post-surgical follow-up visit and some diagnostic imaging,” Ellison says. Working with Dr. Paul Kent and others piqued her interest. “One case led to several, and I eventually became the primary RN for all the fibrolamellar (carcinoma) cases,” Jessica says.

Fibrolamellar carcinoma accounts for 1% to 5% of all liver cancers and occurs in 1 in 5 million people in the U.S., according to the National Cancer Institute. Its rarity led to Rush — specifically, Jessica’s unit — becoming the place to go to treat these patients. “Once our patient load increased, I realized that we needed to demonstrate the importance of our work to leadership, which resulted in the creation of a fibrolamellar clinic located within my transplant clinic,” Ellison notes. According to Kent, Rush sees more fibrolamellar patients than any other facility in the world.

One of the most pernicious aspects of the cancer is its stealthiness: Many tumors are asymptomatic and are discovered only while other conditions are treated. That means they’re not usually diagnosed until stage 3 or 4, worsening the prognosis. Early discovery is key, and patients with resectable tumors have a five-year survival rate of up to 80%. Unfortunately, fibrolamellar carcinoma usually strikes otherwise healthy adolescents, Ellison says, although she adds her youngest patient is 6 and her oldest is in their 50s. “Oddly, patients usually have normal liver function tests and none of the usual tumor markers for liver cancer,” she explains. Symptoms are often nonspecific, such as abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting.

One of Ellison’s biggest challenges is finding enough time to give each patient the attention they deserve, she notes, especially at the beginning. “Most of these patients are struggling with their diagnosis and prognosis, which is hard in itself,” she says. “Navigating the medical system can complicate that anxiety and grief exponentially.” To help ease their load, Ellison helps patients with the sometimes confusing world of insurance, uses a third-party service to obtain needed documents and images, and gives each patient the best advice and consultations possible.

“My goal from the beginning has always been to try to make the journey with fibrolamellar (carcinoma) as easy as possible,” Ellison says. “The rewarding part is when patients and families express the ease and kindness that they have experienced during their journey with our team.” ■



From left: KATHERINE GACEK, B.S.N., RN, OCN, and ROSE CONTI, M.S.N., RN, CNML

PHOTOS BY ARIELLE GALLIONE

ONE NURSE'S BRILLIANT STORY

KATHERINE GACEK, B.S.N., RN, OCN

NURSE NAVIGATOR

[THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO MEDICAL CENTER, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS]

Written by **Rose Conti, M.S.N., RN, CNML**, The University of Chicago Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois


Katherine Gacek, B.S.N., RN, OCN, is an oncology nurse navigator in the lymphoma program at the University of Chicago Medical Center. She is an extremely dedicated and compassionate nurse who puts caring for her patients first. Her role includes spending time meeting with her patients in the clinic, educating them on their disease and their care plan, and working with them to navigate the challenges of receiving care within the hospital.

Katherine's dedication not only to the nursing profession but also to her patients is best shown through her care of her patient Sam. Sam was a nonverbal patient with autism being treated for Hodgkin lymphoma. Because of his cognitive delays, Sam could not understand the severity of his disease and often overwhelmed his own family as they tried to care for him. When Sam started to come for his weekly treatments at the IV therapy center, he would run through the halls, yelling, taking all the snacks meant for other patients, and making staff and other patients feel on edge with his disruptive behavior. He became increasingly »

FINALIST ESSAY

combative toward the nursing staff as his appointments progressed. At a typical appointment, Sam required three strong nurses to assist in providing care to make sure he would not become violent and harm our staff.

Katherine tried everything to prepare Sam's family for their trips and coordinate his arrival with the IV therapy infusion staff, but her efforts did not seem to affect Sam's behavior. After several family meetings with the care team, Katherine started to get a better understanding of Sam's home life. With the background she gained through these meetings, Katherine researched ways to care for patients like Sam and reached out to our child life specialist for further advice. Katherine's solution: a detailed storyboard with images of what Sam could expect on his treatment days. The poster included pictures of Sam's entire day: getting into the car, a wheelchair ride up the elevator, the snacks available to him when he arrived (his favorite), pictures of the nurses who would care for him, the site where his blood would be drawn, the time he would have his medication and, finally, a picture of him arriving home. Katherine shared the storyboard with Sam's family, and before each trip, they reviewed the poster with Sam. The impact on his trips was significant: no struggle and no running and screaming through the halls. Katherine's efforts made a significant difference in Sam's experience, his family's experience and, indirectly, the experience of the other patients and employees at the infusion center.

Katherine wants only the best for her patients. This example shows how her efforts positively affected not only her patients but also other patients within the infusion center. She has shown this time and time again when approaching challenges in her role as a nurse navigator at our organization. Katherine is well deserving of the Extraordinary Healer® Award for Oncology Nursing. 



REWARDING EXPERIENCES

AN INTERVIEW WITH **KATHERINE GACEK, B.S.N., RN, OCN**

By Mark Cantrell



When she was young, **Katherine Gacek, B.S.N., RN, OCN**, never had to think twice when someone asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. “I always wanted to go into nursing,” she remembers. That was largely due to a pair of nurses in her church group. “They were both just so warm and welcoming, loving and caring and so compassionate,” Gacek says. “I wanted to be like that.”

Gacek attended nursing school at Mount Mercy University in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, then moved back home to Chicago, where she got her first nursing job at Northwestern Medicine, working the night shift on an oncology floor. “When I graduated from college and was applying for jobs, it was the best one available,” she says. “I was actually pretty nervous to take it because at 22, I wasn’t sure I was in a good position to handle such a tough department.”

Gacek fell in love with the job, handling postsurgical and general oncology cases and patients coming in for chemotherapy. After three years, she moved to outpatient work, performing chemotherapy infusion for patients with breast cancer and gynecological cancers. “Rather than working with patients during their acute stays in the hospital, now I was seeing them throughout their entire treatment journey,” she says. “That gave me a chance to form deeper relationships.”

FINALIST INTERVIEW

About three years ago, Gacek moved to her current job as a nurse navigator at the University of Chicago Medical Center, working mostly with patients with lymphoma. She found that her experience in oncology had prepared her well to help patients through the bewildering maze of appointments and treatments that follow a cancer diagnosis. “It’s not a position you can just jump into,” she says. “You need experience and a good feel for things to watch out for. We have excellent support from our physicians, but we also need to be able to act autonomously.”

One of Gacek’s most important roles comes right after a patient receives a cancer diagnosis. “Everyone responds to the news differently,” she says, “and there are so many aspects of care to consider on that journey — especially at the beginning after diagnosis, when your head is spinning.

“We sit in on the appointment when patients come in for their diagnoses,” Gacek says. “After the physician leaves, we explain the diagnosis to the patient and family, tell them what the next steps are and begin to establish a nurse-patient relationship to walk them through their treatment. We help set up all their pre-treatment scans and testing, get them started on their chemotherapy treatments, and we’re the main contact for questions about side effects or any other issues. We’re their liaisons for financial matters, helping with transportation and assisting in conversations with their kids about what’s going to happen during treatment and questions. We wear many hats.”

The highlight of Gacek’s nursing career is detailed in Rose Conti’s essay about Gacek and her experience with Sam, an autistic patient with Hodgkin lymphoma. “It was nursing collaboration at its finest,” Gacek recalls. “After reaching a dead end with this patient, we realized he needed an exact routine because when he didn’t have one, things went haywire. Creating this storyboard showing him exactly what was going to happen and making sure an appointment went exactly that way worked extremely well. As soon as he left and we went back up in the elevator, we were all giving each other elated high-fives. It was just amazing.”

Gacek has seen how rewarding this specialty can be. “Nursing provides a unique opportunity to enter people’s lives and help them when they’re the most vulnerable,” she says. “There’s something so raw and pure about being invited into that moment, and it’s such an honor to be a part of each patient’s journey. They’ve been the most rewarding experiences of my life.” ■



Extraordinary Healers®

Finest Hour Award





From left: PAM MALONE, RN, APRN, and
JENNIFER E. GIOVANNI, PH.D., M.S.N., M.P.H., RN

PHOTOS BY KACY MEINECKE

WORLDWIDE IMPACT

JENNIFER E. GIOVANNI, PH.D., M.S.N., M.P.H., RN

[TRAVEL NURSE, WICHITA, KANSAS]

Written by Pam Malone, RN, APRN

Jennifer E. Giovanni, Ph.D., M.S.N., M.P.H., RN, received her call to service before she ever began her nursing career. She started in 1995 as a volunteer with the Peace Corps, providing health services to women and children of remote villages in Niger, West Africa. In 2001, Jennifer received her master's degree in public health degree in infectious disease epidemiology. She went on to work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the area of anthrax and other pathogens. Jennifer was a public health commander with the U.S. Air Force in Alabama and then served with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health in California.

Jennifer received her master's degree of science in nursing and RN credential in 2011 and served in Zambia related to HIV/AIDS. She then spent several years in Liberia and Sierra Leone giving direct patient care to patients with Ebola and serving as the infection control lead of the CDC's Global Rapid Response Team.

Beginning in 2019, Jennifer worked as a crisis response critical care nurse in the COVID-19 intensive care unit at NYU Langone Hospital-Brooklyn in New York and is currently treating patients with COVID-19 in New York and New Jersey.

Although she was often overwhelmed by the critically ill patients and the number of deaths she witnessed on a daily basis, Jennifer persevered. She is always a patient and family advocate »

WINNING ESSAY

TEACHING MOMENT

She is always a patient and family advocate while serving as a member of the team. It was her choice to serve in poor and underserved areas (because) she felt she could be of the most use in those locations.

while serving as a member of the team. It was her choice to serve in poor and underserved areas (because) she felt she could be of the most use in those locations.

To quote from one of Jennifer's writings: "Through my own trials of pain and loss, I discovered comfort, healing and joy in the communion of one human spirit to another. And this is why I want to be a nurse."

Jennifer has a vast area of knowledge, but it is her ability for kindness, compassion and empathy that makes her a hero. Her patients know it and I know it, not only because she is my niece, but also because she is a fellow nurse. My words do not do justice to the health care hero who is Jennifer Giovanni. 📌



TRAVELING WITH PURPOSE

AN INTERVIEW WITH **JENNIFER E. GIOVANNI, PH.D., M.S.N., M.P.H., RN**

By Mark Cantrell



Patients of **Jennifer E. Giovanni, Ph.D., M.S.N., M.P.H., RN**, are lucky she didn't stick with her first career choice of truck driver, despite her father's support. "I had the greatest dad ever," Jennifer remembers, "because he actually went out and bought me a Kenworth that we put together." After rethinking that route, Jennifer ended up in the Air Force and served a tour of duty as a public health commander. But that was by no means the end of her journey.

"I experienced a great personal crisis in 2007 that left me in a very broken state," she recalls. "One evening in the shower, an inner voice told me to go to a school of nursing web-site." That was strange, not only because of its unknown source, but also because nursing was the furthest thing from her mind at the time. "My mother was a nurse, and I hated her job," she remembers. "It took her away from us all the time, and when she was home, she was always stressed out." But in a flash of insight, nursing suddenly made sense, and Jennifer entered nursing school in 2009.

"I had the fortune of attending (UCLA School of Nursing), a school with a strong and concentrated emphasis on the science of disease and therapeutics," she says. "There were

WINNER INTERVIEW

great intellectual challenges associated with that type of learning, but I emerged from the program with a considerable depth of knowledge and the ability to think critically.”

Jennifer’s first full-time nursing job was as a student intensive care unit (ICU) nurse at the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. There she met the nurse who would become her mentor. “Janice had been a nurse for decades, was a great communicator, and was very encouraging,” Jennifer says. “What I remember the most about her was just her exceptional kindness.”

Jennifer had traveled to Niger in West Africa in 1995 to work as a Peace Corps volunteer. Her experience made her determined to return someday. She kept that promise in 2011 by participating in the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), working on prevention of maternal-child HIV transmission in Zambia. She didn’t know it then, but working with patients with Ebola in Liberia would prepare her for her current job: caring for patients in the ICU with COVID-19 for Aya Healthcare travel nursing agency.

“In the COVID ICU, we manage patients with up to 14 drips,” Jennifer says. “Many are heavily sedated and paralyzed due to the lung pathophysiology associated with the SARS-CoV-2 infection. These medications add a level of complexity, in addition to antibiotics and other medications that treat the pathology of severe COVID-19. In addition, we manage arterial catheters, alternate routes of nutrition administration, and endotracheal tubes and tracheostomies connected to ventilators.” »

TEACHING MOMENT

What helps Jennifer deal with the stress? “One word: ‘colleagues,’” she says. “When nurses work together, help one another, provide emotional support and much-needed levity and laughter, there’s (an) energy that carries me through my day.”

WINNER INTERVIEW

The work can be draining. “The biggest challenge is all that a single nurse — one sole human being — must attend to: accomplish, note, communicate, physically labor, orchestrate, collect, advocate for, clean (and) stabilize and still achieve excellence,” she says. “The administrative, therapeutic, physical and communicative responsibilities for our patients, within the context of the American health care setting, are overwhelming — and, frankly, exhausting.”

What helps Jennifer deal with the stress? “One word: ‘colleagues,’” she says. “When nurses work together, help one another, provide emotional support and much-needed levity and laughter, there’s (an) energy that carries me through my day and simply makes possible the extraordinarily hard work of COVID ICU nursing.”

Jennifer’s patients also help keep her going. “One moment that happened in Liberia keeps coming back to me,” she recalls. “We brought one young man into the Ebola treatment unit, or ETU, who was maybe 16 or so, very sick and just terrified. About all we could do at the time was provide IV fluids to counteract electrolyte imbalances.”

When she returned to the ETU, his condition had worsened. The circumstances didn’t help: The ETU was basically a plywood shack covered by blue tarps, she says, with oppressive temperatures and humidity inside. Her patient was still in the clothes he’d worn when he was picked up, so Jennifer bathed him and changed his bed linens. “His eyes were full of pain and terror, and I couldn’t communicate because of my PPE,” she says. “But I got down on my knees (and) wiped his forehead with a wet rag, and our gazes met. It was an incredible moment. I remember thinking that every single thing I’d experienced in my life came down to that one moment, and had I not been a nurse, I never would have experienced it. It was one of the defining moments of my life.”

The epilogue came a few weeks later, when Jennifer was working at another ETU in Liberia. “The ambulance driver came and found me and presented me with a copy of my patient’s certificate of recovery. I haven’t been back to Liberia since, but in the near future, I plan to take my aunt, a nurse who nominated me for this award, back to Liberia. And we’re going to find my patient.” 📍





CHAPTER 1

Knowledge Is Power





**From left: CANDICE ROTH, M.S.N., RN, CENP,
and JESSICA GARMON, D.N.P., RN, ONC**

PHOTOS BY EMILY RHEINBOLT

ABOVE THE STANDARD, BEYOND THE EXPECTATION

JESSICA GARMON, D.N.P., RN, ONC

[LEVINE CANCER INSTITUTE/ATRIUM HEALTH, CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA]

Written by **Candice Roth, M.S.N., RN, CENP**, Levine Cancer Institute/Atrium Health, Charlotte, North Carolina

Jessica Garmon, D.N.P., RN, ONC, truly lives the phrase “above the standard, beyond the expectation” in everything she does as a clinical nurse educator. Although Jessica is not in a direct patient care role, she constantly goes out of her way to ensure that our nurses are able to provide exceptional nursing care. Upon stepping into her role, she created a virtual monthly educational series, bringing together our 16 sites in an outstanding learning platform. For staff unable to attend the day of education, the content is recorded and uploaded to be accessed at their convenience.

Jessica shone as an innovator this past year, finding creative ways to provide engaging educational content to our new oncology residents. She is passionate about ensuring that we are preparing our nurses in the outpatient oncology setting to provide evidence-based holistic care. After reviewing current research, Jessica felt that our new oncology residents needed hands-on interaction in a simulation lab during onboarding. The simulations that were developed allow residents to experience oncology-specific events safely while learning skills needed to keep our patients safe. »

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

As COVID-19 developed and our practices had to adapt on a near-daily basis, Jessica worked tirelessly to ensure that staff were kept up to date on changes pertinent to them. She took our established in-person classes for our new nurse residents and transitioned the program to a virtual platform. She included interactive components, knowledge checkpoints, links to policies and resources, videos, and case studies. Everything was compiled beautifully into a well-organized document that allowed residents to work through the content at their own pace while holding them accountable.

What sets Jessica apart from other educators is her willingness to help outside our department by offering her time and knowledge to those in need. When COVID-19 A/B staffing rotations were put in effect, leaving sites short for patient screeners, Jessica willingly jumped in and picked up numerous shifts. Despite this, she made sure her other work was done on time and to the very best of her ability. She recently volunteered at a system level to assist with education related to our closed-system transfer devices, looking into current inpatient and pediatric practices to make sure the education is applicable to all. She is not focused just on one site and works hard to reach all nurses across our footprint, which spans the Carolinas and Georgia.

Jessica's caring nature is shown in every project through her dedication to providing meaningful education that meets the needs of nurses and patients. Jessica continues to display care, commitment, integrity and teamwork daily and is most deserving of this award. She genuinely seeks to provide our nurses with the tools and resources needed to be a successful oncology nurse. Levine Cancer Institute is truly blessed to have such a strong and committed leader working as its educator. ■

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER





From left: KAY DOWLING; SHAROLYN GONZALEZ, B.S.N., RN, OCN, B.C.N.; and VIRGINIA STERLING

PHOTO BY HARLEY J. SEELEY

A PIONEER OF SERVICE

SHAROLYN GONZALEZ, B.S.N., RN, OCN, B.C.N.

[SPARROW HOSPITAL CANCER CENTER, LANSING, MICHIGAN (RETIRED)]

Written by **Virginia Sterling, Kay Dowling** and **Margie Sisson**

Margie Sisson, Kay Dowling and I contributed to this essay. We are breast cancer survivors and members of the planning committee formed by **Sharolyn Gonzalez, B.S.N., RN, OCN, BCN**, for the breast cancer support group she initiated in 1989 and facilitated, Women's Information Network and Support (WINS). Sharolyn invited and incorporated the talents of the committee members into meetings and special events, using their experience to add relevance to the meeting content. As the years went on, Sharolyn became a three-time cancer survivor herself.

Professionally, Sharolyn is a person of vision. When the concept of nurse navigators began to emerge, she recognized the benefit that expanding the role of the oncology nurse on the multidisciplinary breast team could have for patients, in guiding them and their loved ones reeling from the shock of a breast cancer diagnosis. Sharolyn championed the idea, laid the groundwork for funding and added that position to the multidisciplinary team. I'm sure Sharolyn's medical colleagues could add many more accounts of her professional accomplishments, but we know her as patients, as survivors.

Margie: In 1995, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and I headed straight to a support group. Fortunately for me, Sharolyn was the facilitator. That night, she led the group through laughter »

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER


and tears, and I remember leaving the meeting full of hope. Over the years, Sharolyn affected the lives of so many individuals at WINS, and I was there to witness this one slice of her life. She has tirelessly worked throughout the years to care for, educate and support women and their families through the medical maze of cancer. I saw her as a modern-day Wonder Woman — never faltering, consistent on her journey to help those affected by their diagnoses, and helping them in their recovery and living life afterward. What I saw in Sharolyn was an outstanding oncology nurse who was on a mission and who had a passion for her vocation. Her mother died from breast cancer a month before she started in the oncology unit at Sparrow. She understood the loss and devastation from this disease. In an interview for the WINS newsletter years ago, Sharolyn said, “I feel very privileged to have shared in so many lives during a crisis such as cancer. I have learned so much from so many.” The level of sharing when you are faced with a disease like cancer is a level we don’t always reach in our everyday relationships. For those of us fortunate enough to be on the receiving end of Sharolyn’s care, it is a special bond we will always cherish.

Kay: Sharolyn was instrumental in bringing the Breast Cancer Multidisciplinary Clinic to Sparrow Hospital. I was fortunate to work with her as a volunteer. The clinic was designed to educate patients with new breast cancer diagnoses and their families. We began with a PowerPoint presentation explaining how the disease develops and introducing treatment options. The patient and those who were with her were encouraged to ask questions. Sharolyn’s kindness and reassurance put them at ease.

After the education session, the patient was examined by a surgeon and a radiation oncologist. Then the team met to discuss the patient’s options for treatment. A physician from the team then met with the patient and explained those options. During the process, Sharolyn continued to comfort and educate the patients who in the beginning were scared and unsure where they were going with this disease.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

As I watched these patients leave the clinic, they appeared to walk taller and with more confidence than when they arrived. Since Sharolyn's retirement from oncology nursing, I occasionally run into former patients from the clinic. They typically state how positive the experience was for them. I tell them the clinic was Sharolyn's dream.

Whether or not Sharolyn Gonzalez is selected as a finalist for the 2021 Extraordinary Healer® Award, she will always be that to those who have had the good fortune to cross paths with her on their cancer journey. Thank you for your consideration. 



SHAROLYN GONZALEZ, B.S.N., RN, OCN, B.C.N.

PHOTO BY HARLEY J. SEELEY



From left: BRYAN MATHIESON, MBA, M.S.N.,
and KARI LAHMON, B.S.N., RN, CPN, CAPA, CPAN

COURTESY OF ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL

OUT OF HER COMFORT ZONE

KARI LAHMON, B.S.N., RN, CPN, CAPA, CPAN

[ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE]

Written by **Bryan Mathieson, MBA, M.S.N.**, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Memphis, Tennessee

Kari Lahmon, B.S.N., RN, CPN, CAPA, CPAN, has been a pediatric oncology nurse at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital for eight years and has held a variety of positions across the organization, none of which prepared her for 2020. In January 2020, Kari was serving as the interim director for nursing education, a role she hadn't held before despite her knowledge, skills and abilities. About two months into her role, our institution and the world were changed by a global pandemic. Over the next four months, Kari continued her interim director and nurse educator roles but also took on St. Jude's COVID-19 response.

The response to COVID-19 at St. Jude was unlike any I had seen before. Kari organized and operationalized COVID-19 testing of over 1,000 asymptomatic employees per day, and the same process continues today. As we evaluated resources, Kari was the lead for a self-swab pilot and research study. Next, she was tasked with operationalizing a volunteer workforce of over 200 people to cover screening entrances 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These initiatives were instrumental in protecting our pediatric oncology patients from COVID-19 and allowing a shift of resources closer to the important work we do. Kari's outstanding work and institutional need led to a full-time position involving COVID-19.

As testing was in full force, Kari recognized the need to ensure our patients, families and employees were vaccinated against an impending influenza season. Once again, she developed »



and instituted St. Jude's largest influenza vaccination program to date for over 4,400 employees. Kari spent endless hours developing, socializing, operationalizing and collaborating with a multitude of departments to ensure a seamless rollout and high acceptance rate regardless of work area. The investment in time and lessons learned from the influenza vaccine translated quickly into preparation for the COVID-19 vaccination. Kari developed and established a vaccination plan amid extremely tight time constraints and logistical limitations. This was possible only because of her extensive collaboration and selfless commitment to the mission. To date, Kari and her team have successfully vaccinated over 1,900 St. Jude employees with zero doses wasted. Kari distinguished herself through her outstanding achievement as a pediatric oncology nurse who went above and beyond her comfort level in unprecedented times, thus ensuring the safety and health of countless employees, patients and their families. 🇺🇸

A GIFT TO THE BRAIN TUMOR COMMUNITY

MARY LOVELY, PH.D., RN, CNRN

[NATIONAL BRAIN TUMOR SOCIETY, NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS]

Written by **Rachael Kittleson, M.S.Ed.**, National Brain Tumor Society, Newton, Massachusetts

In the world of caring for patients with brain tumors and their families, there are few more compassionate, more skilled and more knowledgeable than **Mary Lovely, Ph.D., RN, CNRN**. I work with Mary as the director of community relations at the National Brain Tumor Society, overseeing our personalized support and navigation initiative. We are lucky to have Mary serve as our patient navigator for this program, responding to outreach from patients with brain tumors and caregivers with quality, unbiased information, resources, support programs and services. Mary makes sure the community members she serves feel they are listened to, understood and being provided the individualized attention they need and deserve.

Mary's expertise is seen in the dedication and commitment she has demonstrated in her field. She has over 30 years of experience working closely with patients with brain tumors and families as a neurological nurse, clinical nurse specialist and research nurse. In nonprofit organizations, Mary has provided direct patient support, created and revised educational materials, and organized patient/family conferences. She has continually optimized approaches for patients and families to cope with brain tumor effects. »



MARY LOVELY, PH.D., RN, CNRN

PHOTO BY MARIELLE HAYES

Mary co-facilitates the San Francisco Brain Tumor Support Group and is a special adviser to the International Brain Tumour Alliance. She is on the advisory board and is an active volunteer for the Milton Marks Neuro-Oncology Family Camp and serves on the brain malignancy steering committee as a patient advocate. Mary has also consulted with biotech companies conducting clinical trials, communicating with patients and families, and providing input on patient-oriented issues.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Mary's philosophy as a patient navigator: "Patients with brain tumors, their caregivers and their loved ones deserve to figure out how to manage this disease and how they can live their lives to the fullest. They also need someone to listen to them and respect how they approach their disease. I consider a person with a brain tumor and their loved ones in the quality-of-life context of physical, mental, social and spiritual beings. I believe that patients with brain tumors and their loved ones should not be isolated and that they benefit from connecting with others. In addition, I believe there is hope to be found no matter what stage of this disease."

Mary has dedicated her life to serving her patients and their families, always willing to expand her knowledge and find ways to incorporate it into the care she gives them. Mary is a true gift to the brain tumor community and the very definition of an extraordinary healer. 📌



RACHAEL KITTESON, M.S.ED

PHOTO BY MITCH WOJNAROWICZ

SUPPORT FROM THE SIDELINES

ASHLEY MARSTON, M.S.N., B.S., RN

[ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE]

Written by **Felecia Warner, M.H.A., CHC, CPHQ, RHIA**, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Memphis, Tennessee

There are hundreds of expertly trained nurses at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital who work fearlessly to promote healing in their oncology patients through therapy, teaching and medicinal care. But sometimes due to the complexity of the patient's condition, failed processes or human error, the healing does not go as planned. Consequently, every nurse taking care of patients at the bedside needs a nurse planning an offense and supporting them on the sidelines. **Ashley Marston, M.S.N., B.S., RN**, is one of those sideline nurses. She is an extraordinary healer.

Ashley works in the department of clinical excellence and collaborates with front-line staff and leadership to identify process improvements that affect clinical outcomes. Ashley also serves at the bedside and has made several recommendations to implement rapid-cycle improvements, such as central venous line management, falls prevention and prevention of hospital-acquired infections, which are known to have significant side effects and complicate the healing process for oncology patients. One might say this appears to be a routine part of her job. However, Ashley helps the nursing team recover and uses unexpected outcomes to honor the experience of the patient and improve practice with her wit and sense of humor. She also encourages her nursing peers to contact her after hours and on weekends so she can answer questions and help them navigate their day safely and more confidently. »



From left: FELECIA WARNER, M.H.A., CHC, CPHQ, RHIA, and ASHLEY MARSTON, M.S.N., B.S., RN

PHOTOS BY LOREANA ROJAS


KNOWLEDGE IS POWER



KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Ashley's expertise, passion and energy are pivotal in helping to translate and integrate data from measurement activities and incidents that negatively affected the patient into unit-level achievement and improvements to support safe, effective healing and recovery. This dedication and passion were instrumental in driving many of the exemplary patient safety initiatives and quality improvement activities that highlighted the great work of nursing through successful Magnet redesignation status by the American Nurses Credentialing Center in 2020.

The challenges associated with COVID-19 created a platform for Ashley to help outline processes to keep staff and patients safe. Ashley not only contributed to the development of COVID-19 screening processes but also leveraged technology to develop, design and manage the implementation of a comprehensive nursing COVID-19 website, communication plan and OneDrive repository location to offer updated references/documents to the bedside nurse around COVID-19.

There is a quote that says, "Healing doesn't mean the damage didn't happen or does not exist; healing means the damage doesn't control our lives." Ashley's dedication and hard work connect the essence of this quote to the purpose and mission of the nurses at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The damage of the disease or unplanned event may happen, but it does not have to control the life of the nurse caring for the patient. Ashley is an extraordinary healer. 

TEACHING MOMENT

One might say this appears to be a routine part of her job. However, Ashley helps the nursing team recover and uses unexpected outcomes to honor the experience of the patient and improve practice with her wit and sense of humor.



From left: MICHELLE HILLS, M.S.W.,
and MARRISSA VICTOR, B.S.N., RN

PHOTO BY STEVE PUPPE

IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

MARRISSA VICTOR, B.S.N., RN


[THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS CANCER CENTER, OVERLAND PARK, KANSAS]

Written by **Michelle Hills, M.S.W.**

When I was diagnosed with stage 4 non-small cell lung cancer, the experience of learning how to manage the medical appointments and administrative requirements of the insurance companies was completely overwhelming despite my 30-year career in health care. **Marrissa Victor, B.S.N., RN**, had been recently assigned to my oncologist. At the beginning of my journey, Marrissa's optimism instilled hope in me and confidence in my oncologist's skill and expertise. Marrissa diligently followed up with every phone call, often responding within the hour, to help sort through all the new worries, aches and pains.

Then the mountain of paperwork landed from health and disability insurance companies. Somehow Marrissa managed to keep all the documents moving through the system so we would not have to worry about how to pay for treatment. Nurses are responsible for so much more than direct patient care, and this is often overlooked.

I was very surprised that there are few lung cancer support groups, so I launched the Living With Lung Cancer Support Group. It was "game on" for Marrissa. The clinic social worker developed a flyer to recruit patients, and Marrissa began to reach out to other patients. We have been successfully up and running for almost two years!

One of the many things I appreciate about Marrissa is that she believes in me as a long-term survivor. She will support my goals and help me live my best life. It's the competence in managing what most people would find ordinary that makes Marrissa exceptional. 



CHAPTER 2

In Our Corner





From left: GWEN RYAN and BRENDA
BIGGINS, B.S.N., RN, OCN

PHOTO BY CYNTHIA AUGUST

IT'S THE SIMPLE THINGS

BRENDA BIGGINS, B.S.N., RN, OCN

[DANA-FARBER CANCER INSTITUTE, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS]

Written by **Gwen Ryan**, Gloucester, Massachusetts

I'm in my infusion chair on the ninth floor of Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and a new nurse has been assigned to me. I'm anxiously awaiting her arrival. **Brenda Biggins, B.S.N., RN, OCN**, arrives with her big smile, and I feel like I've known her forever. It's the simple things. She did her homework. She knew I loved warm blankets even in the summer. She knew I was allergic to the disinfectant solution and was ready with old-school Betadine. She knew I had a dog and was ready with pics of her new pup. Her kindness always buoyed my spirits, so much that I actually looked forward to chemo every three weeks because I'd get to see Brenda.

Miracle of miracles, I've been stable for five years since being diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. I told Brenda that my (oncologist) and I had been considering ending chemo treatments, which is unheard of with stage 4 breast cancer. Brenda asked some really good questions. When I said I thought I'd wait to get my port out, she encouraged me to get it done sooner rather than later. She knew me! The power of positive thinking for patients with cancer is so valuable. I (was) scheduled for port removal on Jan. 4, 2021. I will miss Brenda and the exceptional staff in the infusion unit on Floor 9. Simple acts of kindness go a long way. 🍷



From left: SANDRA BURNS, B.S.N., RN, OCN,
and DR. NOELLE LOCONTE

PHOTOS BY NICOLE HANSEN

REMARKABLE CARE TO EVERY PATIENT EVERY TIME

SANDRA BURNS, B.S.N., RN, OCN

[UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN HOSPITAL AND CLINICS, CARBONE CANCER CENTER, MADISON, WISCONSIN]

Written by **Dr. Noelle LoConte**, University of Wisconsin, Department of Medicine, Madison, Wisconsin

Sandra Burns, B.S.N., RN, OCN, has been with me in our gastrointestinal oncology clinic for my entire faculty practice, which started in 2006. We treat patients with any gastrointestinal cancer, including gastroesophageal, pancreas, colorectal, anal and neuroendocrine cancers, among other gastrointestinal diagnoses. Sandra also works with other oncology clinics and in the chemotherapy room for the University of Wisconsin Carbone Cancer Center. For context, we are a large tertiary referral center and our health system is an academic practice.

The slogan for our health care system (UW Health) is a simple, single word: “Remarkable.” In my 15-year practice, I can think of no one who represents that slogan better than Sandra. A few examples of that dedication include that she is reliable to a fault, always being present in clinic when she is scheduled to be there, and normally starting early and working late to ensure flawless and comprehensive care for our patients. She also is totally committed to the patient, often making extra phone calls and being a “squeaky wheel” to ensure patients always get what they »

IN OUR CORNER

need, whether that is a ride, food from a food pantry, insurance approvals or more teaching about their cancer treatment. When our patients transition to hospice, Sandy continues to call them weekly, not because she has to, but because she feels it is the best way to provide the best care to our patients. Most impressively, she does all this from an empathetic place of compassion for

our patients and their families, always. She comes at each problem completely judgment free.

Sandra has been flexible with all the new changes that COVID-19 has pushed upon our clinical work, and nearly always with a smile on her face. (I wish I could say the same.) She also worked with me and the team to successfully treat the very first patient in Wisconsin with Lutathera (lutetium dotatate), which involved a herculean amount of care coordination. Sandra is diligent and thorough in her review of our chemotherapy orders, even when the clinic is chaotic, loud and distracting, understanding that she is a critical part of the safety check for all our patients. Her attention to detail is unrivaled. She also goes out of her way to learn all she can about new treatments as they emerge, including how to best teach

about them to our patients. This demonstrates her expertise, particularly in the area of chemotherapy treatments for gastrointestinal cancers.

I am also reflecting on the title of this award for an “extraordinary healer,” and I am left with the thought that although in gastrointestinal cancers we do not always cure our patients, Sandra always seeks healing, from acceptance of a new cancer diagnosis and treatment plan to cure whenever possible, but also including comfort and the best possible quality of life for our incurable patients. I can think of no one more deserving of this recognition, and I hope you will look upon her nomination favorably. 🍷

TEACHING MOMENT

She also goes out of her way to learn all she can about new treatments as they emerge, including how to best teach about them.





From left: CATHY COLEMAN, D.N.P., M.S.N., RN, CNL, CPHQ,
and ADRIENNE DAVIS, M.P.H., MCHES

PHOTOS BY DANIELLE JOY PUTONEN

EXTRAORDINARY PATIENT ADVOCATE

CATHY COLEMAN, D.N.P., M.S.N., RN, CNL, CPHQ

[UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA]

Written by **Adrienne Davis, M.P.H., MCHES**

Cathy Coleman, D.N.P., M.S.N., RN, CNL, CPHQ, exhibits all the qualities and more defined by this award. In the 46 years I have known her as a friend and colleague and as her patient, Cathy has exemplified pure heroism defined by the steadfast and selfless support, care and empowerment she has provided to hundreds of individuals experiencing the impact of their cancer diagnosis. Although Cathy's role as an oncology nurse has evolved over the years, she has never wavered from continuing what she considers her most important role: a patient advocate for patients with cancer.

No matter what Cathy's professional position — clinical, administrative or academic — it has never stopped her from being available to anybody who needs support, education, resources, guidance and just plain caring in regard to their cancer diagnosis. Cathy never says no. She has helped so many of us and our friends and family members, often individuals whom she may not even know. Our cancer journeys have been made so much easier and less fearful because of »





IN OUR CORNER

Cathy's support. Currently a very busy associate professor at the University of San Francisco, Cathy still makes herself available, accessing all her local, national and international oncology resources for anyone who contacts her. She will review test results and help patients understand their meaning, connect patients with consultants and those providing second opinions, speak on the phone with patients and their family members tirelessly, and visit patients and their loved ones just to show caring and hold their hands. I have seen her help patients and families navigate medical care and, if needed, hospice care, funeral arrangements and calls to distant relatives, never refusing a request. She has been a true advocate of patient-centered care, believing in the patient's inherent ability to know what is best for them and whom to include in their journey. Cathy's ability to exhibit empathy and compassion is extraordinary and more than I have ever observed in other caregivers and healers.

To exemplify why Cathy is being nominated for the Extraordinary Healer® Award for Oncology Nursing, I would like to share a quote from a patient she recently helped who had received a diagnosis of breast cancer: "Cathy Coleman possesses a multitude of exceptional nursing skills and talents. But what made a difference in my breast cancer journey was Cathy's innate ability to pass on a feeling of empowerment to her patients. With Cathy's gentle encouragement, I quickly saw that educating myself on breast cancer treatments would be essential in guiding decisions that would have a strong bearing on my future health. Cathy provided her expertise in helping me to understand my pathology and biopsy results. Additionally, she did so in the most compassionate and clear manner. But where her heart shines brightly is that she is a nurse who will go the extra mile to ensure that her patients feel supported. She truly understands the meaning of patient-centered care." ■

ABOVE AND BEYOND

GEARY LYNN DELGADO, M.S.N., RN, CPN

[UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL — ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT HEMATOLOGY/ONCOLOGY,
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS]

Written by **Kara Raful, M.S.N., RN, APRN, PNP-AC**, Community Medicine Associates,
San Antonio, Texas

It gives me great pleasure to nominate a good friend and colleague who is quite possibly the most above-and-beyond person one could ever encounter. In my 10 years of pediatric practice, I have not met someone with more passion, drive and perseverance. She has committed her life to excellence in the service of others.

Geary Lynn Delgado, M.S.N., RN, CPN, certified pediatric nurse, certified chemo and bio-therapy by the Oncology Nursing Society: These are but letters behind this gem of a woman. I have observed her arriving to work in the wee hours with coffee and a smile, often staying later than her designated shift to care for her patients as well as her co-workers. When it seems like there is nothing else to give, Geary manages to put on a happy face and extend a warm touch and her deepest empathy for the patients she cares for. She has gone above and beyond to maintain certifications and apply her knowledge through updating policies in her oncology unit. She excels at everything she puts her mind to, and her patients are better for it.

Most recently, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Geary was determined to advocate for a young woman who was 16 weeks pregnant and had an abdominal mass. Geary was at her »



From left: GEARY LYNN DELGADO, M.S.N., RN, CPN,
and KARA RAFUL, M.S.N., RN, APRN, PNP-AC

PHOTOS BY VANESSA VELAZQUEZ

IN OUR CORNER

bedside when no one else could be. Geary advocated not only for her patient's physical care but also for her emotional well-being by making a case to allow her husband to be there with her. This woman became critically ill at a time when visitors were banned. No one is allowed to hold the hand of the dying anymore. Geary worked tirelessly with the interdisciplinary OB-GYN and GYN-

TEACHING MOMENT

When it seems like there is nothing else to give, Geary manages to put on a happy face and extend a warm touch and her deepest empathy for the patients she cares for.

ONC teams, as well as hospital management, to facilitate a family member to be with her through the surgery and death of her child, and for her family to be able to hold her hand at her bedside while she passed into the next life.

This is not the first patient or family Geary made an impact on, whether it is the boy who passed away from osteosarcoma, whom she held hands with and prayed, comforting him because he knew his prognosis was grave, or the child she knew as Dr. Julian, with whom she spent countless hours making his stay as much like home as possible. Geary and her nurses gowned him up with a chemo gown, face shield and specimen cups with tongue depressors filled with Gatorade, because he believed that one day,

he, too, would be a doctor. She was instrumental in planning and opening the adolescent and young adult oncology unit for University Hospital. This unit is dedicated to care for young men and women transitioning from adolescence to adulthood with cancer.

Acts such as these should not go unnoticed, especially during the tumultuous changes occurring in health care today. Geary is the embodiment of an extraordinary healer, a Florence Nightingale on the battlefield of cancer, and I am proud to call her friend. ■





From left: SUSAN GUSTMAN and
KATHLEEN LUTZ, M.S.N., RN, OGNP

PHOTOS BY CLAUDIO PAPAPIETRO

IN THE ARMS OF AN ANGEL

KATHLEEN LUTZ, M.S.N., RN, OGNP

[NYU PERLMUTTER CANCER CENTER, NYU LANGONE HEALTH, NEW YORK, NEW YORK]

Written by **Susan Gustman**

Each one of us will face hard times at some point in life. Sometimes the hardships come for a short while, and other times they seem to last longer than anticipated. Even though those moments feel like they are going to break us, we have to find support and incredible strength to push forward.

In 2011, I received a diagnosis of ovarian cancer just two years after losing my husband to multiple myeloma/osteosarcoma. How much can one person endure? Then I met **Kathleen Lutz, M.S.N., RN, OGNP**. She was more than just a nurse practitioner; she became family. There is nothing that she does that is not in my best interest. Even through those moments that felt like they were going to break me, Kathleen had that incredible strength to calm me down with determination and encourage me to persevere, which makes all the difference in the world. There are never too many questions for Kathleen to answer. No matter how fierce this storm keeps twisting, Kathleen has always pulled me out of my fear and the wreckage of this disease that knows no mercy. She has always taught me to be brave enough to find the life I want to live and the courage to chase it. Even though the struggles in life are not fun, Kathleen has taught me many lessons »



on how to be strong and how to develop character. Each struggle, we overcame together. She has truly inspired me to keep fighting and showed me ways to make it through this each and every time. I embrace her with love for helping me climb up this massive mountain. All those whose path she crossed feel the same.

For this award, there isn't anyone more deserving than Kathleen. To know her is to embrace her, and when she embraces you back, you know that you are in the arms of an angel. 🇺🇸

A QUIET HEALER

MEGAN MOQUIN, B.S.N., RN, OCN

[THEDACARE REGIONAL CANCER CENTER, APPLETON, WISCONSIN]

Written by **Brenda Van Sambeek, RN, OCN**, ThedaCare Regional Cancer Center, Appleton, Wisconsin

As a nurse, have you ever looked back on a situation and knew that you and your team responded in the best possible way, providing support, information and care for patients and families? It might have been difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel while in the situation, but reflection can often highlight the quiet, expert healers behind much of the work. I have had the pleasure of being in the presence of this exact type of healer.

I met **Megan Moquin, B.S.N., RN, OCN**, when two organizations were combined to provide comprehensive cancer care to more patients in Northeast and Central Wisconsin. Our nursing teams banded together to help each other through the transition.

In our first meeting, we met Megan, a lead RN. She stood up to explain some of the processes and introduce her staff. She was so compassionate, not only to her staff, but to ours, too. »



MEGAN MOQUIN, B.S.N., RN, OCN

PHOTO BY MIKE ROEMER



**From left: BRENDA VAN SAMBEEK, RN, OCN,
and MEGAN MOQUIN, B.S.N., RN, OCN**


PHOTO BY MIKE ROEMER



IN OUR CORNER

Throughout the transition, Megan was always patient. Most importantly, she always put the patients first in every decision. She also had expertise about the clinical processes and answers to our questions. Megan managed to supervise, as well as step in to care for patients when needed. The care she showed with her patients was extraordinary during a time where many of us were looking to her for guidance. She made both teams feel listened to and she never let us know she was stressed, even though we knew she was.

Megan has since transitioned to a clinical nurse supervisor role with ThedaCare Cancer Care, and does such an amazing job. She is a quiet, yet powerful leader. She earned the respect of our team by displaying confidence and being understanding, compassionate and open-minded in every situation. She is a very likable person, approachable and easy to talk to, but you would never hear her mention any of these qualities about herself.

Megan is an expert oncology nurse supervisor who is beyond compassionate and helpful in any way you need her to be. You'll often find Megan coordinating from "behind-the-scenes" — and we all know she is an instrumental part of our show — helping us provide the best care possible for our patients. I am nominating her for the Extraordinary Healer® award. She deserves her time to shine as an expert oncology certified nurse. 



From left: JACK DUNLAP and JAMIE O'CONNOR, B.S.N., RN, OCN

PHOTOS BY WILL REINTZELL

EXTRAORDINARY CARE, NUTRITION AND HEALING

JAMIE O'CONNOR, B.S.N., RN, OCN

[THE JOHNS HOPKINS KIMMEL CANCER CENTER AT SIBLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL,
WASHINGTON, D.C.]

Written by **Jack Dunlap**

This essay nominates **Jamie O'Connor, B.S.N., RN, OCN**, for the 2021 Extraordinary Healer® Award for Oncology Nursing.

In the last two years, I have been diagnosed with prostate and bladder cancer. I have been treated at three different hospital systems for these conditions, including the Johns Hopkins Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center at Sibley Hospital. Overall, I have found the treatment of patients and care at the Johns Hopkins institutions to be superior and the care and treatment by Jamie O'Connor to be exceptional, above and beyond the expectations of even Johns Hopkins and Sibley Hospital.

Although the prostate cancer was initially expected to be an advanced stage of a highly aggressive form of the disease, it turned out to be not as severe as feared. That was a huge relief. That was followed a year later, however, by a diagnosis of muscle invasive bladder cancer. After extensive research and consultations, I decided to go into a clinical trial that included chemotherapy and a likely cystectomy. »

IN OUR CORNER


Although my bladder cancer may have come primarily from sitting under Navy aircraft wings, inhaling exhaust from jet and turbojet engines, another factor may have been exposure to my parents' secondhand smoke. Nutrition was not an area I considered to be of significance. My wife, daughter and Jamie helped me understand the importance of nutrition.

I started the infusions feeling great, but my body was telling a different story. Doctors had to halve the doses and double the number of infusions to lessen the deleterious effects of the drugs. In the meantime, Jamie not only set up some of my infusions but also went above and beyond by checking in with me on days she was not giving me infusions.

Jamie explained the process in simple terms, in a gentle and caring manner. She was encouraging, helping me understand what was coming and how to deal with it. In particular, she talked about the importance of diet, and for a high point in a low part of the process, she brought in her homemade matzo ball soup. Not only was it delicious, I felt better! Jamie made me feel like family. It was clear she cared not just about me but also for all her patients.

Not only was the soup comforting and healing, it also parked thoughts of the importance of nutrition, which Jamie helped me understand.

The Lord works in mysterious ways. A month after chemo, my wife and I missed a New Year's party that we thought was on New Year's Day but was actually on the following Sunday. We ended up going to a plant-based restaurant instead, which rekindled our thoughts about the healing properties of food, which Jamie had introduced with her matzo ball soup. We are now on a substantially plant-based diet, eating no red meat or chicken, only seafood.

Accordingly, with great appreciation, I nominate Jamie O'Connor for the 2021 Extraordinary Healer® Award for Oncology Nursing. 





A TRUSTED FRIEND

JACKIE SHANAHAN, RN, OCN

[MARYLAND ONCOLOGY HEMATOLOGY, ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND]

Written by **Christine Griffith**

I would like to nominate **Jackie Shanahan, RN, OCN**, for this award. Our family first met Jackie in February 2013 when my father-in-law, Earl Griffith, had tongue cancer. Jackie was working for Anne Arundel Medical Center. She became the best thing that had ever happened to Earl. Jackie showed true concern for him and family members helping him through that ordeal and had a wonderful personality. She always had a smile on her face. We could count on her anytime day or night to assist us without any hesitation.

Earl never liked going to doctors, and it was always difficult to get him to agree to go. It just wasn't in his nature to be concerned about things, but with Jackie, that all changed. Earl made a great connection with her in the very beginning, and he soon trusted her completely. Jackie was by our side through his treatments and years later.

There were times when Earl needed medical attention but refused it. If we contacted Jackie, she would talk to him and then he'd agree to whatever was needed at that moment. This happened in September 2013, when Earl had a widow-maker heart attack. He refused to let us call an ambulance until Jackie talked to him. We didn't know at the time that it was a heart attack, but we were all so grateful for Jackie's connection with Earl.

Jackie had to be a very special person as well as a great medical nurse to have won Earl over the way she did. He was always concerned about what she thought, and she wouldn't »



From left: JEFF GRIFFITH; JACKIE SHANAHAN, RN, OCN; and CHRISTINE GRIFFITH

PHOTOS BY JOANNA TILLMAN



sugarcoat any of the facts. She always laid it on the line to him and he knew she would. One week before passing in 2019, Earl ended up in another county hospital because Anne Arundel Medical Center was refusing ER patients. Jackie was in touch with him through that, and it gave him comfort to know he was well taken care of. Earl came home with hospice two days before passing, and Jackie was by his side during that time. She had been a true friend and comfort to him.

If any of our family ever needs a nurse navigator, we would want no one besides Jackie. She is a wonderful person and an excellent nurse. She truly does care about her patients and has a special way to get through to even the toughest of people. Our family believes Jackie is well deserving of this award. 🇺🇸





CHAPTER 3

Learning From Experience





SHILEY AGUILAR, M.S.N., APRN, FNP-C

PHOTOS BY KAYLIN BOOKER

AN UNBREAKABLE BOND

SHILEY AGUILAR, M.S.N., APRN, FNP-C

[TEXAS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, WEST CAMPUS, HOUSTON, TEXAS]

Written by **Ashley LaRue**

There are truly not enough words for me to describe the incredible impact **Shiley Aguilar, M.S.N., APRN, FNP-C**, has made not only on the life of our daughter, who is now a cancer survivor, but also on our entire family. Our daughter, Morgan LaRue, was diagnosed with osteosarcoma when she was 8 years old. Her treatment plan included lengthy inpatient stays at Texas Children's Hospital.

As we began our journey terrified and in uncharted territory, we looked to the nursing staff for reassurance, guidance and support. Very early on, Morgan was very vocal about her favorite nurse, Shiley. She looked forward to shift change because she knew when the night shift came in, she would get to see Shiley. Although her nights were busy and she had many patients to care for, Shiley always took the time to check on Morgan, physically and emotionally, talk with her and reassure her.

One particular night, Morgan required a shot in order to be discharged, and she was scared and very upset. Shiley came to the rescue! She sat, explained everything and offered to give Morgan the shot. Through her tears, Morgan said, "You just don't understand. No one does." Shiley stopped what she was doing, sat on the bed, took Morgan's hands and told her that she, too, had had childhood cancer and she did understand. From that day, Morgan and Shiley have had an unbreakable bond. »



From left: SHILEY AGUILAR, M.S.N.,
APRN, FNP-C, and ASHLEY LARUE

PHOTO BY KAYLIN BOOKER



LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

As Morgan concluded her treatment plan a year later, we were very excited to be going home, but Morgan told us she was sad that she would not get to see Shiley anymore. Just days before Morgan's final discharge, Shiley shared that she had finished school and taken a new job. Fast-forward a couple of weeks and we go to the clinic for a checkup. We go in to see our team, and we are told we have a new nurse practitioner on our team who will be taking care of Morgan. Much to our delight, it walks Shiley! As parents, we could not have been more relieved to know we would still have Shiley caring for our child and there for us to call and lean on.

Shiley has been with us, taken care of Morgan, and gone above and beyond her job requirements, through every milestone and event in Morgan's life. Morgan has finally been transferred to the long-term survivor clinic, and we chose a clinic three-and-a-half hours from our home so Shiley would be the one to care for Morgan as a long-term survivor. While growing up, Morgan often has been asked what type of job she wants to have. Without hesitation, she always has answered that she wants to be a nurse practitioner because she wants to help others the way Shiley helped her, and she wants to be just like Shiley. We can only pray that Morgan turns out to be the type of blessing to others that Shiley is for our family. 🍀

A FRIEND INDEED

LYNN COOK, B.S.N., RN, OCN

[MARYLAND ONCOLOGY HEMATOLOGY, COLUMBIA, MARYLAND]

Written by **Susan Weinstein**

As an eternal optimist, I keep a running list of the positive and extraordinary things that have happened in my life since receiving a diagnosis of triple-negative breast cancer. At the top of that list is the discovery of a caretaker who has become a great friend.

I first met **Lynn Cook, B.S.N., RN, OCN**, a little over five years ago when I began chemotherapy. I was frightened, sad and unsure of my future. I was especially concerned about the side effects I would experience and what quality of life I would have. Through pure randomness, I was made Lynn's patient. We saw each other several times a month for chemotherapy and injections. I could never have imagined that I would look forward to my appointments, not for the treatments, but to see and speak with Lynn. Her kindness and compassion are unmatched, and I feel completely comfortable in her presence. Lynn is clearly brilliant and a wonderful nurse. I have heard many doctors from the practice praising her work and telling me how she often picked up on things they missed or suggested care that was overlooked but necessary. As a result of Lynn's stellar reputation and her talent for comforting her »

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE



LYNN COOK, B.S.N., RN, OCN

PHOTOS BY MARIA LINZ O'BRIEN

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

patients, my quality of life is high and I feel entirely optimistic about my future. Although I am fortunate to have an amazing support system, I cannot imagine going through the treatment of this monstrous disease without Lynn by my side. We have great conversations, making each other laugh, while she tenderly and compassionately tends to my health. She will tell you that she loves her job, but as her patient, you would already know that.

Amazingly, because bad luck doesn't discriminate, Lynn went through her own cancer treatment last year. When she told me the news of her diagnosis, I went through a box of tissues. I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy, and certainly not my close friend. Through her treatments, we kept in touch, and after months away, Lynn was able to return to the job she loves and I regained a nurse and a friend who makes cancer much easier to take. Her own ordeal didn't make her a better nurse, because there was simply no room for improvement. She is lovely, and I am honored and very fortunate to have her in my life. In a word, Lynn is extraordinary. 📌







From left: SUE McCANN, M.S.N., RN, DNC, and
CAITLIN CHIADO, M.S.N., CRNP, FNP-C

PHOTOS BY JOE APPEL

AWE-INSPIRING DEVOTION

CAITLIN CHIADO, M.S.N., CRNP, FNP-C

[UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH MEDICAL CENTER, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA]

Written by **Sue McCann, M.S.N., RN, DNC**, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Caitlin Chiado, M.S.N., CRNP, FNP-C, is a relatively new nurse practitioner and is also relatively new to the subspecialty of dermatology oncology. She now manages a cohort of patients with an often-devastating illness known generally as cutaneous T-cell lymphoma. The majority of her patients have mycosis fungoides and Sezary syndrome. Although this can be a chronic illness for some patients, others have more limited life spans and devastating symptoms such as skin tumors, thick plaques, ulcerations, oozing, peeling and cracking, as well as fatigue and pain. It is disfiguring for some and almost always requires care for the body, mind and spirit. Sometimes Caitlin has been called upon to provide support during end-of-life care. I have worked as a nurse with these patients over the past 30 years and I am awed by Caitlin's initial and ongoing devotion to her patients. She has opened her heart to them with access to her direct phone lines, office and clinic time, and even after-hours time. She has gone above and beyond on more than one occasion, helping and teaching patients how to live their best life.

Recently, Caitlin took time out of a busy day to apply special dressings to the entire body of a patient enduring immeasurable suffering. We had spent time teaching the patient on multiple »

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

TEACHING MOMENT

She has opened her heart to them with access to her direct phone lines, office and clinic time, and even after-hours time. She has gone above and beyond on more than one occasion, helping and teaching patients how to live their best life.

occasions how to do the dressings at home, but he remained resistant. Wisely, Caitlin offered to apply the dressings for him at his most recent visit — an arduous task at best. The patient reluctantly agreed to the process and was amazed when the dressings were removed a few hours later at how much better he and his skin felt. Somewhat miraculously, he said he would now do the dressing at home with the help of his wife. This simple but extra effort made all the difference for this one patient.

Being a new nurse practitioner or even a nurse new to this challenging specialty doesn't hold Caitlin back from doing the absolute best she can do for any patient in her care. I believe this is exactly the right stuff, the foundation upon which Caitlin continues to build expertise and experience. ■

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE



ONCOLOGY NURSE AT HOME AND AT WORK

CANDACE CHURCHWELL, RN

[LEXINGTON MEDICAL CENTER EXTENDED CARE, LEXINGTON, SOUTH CAROLINA]

Written by **Dede Goehler, RN**, PreludeDx, Laguna Hills, California

Working in breast cancer diagnostics, we know intimately that the day-in, day-out work of oncology nurses is mentally, physically and, especially, emotionally exhausting. And all too often, it's thankless as well. So, when presented with the opportunity to recognize a special oncology nurse who has made our lives infinitely better, we are honored to introduce you to **Candace Churchwell, RN**. Candace is the epitome of everything nursing should be. She is intelligent and intuitive; gentle yet strong; compassionate, patient, and in constant and relentless pursuit of what's best for her patients. She is the kind of nurse who celebrates your wins fiercely and sincerely, belly laughs with you when you need a pick-me-up, and cries with you when you just need a good cry.

When giving birth to her daughter, Caitlin, Candace decided to become a nurse. She went into the hospital with the intention of studying business administration and left with a baby girl and a

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

newfound passion for health care. Mesmerized by the nurses and doctors who stood beside her as she labored, she dedicated her time and efforts to joining them in making the lives of those they treat healthier and happier. She spent years working in labor and delivery, OB-GYN settings and nursing homes. Candace still makes sure to spend time in the nursing home and lights up when talking about the fulfillment it brings her. She speaks often and passionately about the importance of sitting with geriatric patients and just listening. She listens to the stories they so badly wish to tell about how things used to be and allows them to reminisce, especially now that the pandemic has isolated them from other loved ones.

Candace began working in oncology last March and not a minute too soon. In April, the daughter whose birth inspired her to become a nurse was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma at just 17 years old. Candace has always been a fantastic nurse, but watching her navigate the unbelievable obstacles she's encountered in the last year with such grace and selfless love has been an awe-inspiring privilege. She juggled being a mom of two teenagers and a caretaker both professionally and personally with as much empathy as a person could possibly demonstrate.

Candace has used her family's experience on the other side of oncology nursing as fuel and a reminder of why she does what she does. And since witnessing her daughter's fight and eventual triumph over cancer in November, she does it even better. Candace continues to wake up each day and strive to be a better nurse, friend, colleague and mother than she was yesterday. She makes hospitals and offices a brighter place to be and fills even the dreariest oncology rooms with a little more sunshine. We are grateful for the opportunity to recognize her and all the various ways she embodies true, selfless oncology nursing. We are all better for knowing her and hope you have the opportunity to know her, too. 📌

TEACHING MOMENT

She makes hospitals and offices a brighter place to be and fills even the dreariest oncology rooms with a little more sunshine.

ALWAYS HELPING

MARYANN FRAGOLA, D.N.P., ANPC, ACHPN

[NEW YORK CANCER AND BLOOD SPECIALISTS, PORT JEFFERSON, NEW YORK]

Written by **Michael Fragola**

I had to submit this for her because she just doesn't ever stop helping her patients, her family and her friends. **MaryAnn Fragola, D.N.P., ANPC, ACHPN**, has worked endlessly to create a palliative care division to provide extra supportive care to her patient population. She has been dedicated to oncology for over 20 years and goes above and beyond for her patients, often calling them outside work to check on them and offer support. MaryAnn decided to do this after her father passed away from lung cancer, when she witnessed the patient aspect of care and how much support families need while going through this with a loved one and how they looked forward to their appointments with their physicians. Being both his daughter and his caretaker was so difficult for her.

Not long after MaryAnn lost her father, her mother was diagnosed with small cell lung cancer and MaryAnn faced this tough situation again. Although it was difficult, she often says it helped her in her practice to truly empathize with what her patients and their families are facing. She supports her patients' physical, emotional and spiritual sides, all while raising a family, teaching students and, recently, pursuing her doctoral education.

MaryAnn's passion for what she does is evident. She puts her heart and soul into caring for patients and looking into what more she can do to help them. MaryAnn says there »



From left: **MICHAEL FRAGOLA** and
MARYANN FRAGOLA, D.N.P., ANPC, ACHPN

PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH SOWA





LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

is always something you can do. Whether curative, supportive or palliative, you always continue to help your patient. She gets to know the patient beyond the diagnosis and creates a relationship. Her patients are more than a cancer diagnosis to her, and she makes them feel comfortable during a very difficult time in their lives.

MaryAnn has healed so many people besides her patients even within our family. She is never truly off and she never minds helping someone out; whether giving advice or listening, she is always there. Without her, we would have lost my father not once but twice. She is incredible to me and to so many others, and it's important that she get recognized.

With the start of her new program, MaryAnn has worked countless hours implementing the best approaches and training in her specialty, even becoming board certified. Her dedication is wholehearted and her focus is on improving the quality of life no matter what the patient is facing. She asks what's important to them for their journey and tries to make anything just a little bit better for them. ■



INFUSION UNIT NURSING STAFF

PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH SOWA

CANCER, COVID-19 AND COMPASSION

INFUSION UNIT NURSING STAFF

[ST. FRANCIS CANCER INSTITUTE, ROSLYN, NEW YORK]

Written by **Eileen Dwyer, RN, OCN**, St. Francis Cancer Institute, Roslyn, New York

My name is Eileen Dwyer, RN, OCN, and I am the nurse manager of an outpatient, 32-chair oncology infusion unit at The Cancer Institute at St. Francis Hospital. I manage a staff that includes 16 clinical nurses, 100% of whom are oncology certified — an amazing feat.

To put it mildly, I have to say “What a challenging year,” not only for our patients, but also for my nurses. Throughout this continuing COVID-19 pandemic, these nurses are tireless in their efforts to achieve excellence in delivering the best patient-centered care while maintaining their professional values of honesty, empathy, authenticity, respect and trust — just what our patients need. Working side by side with them in caring for our patients is invigorating.

In an effort to ease the fear and anxiety our patients were experiencing, these nurses put their patients’ and their family members’ needs first. When visitation was interrupted, these nurses collaborated with all the staff in our unit to create a beautiful garden with plants and flowers on the patio, where family members could sit and see their loved ones. »

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

TEACHING MOMENT

These nurses collaborated with all the staff in our unit to create a beautiful garden with plants and flowers on the patio, where family members could sit and see their loved ones.

The smiles on our patients' and families' faces were priceless. Family connections during this pandemic were now maintained through a glass divide. The thoughtful innovation of my staff was truly appreciated by me and, mostly, by our patients. My staff truly touched the lives of our oncology patients.

Another staff initiative was involving patients and staff in watercolor art therapy. Each piece of art had a personalized message written by the staff and patients. From there, a mosaic was created and framed in the unit. It has become a symbol of the bond of our nursing staff and patients. This is truly a reflection of our personal journey through a time of uncertainty, and our patients appreciate it.

These nurses make our infusion center a special place to work. They stood up to the challenges the pandemic presented and exceeded expectations. They were also crucial in achieving St. Francis Hospital's fourth Magnet designation.

The commitment, dedication and passion for oncology nursing shine through every day. I appreciate their never-ending efforts, and I know my patients do as well. The trusting relationships between the nurses and patients make a difference in their lives. Especially now, these nurses are committed to providing the care and compassion to help our patients through one of the most difficult journeys of their life.

My nursing staff is the heart of oncology nursing. I am privileged to work with them every day. ■

LUESTHER T. MERTZ
INFUSION CENTER



WHAT IT MEANS TO CARE WITH LOVE

JOANN NUGENT, B.S.N., RN

[JOHNS HOPKINS KELLY GYNECOLOGIC ONCOLOGY SERVICE, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND]

Written by **Stephanie Wethington, M.D.**, Johns Hopkins Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland

Experience comes with time — in the case of **Joann Nugent, B.S.N., RN**, more than 30 years as a nurse dedicated to the care of women with gynecologic cancers. But caring with love is a calling and for patients, a gift.

Joann has served women with gynecologic cancers in many capacities, from a bedside nurse to nurse manager and now as an experienced gynecologic cancer chemotherapy nurse and nurse navigator. Her devotion to patients comes through in the early hour she arrives and the late hour she leaves, but, more importantly, it is something the patients feel. If Joann is not at the appointment, they ask where she is and if she will see them before they leave. When we have challenging conversations, she remains in the room after I leave, sometimes to just sit, sometimes to answer more questions and sometimes to comfort with conversation about the usual, able to intuit what the patient needs. Without hesitation, she walks the patients to the front to make appointments, to the car of their waiting family or when they need to be admitted

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

to the floor of the inpatient unit. She returns phone calls and messages and insists that nothing go undone for the next day. On her days off, Joann volunteers for many groups dedicated to educating women about their health and spreading awareness of gynecologic cancers. She is the first to volunteer to staff survivorship conferences, retreats for patients and their partners, health fairs, support groups for caregivers — anything that facilitates the full spectrum of care and the betterment of the community. She also, despite her 30 years of experience, continues to seek learning and growth through tumor boards, asking probing questions when we are discussing treatment plans, including those from patients.

When I read about this award, I probably rushed to write this and should have pondered for longer the perfect thing to say to ensure she wins. But since she is always the first to jump up to help and cares with more heart than anyone I have worked with, I did not want to wait. I wanted to match her eagerness to do for others with my eagerness to nominate her. There are not words adequate (enough) to thank her. 🇺🇸

TEACHING MOMENT

Her devotion to patients comes through in the early hour she arrives and the late hour she leaves, but, more importantly, it is something the patients feel. If Joann is not at the appointment, they ask where she is and if she will see them before they leave.



List of All 2021 Nominees





List of All the 2021 Nominees

Rosaura R. Acosta

Pharr, Texas

**Shiley Aguilar, M.S.N., APRN,
FNP-C**

Houston, Texas

Jessica Aguilera, RN

Casa Grande, Arizona

Wayne Allen

Silver Spring, Maryland

Lily Apfel, LVN

Ukiah, California

Emily Becker, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Columbia, Maryland

Brenda Biggins, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Boston, Massachusetts

Stephanie Bisignano, RN, RN-BC

Lakewood, New Jersey

**Christine Brooks, D.N.P., M.S.N,
B.S.N., RN, OCN**

Queens, New York

Maiken Burden, M.S.N., RN, OCN

Tacoma, Washington

Sandra Burns, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Madison, Wisconsin

Amy Brant, B.S.N., RN, BMTCN

Omaha, Nebraska

Hayden Chae, B.S.N., RN, OCN, ME

Washington, D.C.

**Kathryn Chambers, M.S.N.,
AOCNP**

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

**Caitlin Chiado, M.S.N., CRNP,
FNP-C**

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Sarah Chuposko, RN

Dallas, Texas

Candace Churchwell, RN

Lexington, South Carolina

**Cathy Coleman, D.N.P., M.S.N.,
RN, CNL, CPHQ**

San Francisco, California

Lynn Cook, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Columbia, Maryland

Judy Davis

Annapolis, Maryland

**Geary Lynn Delgado, M.S.N.,
RN, CPN**

San Antonio, Texas

**Yael Derman, M.S.N., RN,
CPNP-AC CPHON**

Chicago, Illinois

Maggie DeRosa, M.S.N., B.S.N., FNP-BC

Brandywine, Maryland

Sydney Desrosiers, RN

Boston, Massachusetts

Ruth Donelson Miller, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Daphne, Alabama

Joanne Downs, RN

Casa Grande, Arizona

Jessica Ellison, M.S.N., RN, BA

Chicago, Illinois

Entire Clinical Team

Los Angeles, California

MaryAnn Fragola, D.N.P., ANPc, ACHPN

Port Jefferson, New York

**Victoria Frazier-Warmack, D.N.P., M.S.N.,
RN, OCN**

Chicago, Illinois

Katherine Gacek, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Chicago, Illinois

Patty Garcia, B.S.N., RN

Silver Spring, Maryland

Jessica Garmon, D.N.P., RN, ONC

Charlotte, North Carolina

Donna Rebecca Garner, RN

Daphne, Alabama

Holly Gentry, RN

Brandywine, Clinton and Lanham, Maryland

Sharolyn Gonzalez, B.S.N., RN, OCN, BCN

Lansing, Michigan

Beth Henderson, M.S.N., NP, AOCNP

Silver Spring, Maryland





List of All the 2021 Nominees

Mary Ellen Husted, OCN
Washington, D.C.

**Infusion Unit Nursing Staff at The
Cancer Institute at St. Francis
Hospital**
Roslyn, New York

Katie Johnson, B.S.N., RN
Baltimore, Maryland

**Kari Lahmon, B.S.N., RN, CPN,
CAPA, CPAN**
Memphis, Tennessee

**Bethany Larkin, M.S.H.A., RN-BC,
OCN, CT**
New Haven, Connecticut

Maria Lim, B.S.N., RN, OCN, BMTCN
North Chicago, Illinois

Mary Lovely, Ph.D., RN, CNRN
Newton, Massachusetts

Kathleen Lutz, M.S.N., RN, OGNP
New York, New York

Ashley Marston, M.S.N., B.S., RN
Memphis, Tennessee

**Jeannette Mazzola, M.S.N., APRN-
CNP, AOCNP, AGPCNP-BC**
Beachwood, Ohio

Ann McCue, M.S.N., RN, OCN
Denver, Colorado

**Jonlyn McGettigan, M.S.N.,
RN, NP-C**
Tucson, Arizona

Glee McGinley, RN
Frederick, Maryland

Hanh Miller, RN
Casa Grande, Arizona

**Megan Moquin, B.S.N., RN,
OCN**
Appleton, Wisconsin

Linda Moors, PA-C
Tucson, Arizona

**Mary Leslie Morgan, B.S.N.,
RN, OCN**
Annapolis, Maryland

Kristy Myers, RN
Mobile, Alabama

**Judith Newcomb, B.S.N.,
RN, OCN**
Annapolis, Maryland

Amy Nibaur, B.S.N., RN, CMSRN
Iowa City, Iowa

Joann Nugent, B.S.N., RN

Baltimore, Maryland

Regina O’Conner, B.S.N., RN

West Harrison, New York

Jamie O’Connor, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Washington, D.C.

Elly Palmer, M.S.N., RN, CNL, OCN

Washington, D.C.

Sheryl Passino, RN, OCN

Wellington, Florida

Leslie A. Pillar, B.S.N., RN

Fort Myers, Florida

Alice Pons, B.S.N., B.S., RN

Baltimore, Maryland

Patricia Schwickerath, ARNP

Des Moines, Iowa

Megha Shah, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Geneva, Illinois

Jackie Shanahan, RN, OCN

Annapolis, Maryland

Angela Snyder, D.NP, PNP-BC, CHPPN

Memphis, Tennessee

Christa Spinelli, B.S.N., RN

Middletown, New Jersey

Joyce Spitz, RN

Columbia, Maryland

Kristina Trafelet, NP

Casa Grande, Arizona

Trish Traylor, RN, OCN

Bethesda, Maryland

**Allison Vallance, M.A., B.S.N.,
RN, CBCN**

New Haven, Connecticut

Marrissa Victor, B.S.N., RN

Overland Park, Kansas

Timra Walsh, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Lake Success, New York

Brenda Wilbanks, RN, OCN

Atlanta, Georgia

Anne Wiltshire, B.S.N., RN, OCN

Annapolis, Maryland

Karina Wischhusen, RN

Casa Grande, Arizona

Ron Zapata, RN

Washington, D.C.





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Oncology  
NURSINGNEWS®



Extraordinary Healers®: CURE® Readers Honor Oncology Nurses Volume 15 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.

“She has tirelessly worked throughout the years to care for, educate and support women and their families through the medical maze of cancer. I saw her as a modern-day Wonder Woman — never faltering, consistent on her journey to help those affected by their diagnoses, and helping them in their recovery and living life afterward.”

— ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY HEALER FROM LANSING, MICHIGAN

“She was more than just a nurse practitioner; she became family. There is nothing that she does that is not in my best interest. Even through those moments that felt like they were going to break me, (this nurse) had that incredible strength to calm me down with determination and encourage me to persevere, which makes all the difference in the world.”

— ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY HEALER FROM NEW YORK, NEW YORK

“Although I am fortunate to have an amazing support system, I cannot imagine going through the treatment of this monstrous disease without (my nurse) by my side. We have great conversations, making each other laugh, while she tenderly and compassionately tends to my health. She will tell you that she loves her job, but as her patient, you would already know that.”

— ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY HEALER FROM COLUMBIA, MARYLAND