Three young children in Kansas City are enjoying the holidays just a bit more, thanks to nurses and other staff on Units 41, 42 and 45 at The University of Kansas Hospital.

The children’s single mother, Elena, lost her battle with leukemia several days before Thanksgiving. “Elena was determined to beat the cancer for her children,” said Unit 42’s Marla Stubbs, RN. “When she realized she wasn’t going to make it, she became very worried, especially about their having a good Christmas.”

So Stubbs and dozens of others on the hospital’s three Hematology/Oncology units quickly rallied to help the children, who are living with their mom’s niece. Staff donated toys, books, clothes, coats, shoes and a grocery store certificate for a holiday meal. They’ve also delivered a Christmas tree and stockings handmade by a nurse; more presents are on their way next week.

The outpouring of support reflects the generosity of many employees and departments at the region’s premier academic medical center: They strive to make the holidays especially warm for those in need in our community.

Unit 66, for instance, worked with the Phoenix Family organization to adopt two senior residents who have no family or support system. Some groups cook meals for families at the Hope Lodge and Ronald McDonald House. Others donate games and toys to the hospital’s Pediatrics unit, knowing the hospital can be especially stressful this time of year for children.

At Project Eagle, a division of Pediatrics within the University of Kansas School of Medicine, employees are collecting new coats, hats, gloves and scarves from co-workers. The items will go to youngsters at Project Eagle/Educare of Kansas City, as well as many of their siblings.

“With Project Bundle Up, we want to make the winter cozy and warm for children in need,” said Allison Lundquist, Project Eagle’s special projects coordinator, “and we’re helping staff experience the joy of giving.”
Events

► Labor and Delivery tours – Maternity tours are part of The University of Kansas Hospital's Prepared Childbirth classes. If you would like to visit the Labor and Delivery areas but are not signed up for the Prepared Childbirth class, you can take a tour Dec. 21, Dec. 28, Jan. 16 or Jan. 23. All tours begin in the Labor and Delivery waiting room. Call 913-588-1227 for details and to register.

► Body and mind balance – Chronic illness affects mind and body. Whether in physical pain or emotional distress, learn to tolerate symptoms and which coping skills work best for you to live a more effective life. The class is 10-11:30 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 13, at Turning Point: The Center for Hope and Healing in Leawood. Call 913-574-0900 to register.

► ‘Inside Out’ for adults – The smash summer movie “Inside Out” teaches children and adults to become aware of and accept their feelings. Learn to better identify your feelings and work on labeling the emotions behind anger, frustration and resentment. Naming them can help us welcome the emotions living inside us. The class is 2-3:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 14, at Turning Point: The Center for Hope and Healing in Leawood. Call 913-574-0900 to register.

► Finding forgiveness – Meditation offers a time to be still and to open ourselves to the deeper, wiser, more compassionate parts of who we are. Through meditation, writing and discussion, we call on our deepest selves to release old emotional hurts — feelings of unforgiveness toward others or ourselves. The session is 2:30-4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 19, at Turning Point: The Center for Hope and Healing in Leawood. Call 913-574-0900 to register.

More events are at kumed.com/event-detail.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Making time for ‘the conversation’

A health crisis can happen at any time, at any age. When the unthinkable strikes — serious illness or devastating accident — families who haven’t discussed medical treatment preferences are often left agonizing: What does their loved one want?

It’s why The University of Kansas Hospital is participating in a national initiative known as The Conversation Project (theconversationproject.org). Its purpose: Help patients and families think about what matters most to them when faced with a medical crisis or serious illness, and then ensure a patient’s treatment plan reflects those preferences.

It all starts with a conversation. What if you cannot speak? What are your medical wishes? According to The Conversation Project National Survey, 90 percent of people say talking with their loved ones about end-of-life care is important, but only 27 percent have actually done so.

Karin Porter-Williamson, MD, the hospital’s Palliative Medicine director, is spearheading a team of physicians, nurses and other caregivers who are promoting such conversations among patients and families. “It’s really important for them to spend time on good advance-care planning so they understand each other’s thoughts, values and wishes,” she said.

Even if they are relatively healthy, patients are advised to complete a power of attorney for healthcare or create an advance directive. The legal documents describe who will speak for them if they are unable, and they allow patients to spell out their medical wishes.

The hospital also is participating in the Transportable Physician Orders for Patient Preferences initiative. It includes a form for caregivers to translate the patient’s goals and preferences into physician’s orders, which move with the patient across the continuum of care.

As Porter-Williamson points out, an important motivation behind an advance directive isn’t because you have an illness — it’s because you have a family. “When we realize how important this is in our own lives,” she said, “it helps us understand how important this is for our patients and families.”

EXPOSURE

Simulation on display

During an open house last week, staff at the new Zamierowski Institute for Experiential Learning highlighted some of the center’s high-tech medical simulation features. Located on the main campus, the $2 million facility is a state-of-the-art learning environment for physicians, staff and students from The University of Kansas Hospital and University of Kansas Medical Center. Educational Specialist Michael Blomquist, RN, demonstrated an anaphylactic shock simulation.
In the News
A recap of recent articles, TV segments and other media coverage of the region’s leading academic medical center

Gene therapy may restore hearing – The Kansas City Star, Dec. 2. A clinical trial at The University of Kansas Hospital is trying to restore hearing. Six trial patients have received an injection of the Atoh1 gene, which causes hair cells to generate in the womb of mammals. “We artificially direct it to be on,” said Otolaryngology’s Hinrich Staecker, MD, PhD. “The idea is to kick-start the process that turns a supporting cell into a hair cell and then stop.” Researchers believe the trial will be useful in determining whether gene therapy is safe when applied to the inner ear.

Progress in halting Alzheimer’s – Salina Post, Dec. 1. Two University of Kansas Medical Center researchers are making strides toward detecting Alzheimer’s disease early and halting its progression. “We think that day is coming,” said Jeffrey Burns, MD, co-director of the Alzheimer’s Disease Center. Alzheimer’s researchers, he said, now have a diagnostic method in which a dye injected into the body can highlight the buildup in the brain of a protein linked to Alzheimer’s before any outward symptoms appear.

ACA increases early cancer detection – USA Today, Nov. 24. The Affordable Care Act may have helped more women get early treatment for cervical cancer, according to a preliminary study led by the American Cancer Society. The study reveals women whose cervical cancers were treated early increased from 71 percent to 79 percent. “Cervical cancer is a young woman’s disease,” said Gynecology’s Kevin Ault, MD, at The University of Kansas Hospital. “Finding this cancer earlier will give women more choices of treatment.”

Nasty parasite reported in area – KCTV 5 News, Nov. 24. A pest known as the ‘kissing bug’ has been reported in Kansas and Missouri. About the size of a penny, the bug feeds on the blood of mammals, birds and reptiles. If infected with the parasite, a person can contract Chagas disease. The risk, however, is minimal. “I think somebody is more likely to get trampled on Black Friday than to catch Chagas disease,” said Lee Norman, MD, chief medical officer at The University of Kansas Hospital.

Finally able to drive – at 50
Roxane Duncan suffered seizures and epilepsy since she was 15, a condition that kept her from getting her driver’s license. But a neurosurgery procedure a year ago at The University of Kansas Hospital halted the seizures. Now 50, Duncan (here with her fiancé, Tim Romine) received the green light last month from a physician at the hospital’s Comprehensive Epilepsy Center to get her license. To watch the video, go to medicalnewsnetwork.org and search ‘epilepsy.’

Neuro, spine program in top 100 in U.S.
Becker’s Hospital Review again has named The University of Kansas Hospital one of the nation’s top 100 hospitals offering “great neurosurgery and spine programs.” The hospital is the only one in the Kansas City area named by Becker’s. Other Kansas and Missouri hospitals on the list are Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, Cox Medical Center South in Springfield, St. Mary’s Hospital in Jefferson City and Via Christi Hospital in Wichita. U.S. News ranked our hospital No. 19 in the nation this year for neurology and neurosurgery.

Magazine profiles patients, innovations
The winter issue of Good Medicine magazine is available online at kumed.com. Among the stories in this issue:
• The cover highlights a novel procedure involving deep-brain stimulation, which provided Jack McDonald relief from Parkinson’s disease. He now stars in one of our hospital’s new television commercials.
• Anne Holzbeierlein credits a clinical trial for her milestone remission from an aggressive form of leukemia.
• A gift from Kay Martin, in honor of her late husband, Tom, supports our hospital’s neuroscience expansion at the Cambridge North Tower.
• Cancer survivor Diane Punch, who has severe heart damage, enjoys a normal life – with a pacemaker and a smile. She also is a remarkable example of the hospital’s emerging cardio-oncology program.

Good Medicine is produced three times a year for community members, donors and friends of our hospital. The magazine also includes information about innovative treatments, fundraising events, giving opportunities and health and wellness tips.

Chief medical officer now state surgeon
Lee Norman, MD, The University of Kansas Hospital’s senior vice president and chief medical officer, has been named state surgeon of Kansas. Norman, an officer in the Kansas Army National Guard, will remain in his current hospital position.

As state surgeon, he will serve as senior medical advisor to the adjutant general, Major General Lee Tafanelli, and have responsibility for troop readiness, medical policy and oversight of the medical assets related to the civil support team, which is the military unit that provides on-site chemical and biological surveillance at major sporting events and public gatherings.

Additionally, he will serve as liaison between local, regional and statewide emergency management organizations and state and federal health agencies.
Our People

Nurse practitioner excellence – Nurse practitioners represent an increasingly vital role in the health-care industry, and The University of Kansas Hospital officially has the best NP in the state.

Liza Rodriguez, APRN, has won the Nurse Practitioner Award for Excellence in clinical practice for Kansas.

The recognition, from the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, is given annually to “a dedicated nurse practitioner in each state who demonstrates excellence in their area of practice.”

Rodriguez leads 13 nurse practitioners in the hospital’s Blood and Marrow Transplant program. She is one of about 300 NPs at the hospital and nearly 5,000 in Kansas.

The recognition reflects her dedication and hard work, as well as the hospital’s approach to patient-centered care.

“Liza is a phenomenal asset to our BMT team,” said Joseph McGuirk, DO, BMT medical director. “The dedication Liza and all our NPs have for our patients is one of the many reasons our BMT nurse practitioners are among the best in the nation.”

Restoring hope in young children – As co-founder and manager of Missys’ Boutique at The University of Kansas Cancer Center, Judy Newell often sees children grieving from losing someone they love.

Now she has written a book, “Twinkle, Twinkle Mommy Star,” which helps younger elementary-age children through the grieving process. It was inspired by Newell’s firsthand experience helping her grandson cope with the loss of his mother (and Judy’s daughter-in-law), Missy.

“My grandson had so many questions, and I realized other children must have similar ones,” she said. “I wanted to help. But grief is hard to revisit. It took me 10 years to write the book.”

Yet it’s the achievement she is most proud of, because it comes from the heart.

“The book starts out with sadness, because it’s honest,” she said. “Then it goes through the strength and support you need to recover, and it ends with a lot of hope.”

Missys’ Boutique, which helps women overcome the physical and emotional obstacles of breast cancer recovery by providing items like prosthetics and wigs, is located at the cancer center’s Richard and Annette Bloch Cancer Care Pavilion, at the Westwood Campus.

“Twinkle, Twinkle Mommy Star” is available at the boutique, Barnes & Noble and Amazon. Proceeds from its sales at the boutique will go to The University of Kansas Hospital’s Patients in Need Fund. Newell’s grandson and his brother will direct those from Amazon and Barnes & Noble to the charity of their choice.

Respiratory therapist honored – Kealy Branson, RRT, is the inaugural recipient of the PHIL Award, which recognizes a respiratory therapist each year at The University of Kansas Hospital.

She was nominated by the family of a little girl with cystic fibrosis who spent two weeks at the hospital with a bacterial infection.

By personalizing her approach to the patient’s respiratory care, Branson helped put the child at ease from numerous tests and big equipment. The therapist also built trust with the girl and her mother, who were three hours away from home.

“It is an honor to be the winner of the hospital’s first PHIL award. There are so many fantastic respiratory therapists here who are so deserving of this award,” Branson said. “I truly love working with our patients and helping make their stay more relaxing.”

About 135 respiratory therapists at the hospital provide breathing treatments for patients, ranging from premature infants with undeveloped lungs to elderly patients who have diseased lungs. They also provide emergency care to patients suffering from heart attacks, drowning or shock.

Why I Support Cambridge North Tower

Cambridge North Tower – now under construction – will allow us, right here in the Midwest, to use new technology to treat inoperable brain tumors, saving lives and extending lives.

Howard Willyard
Clinical nurse coordinator
Support Cambridge North Tower at giving.kumed.com

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