Presby Preserves the **PATIENT EXPERIENCE**

As West Philadelphia wrangles with the uncertainty of COVID-19, there is one thing that community members can rely on — the excellent, patient-centered care provided by Penn Presbyterian Medical Center. Even as policies and protocols have changed to maximize safety, Presby’s staff have remained dedicated to ensuring the best patient experience possible.

“Our team has truly shined,” said Suzanne Smith, MED, CHES, director of Patient Experience. “I am so grateful for their compassion, engagement, and willingness to think outside of the box and go above and beyond in order to serve our patients and their families.”

**Excellence Starts at the Entrance**

A hospital visit can be overwhelming enough without adding a pandemic into the mix. That’s why PPMC’s “Red Coat” ambassadors have been working tirelessly to ensure that patients and visitors still feel welcome and safe as soon as they arrive on campus.

In addition to serving as a greeter, wayfinder, and friendly face, ambassador Shelice Davis has been scanning temperatures and explaining masking and visitation policies at Penn Medicine University City. People sometimes struggle to understand the importance of these rules, but by being sensitive to their needs and emphasizing alternate ways to stay connected, Davis can relieve their stress and confusion.

“‘I’m here to help people feel comfortable,’ she said, recalling a time when she sat with a family member and entertained them with stories until they felt at ease. ‘I come in hoping to provide a smile. People can’t really see that right now under my mask, but I can still help them feel welcome and start their Penn Medicine Experience off right.’”

While there are new challenges every day, Davis notes that the pandemic has reinforced for her the importance of patience and ensuring people feel listened to. “I keep a bright, upbeat attitude and be present myself as a go-to person who can answer questions,” she said. “Patients and families are our first priority no matter what. It’s my job to assure them of that as soon as they walk in.”

**Navigating Change Without Compromising Care**

The same week that PPMC began ramping up coronavirus preparation efforts, Evan Loundas started as Volunteer Services coordinator. His job had already changed by his first day; while volunteer visits were paused, he started managing temperature scanning efforts and distributing donated food.

But Loundas didn’t want patients to go without an extra level of support. Showing the enthusiasm of an entire team of volunteers, Loundas supplied iPads so patients and families could connect virtually; shared books, puzzles, crosswords, and coloring supplies from the Comfort Cart to help patients pass the time; and even paid for a patient’s Lyft ride home. “I wanted to offer a human connection and help them feel comfortable, not isolated,” he said. “My main goal is to listen and to do whatever I can to relieve stress in an already challenging time.”

Over the coming weeks, Loundas is excited to gradually onboard volunteers, get them up to speed with new safety precautions, and eventually roll out initiatives like the Presby Pooch program. Volunteers will also be helpful in filling any gaps left by staff who were redeployed during the early days of the pandemic and have now resumed their normal responsibilities.

While it was a bit of a whirlwind settling into his new role, Loundas noted, “Looking ahead, I think I’ll be able to do my job better because I’ve been able to build strong relationships across the hospital. We’re all in this together.”

**The Evolving Meaning of “Presence”**

The Pastoral Care team is committed to letting patients and families in crisis lead the way and responding to their spiritual needs with personalized care. While the pandemic has complicated this, the team has done their best to meet people where they are, reaffirm their humanity, and assure them they are not alone.

When reflecting on the last several months, two experiences come to mind for chaplain and Pastoral Care manager John Eisman.

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The Goldfinch very fulfilling.

daily deadline, but so much was changing, and I wanted to out the e-newsletter every day. It has been intense having a pandemic spread, I started working full time and sending the “PPMC Need to Know” email biweekly. When the For over three years, I worked part time and sent out good — and my husband for comic relief.

What's the best advice you've ever received? "Feedback is a gift. Receive it gracefully, and give it back in return.”

What guides your work each day? We want to help people and create an environment where everyone feels heard and included. Over the past few months, I’ve had to start with a clean slate each day because information is so fluid. It’s challenging, but I love being able to help someone with a dilemma that seemed unsolvable.

What three items would you need while stranded on an island? Caramel M&M’s, a flip flop — because as Ginger from Gilligan’s Island taught us, a lady always has to look good — and my husband for comic relief.

Why do you enjoy working with this team? My absolute favorite part is when I see someone leave our office and know that we were able to fully assist them. I think our team does a fantastic job effectively communicating changing policies, supporting staff, and offering a listening ear. Feel free to stop in with questions or just to say hi!

What is your dream vacation destination? On my post-COVID horizon, I see St. Maarten, Anguilla, and St. Barts. White sand islands with warm weather year-round, surrounded by luminous, turquoise water and filled with endless trails and palm and coconut trees.

How did COVID-19 change your role? For over three years, I worked part time and sent out the “PPMC Need to Know” email biweekly. When the pandemic spread, I started working full time and sending out the e-newsletter every day. It has been intense having a daily deadline, but so much was changing, and I wanted to help keep staff informed during this challenging time. Being able to support our front-line health care workers has been very fulfilling.


The first was a call with a woman whose husband was dying from COVID-19. Because she also tested positive, her family could not support her in person through this upheaval, but Ehanan listened, prayed with her, and set a plan to follow up. The second was a two-part interaction with another COVID patient. Ehanan organized a video call between himself, the isolated patient, and her family, and when the patient made a full recovery, he safely visited her in person, much to her delight.

In these cases, and in many more, the Pastoral Care team surmounted hurdles by showing compassion even when donning PPE and standing beside patients so they weren’t separated. The Social Work/Care Management team kindly coordinated their transfer at the same time — M to Penn Medicine Hospice, and J to acute rehab — and I asked if it would be possible for them to share a room again. Though Donna was doubtful given the COVID-19 isolation policies, I asked if we could advocate for M and I given this unique situation.

Around 45 minutes before the couple’s pick-up time, Donna called and said, “Michelle, you asked for a miracle...” I was approved to visit M for an hour every day. When I shared the news, J was overcome. J kissed M sweetly and thanked us for helping them make the most of the time they had left together.

I am so grateful for the collaborative efforts of every team member. Their professionalism, excellence in fostering the Penn Medicine Experience, and compassionate care for M and J should not go unnoticed.


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