Reimaging Prenatal Education

Just as departments across the hospital effectively turned to telemedicine to stay connected with patients, Ferrarello successfully leveraged technology in the patient education sphere, transitioning several classes for new parents and grandparents online. The reception to these classes has been incredibly positive — with some programs like the baby care class gaining more registrants than ever — and she plans to continue offering virtual and small-group, on-campus options through the pandemic and beyond to provide parents with convenient options that fit their comfort levels.

Also massively successful were two one-hour “Pregnant in a Pandemic” webinars that Ferrarello developed to address the kinds of compassion our teams have brought to this challenge. “We’ve made some adjustments, but our main focus is still our patients and making sure they have a positive experience.”

Some of these changes include the implementation of a single room strategy, a universal masking policy, and coordinated COVID-19 testing prior to scheduled inductions and C-sections. One support person can stay with the patient, and for patients who planned to have a doula with them, FaceTime has been utilized to accommodate their needs. Though their experiences may not have exactly lined up with the birth plans they created ahead of time, patients have continued sending thank you cards in droves, including an extremely nervous new mom with COVID-19 testing prior to scheduled inductions and C-sections.

This year has certainly been a unique one for expectant parents. As the coronavirus swept across the world, it took with it baby showers, casual walks through the onesie aisles at Target, coffee dates with pregnant friends, grandparents eagerly pacing the waiting room, and even mask-free deliveries. For many parents, the joy of welcoming a new addition has been colored by stress about what childbirth looks like in the COVID-19 era and anxieties about whether it’s safe at all.

But despite all of the unexpected changes presented by the pandemic, the extraordinary care provided by the Women’s Division teams at Pennsylvania Hospital has remained the same — even when the hospital hit a new record, delivering more than 500 babies in July! “We’re still providing patients with the tailored, compassionate, skillful care they need,” said Debi Ferrarello, MSN, RN, IBCLC, NE-BC, director of Parent Education. “Once they come in, it’s really not about COVID-19. It’s about having a baby.”

Prioritizing Compassionate Care

For Jamillah Washington, MSN, RN, nurse manager of the Delivery Room, the division’s approach has been straightforward: “We’ve made some adjustments, but our main focus is still our patients and making sure they have a positive experience.”

Balancing Family and Safety

The PAH team is dedicated to keeping parents and newborns together from birth to discharge unless observation is needed for medical reasons, but for babies who require some extra support, their next stop is the Intensive Care Nursery (ICN). Whether they need a few days to continue growing or a few months of advanced neonatal care, the experience can be disorienting for families. Though the ICN team’s focus in the postpartum care, they masterfully meet the needs of both babies and their anxious parents. The visitation policy has expanded since the initial surge to allow two family members to visit one at a time, skin-to-skin bonding (while masked) is encouraged, and parents can still deliver breastmilk with ease.

“Each year we solicit lots of feedback so we can ensure we’re balancing the importance of family presence with the safety of our patients,” said Elizabeth Quigley, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, nurse manager of the ICN. “We understand that the baseline stress of having a baby is compounded by having a baby in the ICN, and that’s compounded by COVID-19. We’ve been using virtual platforms like FaceTime to connect families and are doing whatever we can to create some normalcy in an abnormal time.”
Kudos

ACC NURSE CELEBRATED FOR CARING CONNECTIONS

For 14 years, Laetitia Simeral, CRNP, a nurse practitioner for the Sarcoma Program at the Abramson Cancer Center at PAH, has been an expert guide, a compassionate cheerleader, and a listening ear for patients with sarcoma, a rare cancer that develops in bones and soft tissue. Her mission is to “help people navigate that really dark place” that can come from a cancer diagnosis and “shed some light” by linking them with resources and taking the time to build meaningful relationships throughout their journey.

For a patient named David, that connection continued even after he passed away. As David’s disease progressed, and he chose to stop treatment, Simeral was by his side swapping travel stories and ensuring his quality of life was the best it could be. This spring, David’s partner expressed their gratitude for the special relationship the three of them cultivated by nominating Simeral for Independence Blue Cross’s Celebrate Caring campaign. The campaign, which honors extraordinary nurses in the region who have touched peers and patients alike, received more than 1,100 nominations this year, and she was named an honoree — a surprise that left her deeply emotional.

“It’s one thing to hope that you’re having a positive impact, but it’s another thing for a patient’s family to actually say it,” Simeral said. “No one can navigate cancer alone, and being able to get to know and support these patients and families is such an incredible privilege. I do this work every day, and it can be tough, but this nomination helped me take a step back and see that our team really is making a difference.”

BRIDGING GAPS AND BUILDING HEALTH LITERACY

Rates of breast reconstruction among patients who have undergone mastectomies continue to rise, but women of color, and particularly Black women, are less likely to pursue reconstruction, despite the demonstrated quality of life benefits. Diatomide Familusi, MD, MS, a fifth-year Plastic Surgery resident, recently published research in Supportive Care in Cancer exploring how clinicians can address these disparities through community engagement and patient education.

From 2017 to 2019, the Plastic Surgery division and the Abramson Cancer Center teamed up with local churches to host annual symposiums featuring lectures on breast health, cancer, and reconstruction, Q&As, patient testimonials, and exhibitor fairs. Due to mistrust stemming from historical medical experimentation and discrimination, many women of color “need to be approached in a nuanced, community-based, and culturally competent way,” Familusi said.

It worked. Post-symposium surveys showed 92 percent of respondents found the event useful, and many previous attendees returned the following years with family members and friends, indicating their investment in sharing this information with their communities. Familusi was set to present this excellent research at this year’s Society of Black Academic Surgeons (SBAS) meeting, but it was canceled due to COVID-19. Still, the SBAS committee noted that her abstract was among their top 5 submissions.

“We’ve been working on this for a long time, so I’m really grateful to receive this recognition,” she said. “But the real happiness and fulfillment came from hearing patients say they felt like they really got something out of these symposiums. The goal isn’t necessarily to get more patients to go to these events, but rather that everyone feels they’re being helped.”

After a 20-year career at Pennsylvania Hospital, John A. Brennan, Jr., RN, MSN, a transformative and inspirational leader, passed away on July 11. Though the loss was immense, he left a legacy of kindness and integrity and made an indelible mark on the colleagues he mentored and the patients he cared for over the years. A memorial service celebrating Brennan’s life was held last month, during which his peers shared stories of his impact, wry wisdom, generosity, and “stalwart leadership.”

Read more in What’s New online.

Commemding Pennsy’s “MAGNET CRUSADERS”

Last month, PAH took the next step towards Magnet Recognition Program® redesignation by hosting a three-day site visit for the program’s appraisers. Though the decision to go virtual due to the pandemic was last-minute, the appraisers noted that the hospital’s “Magnet Crusaders” truly set the standard for virtual visits and lauded the team’s expert preparation, seamless collaboration, and familial camaraderie.

During the virtual visit, 478 staff attended 45 meetings highlighting the work of teams like the Cultural and Community Awareness Council, Interprofessional COVID Response Team, and Professional Excellence Council; hosted 29 interactive unit tours; and shared innovative research and evidence-based quality improvement initiatives, several of which the Magnet team said were unlike any projects they’d seen elsewhere in the country.

“Our appraisers said that they really felt like they were here with us, and we heard time and time again that they wished they could be part of our team,” said Florrie Vaneck, MSN, RN, NE-BC, director of Nursing Professional Practice and the Magnet Program. “I’m deeply grateful for the efforts of our nursing staff and interprofessional partners and am confident that we knocked this visit out of the park. I’m looking forward to positive news in the coming months!”