A NICU, or neonatal intensive care unit, stay is never in a parent’s dream birth plan. NICU babies often have to be away from the loving arms of their parents to stay in incubators, sometimes are hooked up to tubes to eat and breathe, and require specialized nursing care before their stay at the NICU is over. NICU stays can last anywhere from days to months. That is why when babies and their families need to be transferred to the NICU, the staff at Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health Women & Babies Hospital (WBH) work tirelessly to offer the most advanced care and inspire hope to ease the stress and uncertainty of a NICU stay.

On June 8, Margi Bowers, MSN, MHA, RN, NE-BC, nurse manager at the WBH NICU, and the rest of the unit’s staff unveiled the NICU’s “Wall of Hope,” a tribute to past patients meant to inspire families currently on their NICU journey. The Wall of Hope features former patients, both children and adults, holding a photo from when they were in the NICU along with short bios of what they enjoy doing now.

Unveiling the “Wall of Hope”
“Margi has been planning this project for over three years, and it is so exciting to see her vision come alive,” said Lyndsay Tawney, administrative director of Women’s & Pediatrics at LG Health. “Thanks to community donations to the LG Health Foundation NICU fund, the Wall of Hope features beautiful photos of 26 patients, of all different ages, who are now grown and living healthy lives. For those parents and families who are going through an unexpected or expected NICU admission, it’s a way to inspire them and show them that there is support and positivity out there.”

The families featured on the wall were invited to the unveiling ceremony to see the installation and reflect on their NICU experience. The event felt like a reunion as many past patients and families continue to stay in touch with the staff at the WBH NICU. They even have their own Facebook page through which families connect with each other and their NICU nurses, share birthday photos, and ask for recommendations on common experiences like medical procedures.

Some of these benefits include:
•  Special discounted rates and priority for employees seeking fertility treatment.
•  Four weeks of paid parental time following the birth or adoption placement of a dependent child.
•  The LG Health Employee Assistance Fund to provide financial support for employees facing a wide range of temporary circumstances that place hardships on individuals and their families.
•  Special discounted rates and priority placement for childcare as well as a free membership to Care.com for employees with children age 12 and under.

When I think of family, these things come to mind: patience, understanding, teamwork, trust, support and love. The same things come to mind when I think of the work we do each day at Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health to create and support strong families.
When asked about their story, Alyssa Martin shared, “I was at the NICU every day for most of the day, while Ryann was a patient and the NICU nurses became our family – we call them our “aunties”. The NICU journey is not easy and it’s lifelong, but through it we have made some of our closest relationships.”

Bowers adds, “Each family on the wall has a story. Just like the story of Cayden featured at the entrance—he has a big, toothy smile and you can’t help but smile when you walk into work. These families are why I and my staff do what we do.”

The Relationship Doesn’t Stop When You Go Home

At the Wall of Hope ceremony, WBH staff greeted their former patients with hugs and comments on how much they have grown. The reunion of staff and NICU families continued as they perused the hallway, admiring the photos together. “It takes a special kind of nurse to take care of not only the patient but also the families,” commented Geoff Eddowes, senior vice president for WBH Hospital Operations. “Our staff at WBH keeps in touch with you even after your baby is discharged from the NICU and that kind of relationship is unprecedented.”

On May 19, Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health celebrated the class of 2023 graduates of the Project SEARCH program. Project SEARCH is an internship program at LG Health that provides work, social and life skills to local high school seniors with intellectual challenges. Through the program, students gain independence, confidence and experience as they reach for their goal of employment at Lancaster General Hospital (LGH) or within the broader Lancaster community after graduation.

LG Health partners with local Lancaster-area organizations including the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, Lancaster County and the Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 (IU13), an education service agency, to operate Project SEARCH. Students are fully immersed in three separate LG Health internships for the entirety of their senior year, with each internship lasting 9 to 10 weeks. The students follow a schedule of learning job-specific skills on-site Monday through Thursday, followed by classroom work on Fridays learning a life skills curriculum that includes how to write a check and how to obtain a learner’s permit and driver’s license.

This year’s annual graduation ceremony was held at the IU13 building, with an additional drop-in celebration at LGH where LG Health mentors had the opportunity to congratulate this year’s class of seven graduates.

“The evolution our students experience starting in September to graduation in May is an amazing one,” said Maria Sheddicks, manager, Volunteer Services & Community Outreach. “The program is not only about the job skills but also the social and life skills which transform students into confident young adults.”

Family Medicine Oxford Creates Food Pantry for Patients in Need

The Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health team at Family Medicine Oxford noticed some patients in their community were struggling to secure basic food and hygiene needs. Using their own resources, the team recently stepped up to create a mini food pantry at their family medicine location to help combat this issue. “Our patients are very appreciative that we are able to offer these services to them. We are hoping to get the word out to more of our patients,” said Sharon Dilley, LPN, at Family Medicine Oxford. If you would like to donate to the Family Medicine Oxford food pantry, all donations can be sent to Katie Ducus at 620 Spear St, Oxford, PA, 19363.

LG Health also operates The LG Pantry, which benefits employees and offers three pick-up locations including Lancaster General Hospital (LGH), the Suburban Pavilion and the headquarters at the Commercial Avenue/Human Resources office. Food bags are pre-packaged and provide a day’s worth of food, based on a family of four. Locations are self-service which ensures a convenient and private pick-up.

The LG Pantry is made possible by donations from fellow LG Health employees. If you are interested and able to donate to the LG Pantry, or if you or your family are experiencing a need, please contact the confidential mailbox LGH-FoodPantry@pennmedicine.upenn.edu or access the Employee Service Center page on StarNet.