pain that gets to them, but the feeling that many patients report is not just the impact on a person’s quality of life. However, exercise, and overall have a debilitating pain exacerbated by sneezing, eating, or irritate intercostal nerves, cause radiating but it can poke out, make clicking noises, cartilage attached to a false rib. The slipped is most often caused by the breakdown of lower floating ribs; slipping rib syndrome to the sternum indirectly via cartilage, and the sternum directly, false ribs that connect of 12 paired bones — true ribs that attach to around abnormally. The rib cage is made up issue that occurs when a person’s rib moves that it’s just a normal horse.

“-When you hear hoof beats, think horses, not zebras.” This aphorism encourages physicians to consider conditions that are more common and likely rather than jumping to rare or unusual diagnoses. But Adam Shiroff, MD, FACS, a trauma surgeon at Penn Presbyterian who sees outpatients at Penn Medicine University City and director of the Penn Center for Chest Trauma, has become quite adept at spotting a certain type of zebra, even after other doctors have insisted that it’s just a normal horse.

Slipping rib syndrome is an undiagnosed issue that occurs when a person’s rib moves around abnormally. The rib cage is made up of 12 paired bones — true ribs that attach to the sternum directly via cartilage, and lower floating ribs; slipping rib syndrome is most often caused by the breakdown of cartilage attached to a false rib. The slipped rib generally will not cause internal damage, but it can poke out, make clicking noises, irritate intercostal nerves, cause radiating pain exacerbated by sneezing, eating, or exercise, and overall have a debilitating impact on a person’s quality of life. However, because the condition flies under the radar, many patients report that it’s not just the pain that gets to them, but the feeling that no medical professionals believe them. The journey to a diagnosis can be long and challenging, partly because many doctors haven’t heard of the condition, and partly because slipping rib syndrome is hard to see with imaging.

“These CAT scans are read as normal almost universally,” Shiroff said. “With sophisticated software, I can evaluate the cartilage anatomy and match that up with the patients’ symptoms.” Once diagnosed, Shiroff is able to intervene with a simple orthopedic suture, a minimally invasive outpatient procedure.

In the fall of 2019, a slipping rib patient named Ashleigh Berge shared her experience with the Presby Bulletin. Over the last year, Shiroff has received countless calls and emails from people across the United States who found the article while searching for answers, realized it mirrored their own experience, and came to Penn for help. Here are a few of their stories:

A Relentless Self-Advocate

Heather Dobos, 35, wanted to lose a little weight for her wedding, but the number on the scale kept dropping even after she said, “I do.” Between her September 2018 nuptials and March 2019 move to Minnesota, she lost 40 pounds. Her parents were terrified, her collarbones were poking out, and she couldn’t bear the excruciating pain and “exorcism–worthy” stomach noises she experienced while trying to eat. She bounced from specialist to specialist, and as she underwent countless endoscopies, colonoscopies, MRIs, and pain management injections, her exhaustion was compounded by her doctor’s insistence that there didn’t seem to be anything wrong. “I started to feel like I was crazy,” Dobos said. “I had to look in the mirror and remind myself, ‘You’re not going to live like this. If I didn’t have that fight in me, I feel like I would have succumbed to it.’”

She turned to the internet and came upon Berge’s Presby Bulletin interview. Shoked by the possibility that there was another person who had experienced the same pain and frustration, she tucked the phrase “slipping rib syndrome” in the back of her mind. Just a few weeks later, the phrase came up again after a physical therapist examined Dobos’ ribcage and suggested that she was dealing with this condition. It was time to act. With her family’s encouragement, Dobos reached out to Shiroff — “the first doctor I felt comfortable with and who believed me.” She flew to Philadelphia with her husband at her side, and she successfully underwent surgery on July 27, feeling immediate relief the moment she opened her eyes.

“I planned my life around pain, but now I can sleep at night. I can eat foods that I haven’t had in years. I’ve started working out again. I can give real hugs. I can do whatever I want and feel good doing it,” Dobos said. “I’m sad that I missed out on so much, but now I’m so grateful, and I’m not taking anything for granted. Life can be scary but now I’m ready to live my life with endless possibilities.”

Rebuilding Hope and Strength

Though slipping rib syndrome often occurs without a clear cause, 26-year old South Carolinian Guy Cilento can point to the two specific moments that led up to his condition. In 2015, he was bitten by a coral snake and wased up suffering several connective tissue injuries. Six months later, he visited a chiropractor whose overly aggressive adjustment left him with recurring spasms that upended his entire athletic lifestyle.

For many people, giving thanks is top-of-mind at this time of year. Given the range of challenges that 2020 has presented — COVID-19, economic upheaval, civil unrest, and the need to juggle personal, family, and professional responsibilities in new ways — it is perhaps more important than ever to communicate our appreciation for each other. At Penn Presbyterian, staff on the front lines and behind the scenes have met these challenges with courage and resilience, showing unwavering dedication to their patients, colleagues, and community members. The executive leadership team and I could not be more proud of or grateful for these remarkable efforts. I would also like to share my gratitude for the longstanding loyalty of our team members who recently celebrated milestones. Their years of experience and leadership have been especially valuable in providing stability and guidance to their teams over the past several months. This year, 363 employees celebrated a milestone anniversary at Presby: 171 reached 5 years, 72 hit 10 years, 65 celebrated 15 years, 31 reached 20 years, 12 hit 25 years, six celebrated 30 years, and three celebrated 35 years. Lab supervisor David Talemaz and Radiology technician Charles Katze both reached incredible 40-year milestones this year, and Seymour Myers has now been a mainstay of our accounting team for an awe-inspiring 50 years.

Due to social distancing, we will not be able to host our annual Employee Recognition Ceremony, but a creative committee is figuring out how we can best ensure our honorees are recognized for their dedicated service virtually. Stay tuned for additional details! Plus, each honoree will receive a certificate, a letter of gratitude from Michele Volpe, and instructions on how to redeem their gifts online.

As PPMC builds a culture in which we regularly recognize employees’ achievements and contributions, I encourage everyone to make it a habit to thank your peers, celebrate your coworkers, and help out your colleagues. After all, amid all of the uncertainty and challenges, one thing is clear: we’re in this together.
PMX WEEK 2020: PRIORITIZING PRESENCE AND PATIENT ADVOCACY

Last month, presence and patient advocacy took center stage at PPMC. Held each October, Penn Medicine Experience (PMX) Week encourages staff to take time to celebrate their colleagues and renew their commitment to being compassionate, present, empowered, collaborative, and accountable. Last year, a five-year campaign was launched to shine a spotlight on one of these Experience Standards each year, and the focus of PMX Week 2020 was “BE Present.”

“PMX Week is a time for us to reflect on what being present looks like in both our work and in our home lives. How can we show up and create connections with our patients and their caregivers? How can we be engaged with our colleagues and our community?” said Suzanne Smith, MEA, CHES, director of Patient Experience and head of PPMC’s PMX Committee. “While PMX Week looks very different from years past, it still gives us the opportunity to celebrate our commitment to those we serve and recognize the efforts of our staff while having some fun.”

PMX Week was bookended by the distribution of tasty treats, with hospital leaders handing out snack packs during the Monday morning kick-off, and staff enjoying a socially distanced ice cream social on Friday. Staff were also visited by the Fun Cart and the Presby Pooches, shared stories of how they remain present each day, and showed off their silliest socks and pictures of their playful pets. System-wide activities like an online PMX Week scavenger hunt and virtual yoga and dance therapy sessions were also scheduled.

As the week came to a close, the PMX Week Committee and Patient & Guest Relations team hosted the 12th Annual Patient Advocacy Experiences & Social Impact Awards Ceremony. “The annual event recognizes the work of our patients and families and the presence and advocacy of our staff,” said Mary Kate Whitt, editorial director. “This year, we were especially proud to celebrate the work of our staff engaged in the care and well-being of our patients and families.”

“Without the passion and commitment of our staff, we would not be able to serve our patients and families to the best of our ability,” said Mary Kate Whitt, editorial director. “We are proud to acknowledge their contributions and thank them for their dedication and hard work.”

Thank you to every Presby team member who made this year’s PMX Week such a great success!