On November 8, members of Pennsylvania Hospital’s (PAH) six diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) workgroups — clinical, research, education, community, culture, and people — collaborated for the first time in a virtual setting through PAH’s first DEI Summit. Since the workgroups’ launch in November 2020, each group has been working separately to tackle disparities in various aspects of health care, only having the chairs represent the groups and exchange updates in a monthly meeting. To enhance collaboration, the chairs decided to plan a summit where all members could listen and contribute their experiences and ideas.

“We started these workgroups from scratch,” said Karen Alkire, a quality and training specialist, and chair of the education workgroup. Alkire served as the coordinator for the DEI Summit.

“In just one year, we’ve made tremendous progress with strengthening current programs and developing new ones to support DEI for patients and staff.” With nearly 40 members in attendance, and several members of PAH’s Executive Leadership team, each workgroup presented their goals, the current work in place, and the progress toward reaching those goals, offering time for questions and feedback among the members. After the presentations, the members were divided into breakout rooms as an additional space to brainstorm ways to enhance DEI in the hospital.

A few initiatives shared at the summit included preparation for January’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration and the launch of the first Grand Rounds — a panel discussing the current research projects at PAH focused on improving diversity in clinical trials and equity in care for underrepresented patient populations. In addition, the workgroups discussed the return of PAH’s high school student program, which was halted by the pandemic. The program gives local students interested in pursuing careers in health care and hospital operations the opportunity to network with medical professionals, having the goal of hiring one student from each cohort.

“Our goals were education, collaboration, and inspiration,” said Alkire. “We want people to walk away knowing something they didn’t know about the other groups, collaborating with others who share similar DEI goals, and feeling inspired and motivated to continue these efforts.”

WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE MEMORIES WORKING AT PAH?

Working with people who have become family. I got to meet a lot of staff, both clinical and non-clinical, through playing basketball and softball at the gym or outside of PAH. I also played on Penn’s medical school soccer team for several years in the ‘80s. I had coached my three daughters’ soccer teams, but stopped when they got older. Then one of my students asked if I wanted to join the medical school’s team. It was part of a league with surrounding medical schools and Penn’s graduate programs. A lot of these students rotated with me in the advanced surgery course at PAH.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR FUTURE MEDICAL STUDENTS?

Just enjoy what you’re doing. Enjoy every day. Penn’s been wonderful to their students. The students are great, and they’ve been a joy to teach.

On following his retirement through his mentorship for medical students, who will then go on to help others in their own clinical settings.

As we approach 2022, I look forward to another year of excellence in care and service, and I thank our staff who continue to epitomize the Good Samaritan image that has been central to PAH’s foundation.

WHAT’S NEW

Pennsylvania Hospital (PAH) opened in 1751, affixing the image of the Good Samaritan as its hospital seal. Nearly 300 years later, our staff continue to exemplify this image of the Good Samaritan, creating new ways to help others and strengthen patient care in our community.

This image was especially emphasized during PAH’s PMX Week, when we honored 10 employees at the Patient Advocacy Award ceremony, recognizing them for going above and beyond for people they serve.

In addition, our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee has been collaborating to overcome bias and provide equitable care and opportunities for patients and staff. At PAH’s first DEI Summit in November, the committee’s workgroup members demonstrated curiosity, commitment, and courage for addressing goals and initiatives to support DEI at our hospital.

We also celebrated the 47-year career of Allen H. Bar, MD, whose legacy lives on.
On August 10, Pennsylvania Hospital's Cardiology department expanded to South Philadelphia, allowing more Philadelphians to access Penn Medicine’s resources to treat their health needs.

While its main center is still located on PAH’s campus, this extension of the department has moved to the Constitution Health Plaza, joining other health services like PAH’s Primary Care — Delancey Internal Medicine — and Penn Medicine Urgent Care. Originally, the Constitution Health Plaza was the location of the St. Agnes Hospital, which closed its doors in 2004. Now, the property has been renovated as a multi-purpose medical campus with a myriad of health services to support community care.

“When St. Agnes closed, it limited health care in that area,” said Karen Lyons, director of Ambulatory Operations. “Through our Constitution Health Plaza, PAH is bringing primary and specialty care into the South Philadelphia community, and our vision is to continue to grow and meet the needs of the population there.”

The expansion of the Cardiology department is part of PAH’s mission of providing greater access to patient care in the region. Offering services beyond PAH’s campus allows even more patients to be seen by specialists and helps the hospital to better meet local needs.

“A lot of our patients that come to PAH live in South Philadelphia. This new location will now give them the opportunity to be seen closer to home, while still having access to a fully integrated approach to care,” said Eric Smith, administrator of Practice Operations.

The close proximity between Penn Medicine practices at Constitution Health Plaza allows for convenient collaboration between the departments. If a patient is found to have a heart murmur or an irregular heartbeat in Primary Care, they can be easily referred to additional treatment in Cardiology right next door.

The new Cardiology practice offers services ranging from general cardiology care, like managing high blood pressure and high cholesterol, to more advanced needs, like cardiac catheterization — a procedure in which a small tube is inserted into a blood vessel to help diagnose certain heart conditions.

“We’ve already had a tremendous number of new patients, and that’s something we’re really proud of,” said Smith. “This new, yet familiar, location to the community will allow more patients to feel comfortable seeking care.”

Tom and Bob, that phrase takes on a whole new meaning. While they’re co-workers as echocardiogram (echo) vascular technologists at Pennsylvania Hospital’s Cardiology Heart Station, Tom and Bob are also identical twins.

“It’s great having a twin. It’s a friend for life,” said Tom.

Even as children, the Mckee twins shared the same interests. They played sports together, participating in the same basketball, baseball, and football teams at their school. Now, they’re both part of PAH’s Cardiology team. However, the brothers didn’t always work together. In fact, they initially pursued completely different career paths.

Tom chose a career in health care, training in cardiac ultrasound, inspired by his older sisters who are both nurses in the Philadelphia region. Meanwhile, Bob pursued a career in accounting. After a few years as an accountant, Bob decided to make a career change; he wanted to help people in a way that also tied back to his original interests in technology and science. Following his siblings’ footsteps, he began his journey into medicine, enrolling himself in a local ultrasound diagnostics program. While in the program, Bob turned to Tom for guidance on the best practices in ultrasound.

“This year’s Penn Medicine Experience (PMX) Week, held October 25 to 29, highlighted employees who actively demonstrated acts of empowerment — speaking up and promoting change to provide better care for patients and a better work environment for colleagues.

To recognize empowered employees, Pennsylvania Hospital (PAH) held the annual Patient Advocacy Awards. Staff could nominate their peers, submitting exemplary stories of exceptional patient care and advocacy. This year, staff gathered to honor 10 employees, recognized for everything from comforting a patient during a stressful procedure to providing access to vaccinations to patients who were unable to leave their homes. Michael N. Braffman, MD, chair of Medicine, who retired in October, received a Lifetime Patient Advocate Award for his 35-year career in patient care.

“The pandemic has made things challenging, but our staff still found time to recognize their peers for the amazing work they do each and every day,” said Cassandra A. Cisneros, MHA, CPXP, director of Patient Experience. “These stories bring us all together and showcase how impactful employee engagement can be.”

“IT’S GREAT HAVING A TWIN. IT’S A FRIEND FOR LIFE.”
— TOM MCKEE

In addition to the award ceremony, PAH scheduled an assortment of festivities for staff. Kickoff of the week was a “Welcome to Work” breakfast in the Elm Garden, followed by a night-shift celebration with cookies and a photo booth. PAH provided live music, performed by the Fratlington String Band, and a pumpkin-carving contest, along with games and prizes. PMX Week also emphasized employee wellness, holding massage therapy sessions and a de-stress event with pet therapy.

“Despite all the barriers we’ve faced these past two years from the pandemic, our staff continued to strongly advocate for our patients and each other, truly embodying the PMX theme,” said Cisneros.

See the full list of Patient Advocacy Award recipients in the online version of What’s New.