There are some vulnerable groups who are at risk of being left behind. While vaccine access has been expanding rapidly across the country and region, there are still barriers to the vaccine, including contacting patients’ caregivers and other members of their household. The team would call to schedule and confirm appointments, even speaking with individuals who were hesitant. Some clients were on the fence, so I would call and provide resources about the vaccine,” Cartwright said. “We wanted to make sure they had the right information to make a decision that’s best for them.”

The team was ready to hit the road in April but had to briefly pause their plans when distribution of the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine was temporarily paused for additional safety evaluation. Once the review was completed and deemed safe, Cartwright was equipped with stacks of vaccination cards and a cooler to store the vials in a cold temperature, ready to vaccinate her first patient on May 5th.

In just one month, Cartwright administered 52 vaccines, one by one in vulnerable patients’ homes. Once a vial was opened for the day, Cartwright only had six hours to receive her shots safely and in the comfort of their homes. “Our goal was to vaccinate as many interested people as we could, and with my team’s efforts, we were able to accomplish that goal.”

Everything went as smooth as can be,” said Johnnie, another patient who received the vaccine with her friend. “Scheduling was easy and Donna waited with us to make sure we didn’t have any side effects. We were very happy and grateful to have this offered.”

Reflecting on the outreach, Cartwright appreciates her team’s collaboration for driving this initiative and helping patients receive their shots safely and in the comfort of their homes. “Our goal was to vaccinate as many interested people as we could, and with my team’s efforts, we were able to accomplish that goal.”

It has been more than half a year since the first COVID-19 vaccines were administered at Pennsylvania Hospital — the first vaccines to be given at our health system early that chilly December morning. Met with applause by our staff in the Zubrow Auditorium, that first shot was a first step of protection for our frontline staff, and by extension their patients, against this devastating disease. I’m grateful for our whole Pennsylvania Hospital community of heroes, starting with the frontline staff who first stepped forward in the early days of the pandemic to help our patients battle the virus. Our retirees even returned to the frontline, ready to make a difference in the Philadelphia community.

When we were able to expand our vaccine outreach to our patients and then the public, we looked outside the walls of the hospital, partnering with Live Nation in February to open our South Street Clinic at the Theater of the Living Arts (TLA). Our staff from Nursing, Patient Access, Pharmacy, Social Work, Patient & Guest Relations, and even our Volunteers established a workflow that created a smooth vaccination process from appointment scheduling to post-shot monitoring. For patients with concerns about the vaccine and other health-related worries, our staff offered support and helpful resources to put them at ease.

With the success of the TLA vaccination site, Pennsylvania Hospital has pivoted to opening operations at Hall-Mercer Community Mental Health Centre, which has also been actively involved in Philadelphia’s vaccination efforts. As you can read above in this issue, our Targeted Case Management team has traveled throughout the city to administer the vaccine, allowing our behavioral health patients, who felt uncomfortable leaving their homes, to safely receive the shot through a home visit.

The efforts of hundreds of individuals add up to a huge impact: From that first delivery of doses, Pennsylvania Hospital staff have fully vaccinated more than 16,000 patients. And we can see how widespread vaccination is now bringing this virus under control at long last. June 4 marked the first day of having zero COVID-19 patients on the fourth floor of our Cathcart building since the onset of the pandemic. These achievements would not have been possible without the tremendous efforts of our Nursing managers, educators, and supervisors, pharmacy, IT partners, and system wide planning group. Together, we have faced down the worst pandemic of our lifetimes. To each and every one of you, I thank you for your consistent dedication to serving our patients and community.
NEW DIRECTOR OF PATIENT EXPERIENCE

Pennsylvania Hospital welcomed Cassandra A. Cuesta, MHA, CPXP, as its new director of Patient Experience, joining March 23 from Temple University Hospital. Despite only being in the role for a few months, Cuesta already feels part of the Penn Medicine family and has been working to strengthen the patient experience at the nation’s oldest hospital.

What was your journey to PAH like?
I started my career at Temple University Hospital (TUH) and served multiple roles over the past 7 years. I first worked in the Performance Improvement and Medical Staff Affairs office and facilitated our monthly Performance Improvement Committee. I then saw an opening in Patient Experience at Temple, and while I didn’t have much background in it, I was determined to work hard and take myself, my team, and patient experience at TUH to the next level. Our team developed “The Temple Experience,” a service excellence employee recognition program and created Temple’s first patient and family advisory council. Under our guidance, we grew the volunteer program, increasing our members from 15 volunteers in 2015 to 200 volunteers by 2020 and establishing it as a nationally recognized program. I attribute these accomplishments and many others to having a great team, and I can already tell that I have that here at Penn as well. Everyone has been extremely welcoming, and I’m excited to see what we can achieve together.

What is the scope of your role?
Much of my role includes analyzing patient satisfaction data to implement best practices and performance improvement initiatives to improve our patient’s and their families’ experiences. We want practical feedback to provide to managers and frontline staff to know where their strengths and opportunities are. Some of this data is collected through paper or digital surveys distributed to patients, online reviews, and social media comments. We’re looking at comments and reviews in a whole new way, looking beyond whether it’s positive or negative. Humanizing data and sharing stories and experiences is how we’re going to improve engagement and consistency in our branding and messaging of the Penn Medicine Experience. In addition, I oversee the Patient and Guest Relations, Pastoral Care, Volunteer Services, Language Assistance, and the Welcome Desk. While they all have different nuances, they all tie together and impact the overall patient experience.

What are your plans for patient experience at PAH?
There have been a lot of moving pieces, such as bringing back our volunteers, patient and family advisors and therapy dog program [after suspending these in-person programs during the pandemic], developing a task force to pilot a new way to track patients’ belongings if they’re lost, and getting the welcome desk a new visitor management system to better track people in the hospital. We’re working on implementing a new volunteer management system in order to streamline the volunteer onboarding process and make it electronic. Another plan in motion is the recruitment of patients and caregivers for our Patient-Family Advisory Council who will meet with staff to help improve our clinical performance. In addition to these initiatives, I want to work on developing a Patient Experience Committee that represents all aspects of the patient experience, including inpatient, outpatient, and ancillary services. It will give employees a space to share their practices and informs others about what’s going on at the hospital. Everyone impacts the patient experience and has a role in whether they know it or not.

Remembering Our Service Men & Women at the Missing Man Table
For Memorial Day, Pennsylvania Hospital and Penn Medicine’s Veterans Care Excellence Program held its first Missing Man Table to honor missing military members. Located in the Pennsylvania Hospital cafeteria, the table is set for one, adorned with flags to represent each branch of the military and symbolic items to remember missing service men and women.

“Not only are these military members remembered by veterans, but they’re remembered and missed by families and friends,” said Jack Sariego, MD, MBA, FACS, FACP, vice president of Pharmaceutical Services and an Air Force veteran. “Whether you’re a veteran or not, virtually no one has been untouched by the military, and virtually every family has some connection to a missing service man or woman. Everyone is connected in one way or another.”

Melissa Sherman, a clinical services associate, waited in anticipation for the results of the season finale of The Voice. Surrounding the TV, Sherman’s friends and family sat silently in the show’s final moments. “The winner of The Voice…is Cam Anthony!” The watch party jumped from their seats, cheering and crying as they watched Cam walk through the confetti to take his trophy. Sherman could not be more proud of her 19-year-old son, the winner of the hit singing competition.

In between Cam’s performances on live TV each week in California, Sherman and her team were rooting for him on the 20th floor of Penn Medicine Washington Square. “My floor was so supportive. If Cam called during my lunch time, people would talk to him and boost his confidence,” said Sherman. “They even surprised me with a banner up on our floor for his win. It was a wonderful atmosphere.”

Singing runs in the family as Sherman grew up performing at her church and school.

“When Cam was born, and I found out he liked to sing, I taught him everything I knew from my father,” said Sherman. Sherman finds that her skills and lessons learned from being a singer and mother have applied to her work with patients. While comforting and providing care for patients, like she would for her children, Sherman’s background in singing has influenced the way she interacts with patients. “You sing a certain way or hit a certain note to express how you’re feeling through song,” Sherman said. Though careful listening, Sherman can recognize how a patient is feeling based on the tone of their voice and the way they express their thoughts.

Since winning The Voice, Cam has appeared in TV and radio interviews, chatting about the talent he acquired from his family with the world. “He’s such a young kid and he has this wow factor,” said Sherman. “He’s fulfilling to see him with this gift and become the person he is today.”

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What’s New is published monthly by the PAH employees. Access What’s New at PennMedicine.org/WhatsNew.