The Emergency Nurses Association’s (ENA) Lantern Award is named in honor of Florence Nightingale, credited for her transformative work in modern nursing and improvement in conditions for patient care. Known as the “Lady with the Lamp,” she would walk around the infirmary at night, carrying a lantern to see through the dark and check on wounded soldiers in need of care.

Similarly, the Emergency Department (ED) at Pennsylvania Hospital serves as a guiding light through the dark times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of their efforts of reimagining patient care during an unprecedented time, the department received its third Lantern Award. “It has been a journey of collaboration and teamwork,” said Lauren N. Ellis, MSN, RN, CEN, NE-BC, nurse manager for Emergency Nursing at PAH. “We had to think outside the box to keep patients and each other safe, finding ways to keep things relatively normal when things were quite abnormal.”

The team joined together to create a smooth ED setup and strengthened the patient experience amidst the coronavirus commotion. One of these innovative practices was the ED’s operation for patient throughput, an approach to controlling the volume of patients entering the hospital. The ED team built a tent outside of the department on Spruce Street, equipped with printers for paperwork and a preadmission COVID-19 testing area, essentially creating an outdoor lobby for patients to check in. An outdoor setup allowed staff to identify and sort patients, and to determine if they were positive or negative for COVID-19 to take appropriate precautions that would prevent any spread of infection within the hospital’s walls.

The ED nurses also offered support for COVID-19 patients who were actively passing from their battle with the virus and unable to have visitors by their bedside. They provided a hand to hold and their cell phones so patients could call and speak to their loved ones. “The team went above and beyond for caring for patients, and additionally, our team cared and comforted each other through these difficult moments,” Ellis said.

In July, the team received the news of their Lantern designation. The award will be on display in the ED, serving as a reminder to keep improving their practices and as a symbol of the culmination of the challenges presented during the pandemic.

“We can look at the award and think about what we all went through and accomplished together,” Ellis said. “We learned to be versatile and maintain a high level of patient care through a time of ambiguity. Health care is constantly changing and we need to make sure we’re rising to the challenge and being on the right side of change.”

Summer 2020 altered the course of history. The pandemic changed our operations and the way we provide care at Pennsylvania Hospital in profound ways. We witnessed the tragic death of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, sparking systemic change and raising awareness of inequity and injustice in our country. Looking back now as another summer draws to a close, I couldn’t be prouder of what we’ve achieved in this unprecedented year.

We continue forward in our commitment to our mission, and honor our promise to “Take Care of Him and I will Repay Thee.” We responded to this need when our hospital was founded to serve the underserved and ease society’s fear of the mentally ill in 1751. In 2021, we are addressing a different fear, that due to the persistence of systemic racism, we may leave others behind. In fact, we remain true to our original mission by lifting up all who seek our help. Our commitment to equal treatment and care remains strong.

Pennsylvania Hospital employees demonstrated resilience and dedication to change, both in adapting to the uncertainties of the pandemic and in initiating ways to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at the hospital. We assembled a temporary COVID-19 unit to help our patients fight the virus, and then helped our community build immunity through our vaccine clinics in Philadelphia. As a health system we moved from kneeling together in solidarity with White Coats for Black Lives, to launching the Action for Cultural Transformation to eliminate racism at Penn Medicine and in health care. Through these efforts, Pennsylvania Hospital has been breaking down barriers in more ways than one and casting light for better times ahead. We witnessed the physical deconstruction of a wall that once marked one of our busy provisional COVID-19 units. We gathered to remember those who lost their lives to the virus and created a COVID-19 time capsule to collect insights and hope for the future. PAH also launched the DEI Steering Committee to develop strategies for confronting disparities in health care, signing a pledge letter to epitomize PAH’s commitment to this mission. In addition, PAH employees demonstrated teamwork and dedication through the recent Joint Commission survey, providing valuable participation and feedback to the surveyors, a testament to the care we provide here at Pennsylvania Hospital.

Thank you to all PAH employees for their perseverance through these challenging times. While we may reflect on and remember the past, we must look forward to the future and the positive changes that lie ahead.
While completing their daily tasks and tending to patients one Friday in June, the Cathcart staff had a small victory they didn’t think would be possible after more than a year before that, in an attempt to control the virus, the Cathcart staff had prepared for battle, entering the doorway to the temporary COVID-19 unit on the opposite side of the wall, putting on their armor of masks, face shields, and other forms of personal protective equipment, to help patients fight against COVID-19.

The fight against COVID-19 may not be over yet due to the concerning rise of growing coronavirus cases in the city. It served as a physical reminder that COVID-19 patients were occupying rooms in that select section of the floor, restricting routine patient, staff, and visitor flow from the area.

This summer, after the tremendous efforts restricting routine patient, staff, and visitors in that select section of the floor, COVID-19 patients were occupying rooms in that select section of the floor, restricting routine patient, staff, and visitor flow from the area.

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Cavanaugh said. “We weren’t known as a COVID floor anymore.”

To celebrate this achievement, unit staff held an event centered on the breakdown of the wall. Holding golden hammers, they pounded to hit the wall, as it would be properly taken down by a maintenance team, to symbolize their fight against the coronavirus on the floor.

“They’re a resilient bunch that took such diligent care of these patients,” Cavanaugh said of the Cathcart team. “I’m very proud of them.”

“This team handled the unit with such grace, dedication, and commitment to our patients,” Berry Craig, DNP, chief nursing officer, said. “The COVID-19 pandemic is one that comes with ups and downs. When we’re able to see some progress, it’s important to celebrate and remember we can achieve victories along the way and regain a sense of normalcy and peace.”

WHAT’S NEW

WHY DID YOU JOIN THE EDUCATION WORKGROUP?

At the time that they were looking for volunteers, I decided to go back to school to get another master’s degree, but this time in social work. DEI is something that is often talked about by social workers. We must be committed to those ideas, but we also must advance those ideas. There’s polarization and division in the world, and a lot of that comes down to a lack of understanding.

If we can better understand the root cause of where these disparities and inequalities are coming from and how they’re happening, then we can better bridge those gaps and make sure that not only our patients are getting better care, but we are also taking better care of our coworkers who have different backgrounds than us.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE WORKGROUP?

There are two overarching goals. One is to provide education to our clinical and nonclinical staff through a speaker’s forum. This will take the shape of quarterly Grand Rounds presentations on DEI-related topics. The other goal is to provide other opportunities for people to learn outside of these presentations. While some people would want to sit in the Zubrow auditorium and listen to presentations, others may not be able to due to their schedules. They may prefer a different learning tool like a podcast or an article on topics like health equity or historically based inequities in the health care system to learn why

we are reevaluating and looking at things differently.

HOW DOES THE GROUP COLLABORATE WITH THE HOSPITAL’S DEI STEERING COMMITTEE?

We have monthly meetings to share updates with the other workgroups, but there is also a Microsoft Teams [virtual collaboration] group for the committee. We use the Teams space so individual groups can post their meeting minutes and stay up to date on what the other groups are doing on an ongoing basis. This way we don’t have to wait until the meeting to know what’s happening among the other groups.

Right now, our group has began working with the research group to help with one of our Grand Rounds. They’re looking at DEI-related research proposals and inquiring about health equity as a potential research outcome at PAH. Some of this research has focused on racial diversity in academic surgery and the influence of race and geographic access to plastic surgeons, in addition to a focus on outcomes for maternal health and female reproductive cancers as a factor of race, economic class, and spoken language. We’re hoping to present some of the preliminary results of that work at the first Grand Rounds.

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