

HOUSE CALLS

**THE
HUMILITY OF
HUMANKINDNESS**
PG 12

**FROM
PATIENT TO
AMBASSADOR**
PG 8

DIGNITY HEALTH PATIENT GETS A NEW LEASE ON LIFE
PG 4



Dignity Health
Mercy & Memorial Hospitals

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

DEAR FRIENDS

In 2012, Dignity Health embarked on a new initiative and partnered with the Comprehensive Blood and Cancer Center (CBCC) in Bakersfield. Because of this partnership, CBCC and Dignity Health have been able to serve more cancer patients in Kern County as we continue to grow. We're proud to work alongside CBCC this summer to expand our infusion center. By adding more supportive care and wellness programs, our cancer patients can learn to live fuller, healthier lives.

While CBCC and Dignity Health's Memorial Hospital Infusion Center may be working to heal patients of cancer, one of those patients has healed and touched others' hearts with her kindness. Ann Press is highlighted on page 12 for the light she brings to others battling cancer, and for her well-deserved *Hello humankindness* nomination. Our center is a better place because of people like Ann, who use their time undergoing treatment to encourage and help those around them.

As illustrated throughout this issue of HouseCALLS, knowing your risks of a heart attack or stroke is important



at any age, and may save your life. One of our very own employees shares her experience with a stroke on page 14, letting the community know it can happen to anyone. Another woman, who suffered a heart attack at the young age of 33, spoke out at the Go Red Por Tu Corazón luncheon to share her story and encourage other Latina women to take care of their heart health. Through the testimonies of these brave women, Dignity Health hopes to encourage the residents of Kern County to be proactive in addressing their health needs.

While physicians and nurses heal patients physically, there are those who commit their lives to spiritual healing. Mercy Hospitals has had the privilege of working with Sister Mary Anne Bradish for the past 29 years as she has helped patients find peace during their most trying moments. Whether she said a prayer, sang a hymn, or offered a listening ear, she has touched the lives of countless patients and their families. Dignity Health would like to thank Sr. Mary Anne for the meaningful time she has spent at Mercy Hospitals, and we congratulate her on her retirement. ■

SINCERELY,

JON VAN BOENING

PRESIDENT AND CEO, MEMORIAL HOSPITAL
SVP OPERATIONS, DIGNITY HEALTH
CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

BRUCE PETERS

PRESIDENT AND CEO
MERCY HOSPITAL DOWNTOWN
MERCY HOSPITAL SOUTHWEST

Hello humankindness

DIGNITY HEALTH MEMORIAL HOSPITAL RECEIVES STROKE AWARD

Award demonstrates Memorial Hospital's commitment to quality care for stroke patients

Dignity Health Memorial Hospital has received a Get With The Guidelines™ -Stroke Gold Plus Target: Stroke Honor Roll Quality Achievement Award at the American Heart Association / American Stroke Association's recognition event during the International Stroke Conference 2015. The award recognized the hospital's commitment and success, ensuring stroke patients receive the most appropriate treatment according to nationally recognized, research-based guidelines based on the latest scientific evidence.

To receive the Target: Stroke Honor Roll Award, hospitals must meet quality measures developed to reduce the time between the patient's arrival at the hospital and treatment with the clot-buster tissue plasminogen activator, or tPA, the only drug approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat ischemic stroke. If given intravenously in the first three hours after the start of symptoms, tPA has been shown to significantly reduce the effects of stroke and lessen the chance of permanent disability. For more than 12 months, at least 50 percent of the hospital's ischemic stroke patients have received tPA within 60 minutes of arriving at the hospital (known as door-to-needle time).

These quality measures are designed to help hospital teams provide the most up-to-date, evidence-based guidelines with the goal of speeding recovery and reducing death and disability for stroke patients.

"With a stroke, time loss is brain loss, and this award demonstrates our commitment to ensuring patients receive care based on nationally-respected clinical guidelines," said Michele Shain, director of Neuro and Cardiac services for Memorial Hospital. "We are dedicated to improving the quality of stroke care and the American Heart Association /

American Stroke Association's Get With The Guidelines™-Stroke helps us achieve that goal."

Memorial Hospital has also met specific scientific guidelines as a Primary Stroke Center, featuring a comprehensive system for rapid diagnosis and treatment of stroke patients admitted to the emergency department.



"We are pleased to recognize Dignity Health Memorial Hospital for their commitment to stroke care," said Deepak L. Bhatt, M.D., M.P.H., national chairman of the Get With The Guidelines™ steering committee, and executive director of the Interventional Cardiovascular Programs at Brigham and Women's Hospital and professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. "Studies have shown that hospitals that consistently follow Get With The Guidelines™ quality improvement measures can reduce length of stay and 30-day readmission rates and reduce disparities in care."

For providers, Get With The

Guidelines™-Stroke offers quality improvement measures, discharge protocols, standing orders, and other measurement tools. Providing hospitals with resources and information that make it easier to follow treatment guidelines can help save lives and ultimately reduce overall healthcare costs by lowering readmission rates for stroke patients.

For patients, Get With The Guidelines™-Stroke uses the "teachable moment," the time soon after a patient has had a stroke, when they learn how to manage their risk factors while still in the hospital and recognize the F.A.S.T. warning signs of a stroke.

According to the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association, stroke is the number five cause of death and a leading cause of adult disability in the United States. On average, someone suffers a stroke every 40 seconds; someone dies of a stroke every four minutes; and 795,000 people suffer a new or recurrent stroke each year. ■

ABOUT GET WITH THE GUIDELINES™

Get With The Guidelines™ is the American Heart Association / American Stroke Association's hospital-based quality improvement program that provides hospitals with the latest research-based guidelines. Developed with the goal of saving lives and hastening recovery, Get With The Guidelines™ has touched the lives of more than 5 million patients since 2001.

For more information, visit:
heart.org/quality or heart.org/QualityMap

Sarah Smith decorated her BRA Day entry with pink and white butterflies to symbolize angels and the physicians who work hard to fight cancer.



SETTING

THINGS RIGHT

Dignity Health patient gets a new lease on life

It began as a normal night, but ended up changing a life forever. Sarah Smith prepared dinner for her husband and four children, and then settled in to watch some late night television. The house was fairly quiet when the commercial came on the screen that would so profoundly touch Sarah.

With a focus on Breast Reconstruction Awareness (BRA) Day, the commercial spoke of raising awareness among the 60 to 70 percent of breast cancer surgery patients in America who are not offered an immediate reconstruction option. It asked for donations of decorated bras for an upcoming event hosted by Dignity Health Mercy and Memorial Hospitals.

The commercial had a very personal impact for Sarah. Born with hypomastia, a medical condition that prevented one of her breasts from developing at puberty, she had known the physical and emotional pain of living with one breast.

"I could relate to having your breast gone, having it rebuilt, having the different stages of the rebuilding, and how it affects you emotionally, physically, [and] your insecurities," Sarah remembered. "From a young age all the way up to an adult, having kids, being married—I was able to connect to such a broad range of women."

By the time the commercial ended, Sarah couldn't stop thinking about the women facing breast reconstruction and her own story. "I woke my husband and told him, 'I'm going to make a bra.' I couldn't go back to sleep," Sarah said. "I stayed up going through all my crafty stuff and found [what I needed] to make it. The more I worked, the more I was thinking about how so many

women aren't diagnosed with breast cancer until they're older, who don't get checked until they're older."

The bra she designed was black, adorned with pink and white butterflies. To Sarah, the black represented loss. In her submission description she wrote about her butterflies; the white symbolized angels, and the pink stood for the

wrong with me because I thought this was just how girls develop, maybe just one at a time," she said.

It was during a physical, required in order to play school sports, that a doctor noticed a lump on the undeveloped side of her chest. What followed was a series of surgeries and an implant at age 13 to help give her a more symmetrical appearance. As she grew, so did her right breast, which left her once again lopsided and insecure.

"I didn't dress like everyone else; I'd wear baggy t-shirts instead of fitted clothes," Sarah said. "When we'd go swimming in the summer, there was a long period of time when I had a foam prosthetic inside my bra. Once, it came out in the swimming pool in front of a whole group of people. It was so devastating to me, kids were saying 'whose is that? That's so gross!' I went home and didn't swim for the rest of that summer."

Sarah went on in life to marry childhood friend, Brian, and they have four children. With her family and friends by her side, the emotional scars were eventually healed, but the physical pain from early implants began causing her problems.

She saw a series of doctors with burning pain and pneumonia-like symptoms.

Once it was determined that her implant had deteriorated, Sarah was shocked to discover her family's insurance wouldn't cover the corrective surgery. With an abundance of grit but not much in savings, Sarah and her husband started earmarking their tax ▶



Sarah Smith proudly wears a dress given to her by her husband.

"I would tell any young woman who has hypomastia to not be ashamed; this is just the way that God made us."

—Sarah Smith

cancer-fighting army of doctors, medical technicians, patients, and survivors who give hope to so many. She hoped her bra would create awareness while inspiring strength and courage.

Sarah's need for strength and courage began at an early age, when she first noticed that her right breast started growing while the other did not. "I didn't know something was

SETTING THINGS RIGHT *continued*

refunds to cover the expense, which was quoted to cost more than \$10,000.

“When it comes to money, I know things like fixing the car comes first,” Sarah said. “But when you reach the point when you’re in pain constantly, that’s when you start setting money aside.” Consulting with a cosmetic surgery center in Bakersfield, she began making payments toward the eventual procedure, hoping to use this year’s tax return for the final balance.

While the events of Sarah’s life leading up to the chance viewing of a

what I can do, let me talk to Hawarden Medical Supply, some other folks, see if they’re willing to help out.”

The result of a series of phone calls was the go-ahead to gift Sarah an entire breast reconstruction.

At the Breast Reconstruction Awareness Day Be BRAVe event at the Padre Hotel, Sarah was only expecting to give a short speech about the inspiration behind her decorated butterfly bra. “I was told I’d get a signal to stand up, but I never spoke. That’s when Dr. Dev told me what he and Memorial Hospital were

It took my breath away because I didn’t know what to say or do; it was magical, it was awesome. Afterwards, I couldn’t wait for the elevator door to shut so I could just cry for a minute by myself.”

Sarah is looking to put the years of pain and embarrassment behind her while speaking out to help others. “I would tell any young woman who has hypomastia to not be ashamed; this is just the way that God made us,” Sarah advised. “You need to not let it control you as a person and don’t hide it. Don’t let it be a secret.”



single television commercial can be considered amazing, it is what followed that changed Sarah’s life. Her heartfelt submission of the beautifully decorated bra, caught the attention of Robin Mangarin-Scott, director of strategic marketing at Dignity Health Mercy and Memorial Hospitals, who in turn shared it with plastic surgeon Dr. Vipul Dev.

“Her letter said, ‘I know what this is like because I was born with one breast that never really developed,’” Dr. Dev remembered. “I said ‘well, let me see

going to do for me,’” Sarah said. “I was so overwhelmed that I was in this room with all these cancer patients, and it was me that he was going to help.”

Later, as she was being interviewed outside the meeting room, Sarah’s emotions took another turn as women came to her with hugs and congratulations. “I felt that none of these women know what their future holds and no matter how much pain I’m in, I don’t have cancer,” Sarah said. “I couldn’t even answer the interviewer’s questions.

Dr. Dev offered that one in 17,000 women are born with Sarah’s condition and donation of his services is simply part of the creed he has as a physician. “We’re fortunate to have the ability, so it’s a way to pay it forward to help people when they can’t otherwise afford it.”

“The Dignity Health system has been my partner in this; they’ve been very good about it. It’s their philosophy; they support the physicians who support them. It’s a community effort in that way,” Dr. Dev said. ■



COMBATING CANCER WITH HOLISTIC & SCIENTIFIC HEALING

Dignity Health and CBCC expand cancer center to reach more patients and promote survivorship

For many patients with cancer, adjusting to life during and after treatment can be challenging, and usually calls for a complete lifestyle transformation. That's why Dignity Health and the Comprehensive Blood and Cancer Center are expanding the center to support current patients, while also preparing them for life in remission.

In 2012, Dignity Health and CBCC formed a partnership in order to better serve the needs of cancer patients around Kern County and the outlying areas.

Currently, CBCC is 70,000 square feet, making it the largest freestanding cancer center on the West Coast. The expansion will add around 18,000 additional square feet of space that will feature a new infusion center with more than a dozen private rooms, a cancer rehab center, a wellness kitchen, and a survivorship center to promote holistic healing. Construction has already begun with plans to

open in four to six months.

This expansion of space will allow an increase of services that are developed to educate patients in living healthier and fuller lives. The center will be hiring nutritionists, naturopaths, and genetic counselors, to fulfill the center's goals of promoting a healthy living.

The founder and medical director of CBCC, Ravi Patel, M.D., FACP, has noticed a lack of supportive care programs for cancer patients. According to Dr. Patel, patients are often left with very little empowerment and ability to structure a new lifestyle for themselves.

"Our programs and our expansion [are] geared toward addressing the needs that patients have. So they can go out and live a normal life with a feeling of wellness, and feeling good about what has come into their life," Dr. Patel said. "We give them skills, for example; survivorship skills that help them learn what they need to do as cancer survivors to live life in a very meaningful way."

In addition to the infusion center expansion, the new center will feature preventative programs focused on mind-body techniques, such as: yoga, healthy cooking classes, meditation, and other wellness practices.

"We are really very excited for this partnership with Dignity Health, which has continued to allow us to bring further care to the community, and combine the services with both inpatient cancer care and outpatient care," Dr. Patel said. ■



"OUR PROGRAMS AND OUR EXPANSION IS GEARED TOWARD ADDRESSING THE NEEDS THAT PATIENTS HAVE SO THEY CAN GO OUT AND LIVE A NORMAL LIFE WITH A FEELING OF WELLNESS AND FEELING GOOD ABOUT WHAT HAS COME INTO THEIR LIFE."

—Dr. Ravi Patel, Founder and Medical Director of CBCC



Bakersfield Memorial Hospital Foundation

LAUREN SMALL Children's Medical Center

FROM PATIENT TO AMBASSADOR

A LIFE SAVED THROUGH LOCAL DONATIONS PUTS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL IN THE NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT

When you walk into the Lauren Small Children's Medical Center at Memorial Hospital, the eye can't help but be drawn to gleaming examples of the most advanced, life-saving technology the world has to offer.

There are Giraffe OmniBeds that simplify care of newborns with the combination of a full-featured incubator with a radiant warmer. There are vein detection devices that see through the skin to allow nurses to locate a child's tiny and fragile veins. Elsewhere inside, specially designed oscillators take care of intensive care breathing needs, and portable ultrasound devices bring high-quality imaging efficiently to the patient's bedside.

Throughout this 'hospital within

a hospital,' much of the vitally needed equipment for the 31-bed Level II Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, the eight-bed Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, and the 20-bed Pediatric Unit, exists in large part because of donations made locally through the Children's Miracle Network Hospitals (CMNH). An international non-profit organization, CMNH raises funds for children's hospitals, medical research, and community awareness of children's health issues.

Now, the first comprehensive pediatric program in Kern County has reached another impressive milestone with the announcement that Chiann Wheeler, whose life was saved at the Lauren Small Children's Medical Center

after contracting toxic shock syndrome, has been named the California CMNH Champion Ambassador for 2015.

Each year, CMNH member hospitals across the U.S. make nominations for their state's ambassador by submitting the story of a former patient's bravery and the hospital's role in helping the child battle a serious illness or injury.

Chiann's story began when she was brought to Memorial Hospital with a temperature of 102 degrees and what was thought to be severe food poisoning. Through fast action of the emergency nurses, and a quick diagnosis of septic shock due to toxic shock syndrome by Dr. David Merzel, a pediatric intensivist, Chiann was moved into the Pediatric

Intensive Care Unit where her difficult, but ultimately successful, recovery began.

While Chiann and her family give credit to the hospital's staff, they are also thankful for the donations to CMNH that helped equip the only Pediatric Intensive Care Unit between Los Angeles and Madera. "The great thing is that every donation made locally stays locally," said Chris Wheeler, father of Chiann. "It means a lot to families and parents to know we

Lady, and will get together with their local legislators on Capitol Hill, as well as media and representatives from some of the largest companies in North America.

In February 2016, CMNH Champions fly to Orlando, Florida to participate in the National Children's Miracle Network Hospitals Momentum Conference at Walt Disney World. In an emotionally charged medal ceremony, they will receive an award from Miss America and "America's

Nilon said. "Plus, this is the first time in our hospital's 24-year partnership with CMNH that a Champion was chosen from our market. This is even more significant since we were competing among California's eight other CMNH member hospitals, most of which are stand-alone children's hospitals."

Nilon is also proud that Chiann Wheeler, after going through one of life's most traumatic experiences, is tackling

"My main goal is to spread awareness about what I had, to let people know it's still something they can get. And I want to raise as much as I can for CMNH so more families can be treated here and not sent to other places." —Chiann Wheeler, California Children's Miracle Network Hospital Champion Ambassador 2015

have the same facilities and capabilities here that other hospitals have elsewhere. And not only that, it brings us an upper level of doctors."

Opened in 2012 with the help of community donations to CMNH, Memorial Hospital's Pediatric Intensive Care Unit has meant that fewer critically ill children in need of advanced medical support are transported by ambulance or helicopter to receive treatment. Parents no longer have to bear the burden of paying for lodging and meals, losing time at work, and arranging for the needs of other children still at home.

For Chiann, that distinction played an important role in her recovery. "If I had to have been flown out, it would have made it a lot harder," she said. "Instead, I had visitors every day and my family there for me. Because I didn't have to go somewhere else, I got that special care and they had all the equipment here for me."

As California's Champion Ambassador, Chiann plans on using her position to become an advocate for CMNH and to bring the dangers of toxic shock to light. "My main goal is to spread awareness about what I had, to let people know it's still something they can get," Chiann said. "And I want to raise as much as I can for CMNH so more families can be treated here and not sent to other places."

This June, Chiann will travel with Champion Ambassadors from each state, to Washington D.C. and to the nation's capital for a weeklong tour. While there, she will visit the White House and meet either the President of the United States or the First



Got Talent" host, Nick Cannon, as well as attend a private concert from a surprise celebrity/singer.

For Lourdes Vargas Nilon, manager of Children's Miracle Network Hospitals for the Bakersfield Memorial Foundation, her submission, and eventual selection, of Chiann Wheeler as California's Champion Ambassador represents a triumph on many levels.

"What I loved about Chiann's story is how it was a true coordinated effort of all the departments and staff that make up the Lauren Small Children's Medical Center,"

a new role where her courage can inspire others. "I think she's going to be a perfect ambassador to represent all the CMNH California hospitals," she said. "Because we're all in this together; we're all in this to save children's lives with the best medical care." ■

CHILDREN'S MIRACLE NETWORK HOSPITALS

Children's Miracle Network Hospitals raises funds and awareness for 170 member hospitals that provide 32 million treatments each year to kids across the U.S. and Canada. Donations stay local to fund critical treatments and health care services, pediatric medical equipment, and charitable care. Since 1983, Children's Miracle Network Hospitals has raised more than \$5 billion, most of it \$1 at a time through the charity's Miracle Balloon icon. CMNH's various fundraising partners and programs support the nonprofit's mission to save and improve the lives of as many children as possible.

CMNH helps to open doors for Memorial Hospital's Foundation to partner in fundraising efforts with national and local businesses and organizations who know that every dollar donated will stay here to fulfill the vision of providing the highest possible level of pediatric medical care in Kern County. ■



GO RED POR TU CORAZÓN

EMPOWERING LATINA WOMEN AND INSPIRING HEART HEALTH

What would you do to protect your heart? Anything. Right? What many people do not realize is that their day-to-day living habits don't always generate the best results for their heart health. That's why Go Red Por Tu Corazón,

County, Dignity Health Mercy and Memorial Hospitals have joined forces with the American Heart Association to sponsor the Go Red Por Tu Corazón luncheon that helps engage and educate women and their families on heart health.

breakout sessions, including a healthy cooking demonstration, a heart healthy panel discussion, a healthy financial future presentation, and an interactive Zumba basics lesson.

The GRPTC luncheon's survivor

“Less than half of Latina women know that cardiovascular disease is their number one killer.”

—Julie Liebel, executive director, Kern County American Heart Association

a sister cause of Go Red For Women, empowers Latina women to be proactive about a heart-healthy lifestyle.

Knowing that heart disease is the number one cause of death in Latina women and is a silent killer in Kern

This year on Friday, May 1, Go Red Por Tu Corazón held a bilingual luncheon and fashion show at the DoubleTree Hilton Hotel. With 330 attendees, the event had almost double the amount of guests from 2014. The luncheon featured four

speaker, Hilda Tarwater, gave a moving speech about her experience with a heart attack at the young age of 33. Hilda spoke about facing the shocking reality that her life may end too soon, leaving behind a husband and a daughter. Now, one year



Go Red Por Tu Corazón attendees danced their hearts out during a Zumba breakout session.



American Heart Association®



por tu corazón™

later, Hilda hopes to empower other Latina women to take care of their heart, and to act fast when they are experiencing symptoms of a heart attack.

“Less than half of Latina women know that cardiovascular disease is their number one killer,” said Julie Liebel, executive director of the American Heart Association in Kern County. “That is why we started this program in Bakersfield with Dignity Health and why we are ecstatic that it has been so well received. The event sold-out this year, and we will continue expanding to reach as many women as possible.”

At the end of the luncheon,

125 attendees committed to joining Camadres de Corazón (Godmothers by Heart) with a \$25 donation in order to stay engaged with the GRPTC campaign year-round.

Go Red Por Tu Corazón and Go Red for Women aim for residents of Kern County to be active in their heart health. Remember—a strong heart is a healthy heart, and a healthy heart gives you the chance to spend more time creating traditions with your family. ■

For resources and to sign up for the Go Red Por Tu Corazón movement, visit: www.Heart.org



The Humility of Humankindness

A Dignity Health cancer patient is nominated for a *Hello humankindness* award for the joy she brings to other patients



Have you experienced an act of kindness or know of someone who does kind things for others?

We want to know about it! Dignity Health and KGET/Telemundo are celebrating humankindness by asking you to share your stories. Log on to kerngoldenempire.com and tell us about the good stuff happening in Kern County.

Many of us live what we consider to be simple lives; we aren't jet setters, we haven't made revolutionary scientific discoveries, and we might not be "movers and shakers." We are here to live our days the best we can, hoping to make an impact if even only in small ways. What we may not realize is that our very existence is more valuable to those around us than we give ourselves credit for. Take Ann Press.

Ann believes her life is small, yet the effect she has on the people around her is anything but. Ann is a patient at Dignity Health Memorial Hospital's Infusion Center at the Comprehensive Blood and Cancer Center, and a recent *Hello humankindness* award nominee. While she fought and won a battle against breast cancer several years ago, she now fights against inoperable stomach cancer.

Nearly every morning since September 2013, Ann has assumed her position in one of the "pods" at the infusion center to receive chemotherapy or hydration. While many people might feel sorry for themselves, or dread such invasive treatments, Ann does so looking forward to the conversations, the laughs, and the heart-to-hearts she is bound to have with the nurses, staff, and other patients.

"I've met wonderful people at the center, but I'm not the type of person to say 'I'm glad I got cancer because all these good things that have happened.' Nope, I could have passed this up and found other ways to meet these people," laughed Ann. "But I have met some wonderful people; people who are inspirational and brave. And we're in it together as a family."

Ann was recently nominated and featured on KGET as a *Hello humankindness* nominee because of her dear friend and fellow Dignity Health patient, Paris Byington.

"I nominated her because she doesn't

deserve cancer," Paris said. "Ann is a light on the world and it is a better place having her in it. She's so sweet, so loving, non-judgmental, and she wants to know everybody. I always get a hug when I get there and I always get a hug when I leave."

When Paris first heard about the *Hello humankindness* campaign, she originally thought it was meant for people who volunteer or do physically measurable deeds, but she nominated Ann anyway. She is so glad she did. "Physically, Ann can give us nothing, but what she does give us is priceless," Paris said, holding back tears as she described what she wrote on the application. "Everybody gets her love. She



Ann Press, fourth from the left, stands with other CBCC patients, who she considers part of her family.

"I have met some wonderful people; people who are inspirational and brave. And we're in it together as a family."

—Ann Press, Dignity Health and CBCC patient

doesn't even have to say a word, all she has to do is smile and she makes somebody's day."

Ann believes any one of her fellow "pod mates" could have been nominated as well. "It seems as though good people recommend other people for things, and that's what my friend did. She gave me credit for doing what we all do—for trying to help other people, for talking to them, for trying to make them laugh, to find some good in the day."

It is these relationships, along with


her faith, that help Ann through even her most difficult days. Because of her treatment and the severity of her cancer, she can no longer drive, she walks with a walker, and she is fed with liquid nutrients. Many days she relies on her friends for support and is so grateful for the bonds she has formed with the staff and patients at the infusion center.

"It's a joy for me to go to the cancer center and see the nurses that I love," Ann said. "I get a hug, and get to visit with them for a few hours, or meet someone new and share our experiences while we're going through this. I just love learning about other people."

Life's simplest, yet most meaningful pleasures keep Ann's days bright. She enjoys writing and frequently sends out journals to her friends, sharing about her experiences with cancer and how thankful she is for each new day she's blessed with.

"I've never been a world traveler or have wanted to zip line through Columbia or anything like that," Ann said. "Those who want to go off and sail the Seven Seas, I think they should, but I'm content being at home cleaning up my house, though I don't do it as well as I used to. I guess you could say I have an ordinary life, or a small life, but I'm happy with it."

Humankindness isn't always displayed in dramatic ways or in "viral" moments. Sometimes it comes from people with humble circumstances, but it means more to those touched by it than can be expressed through words or through any form of mass media. In the midst of unimaginable suffering, and in moments when Ann can hardly help herself, she has brought light and joy to an entire center of nurses, doctors, and patients. That is humankindness in its purest form. ■



Dignity Health employee, Michelle Willow (R), is thankful for her colleague, Michele Shain (L), director of Neuro and Cardiac Services for Dignity Health Memorial Hospital, who responded quickly to her stroke symptoms.

STROKE OF LUCK

A DIGNITY HEALTH EMPLOYEE LEARNS MEANING OF BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

It's quite easy to believe that the people who are in the business of providing health care are more likely to pay close attention to their own well being. Especially in a hospital's marketing department, where the job includes informing the community about health risks, ways to make positive lifestyle changes, tools to manage chronic diseases, and how to get connected to the doctors and services people may need to stay healthy.

But for Michelle Willow, marketing and communications manager at Dignity Health Mercy and Memorial Hospitals, the phrase 'practice what you preach' became a frightening reality one morning in September of 2013 when she suddenly felt the onslaught of a powerful headache.

"It was the strangest headache I had ever experienced; the entire morning I felt disoriented, dizzy, and confused,

slurring my words, and sometimes not even responding when someone asked me questions," Michelle remembered. "I joked all morning with my colleagues 'I think I'm having a stroke.'"

Michelle went home early and soon fell asleep. The next morning she felt better, but noticed something odd while getting ready for work. "Every time I looked in the mirror, something seemed off," Michelle said. "It was subtle, but there was something off about my face."

Arriving at her office, she picked up the phone and called Michele Shain, director of Neuro and Cardiac Services for Dignity Health Memorial Hospital. "Michelle and I are nearly best friends, and I happen to be the stroke program director here," Shain recounted. "She called and said 'I don't feel very good.' I went to see her and she explained to me that her face felt kind

of numb, she felt like she was walking strange."

Shain immediately started an indirect neuro assessment as she would for any stroke patient. "I asked 'can you raise your eyebrows for me, smile and show me your teeth, hold your arms up?' When I asked her to smile for me, I realized she had facial droop," Shain said.

Realizing her good friend was having a stroke, Shain insisted they head immediately to the emergency department. Michelle wanted to walk rather than use a wheelchair, and Shain witnessed more confirmation to her initial diagnosis.

"I could see that she had weakness on one side because it was difficult for her to walk in a straight line, like in a sobriety test," Shain said. "I was holding her arm and Michelle said 'I don't feel like I know where the floor is.'"

The attending physician quickly performed an evaluation and ordered a complete ischemic stroke workup. Over the next several hours, Michelle went through a series of tests, including CT scans, MRI, ultrasounds, and X-rays. The results confirmed that Michelle had suffered a TIA (mini-stroke) and that she had carotid stenosis: a 95 percent blockage in her right carotid artery, one of two large blood vessels that supply oxygenated blood to the large, front part of the brain. Told of the diagnosis, Michelle was shocked. “I thought ‘What? How can that be? I’m too young!’” she said.

Shain says carotid stenosis is a common culprit for causing a TIA mini-stroke. “But Michelle’s blockage being at such a critical level is a bit unusual, especially given someone who’s only 48,” she added. “A good takeaway from all this is that strokes can happen to young people, too, so they shouldn’t discount symptoms because they believe

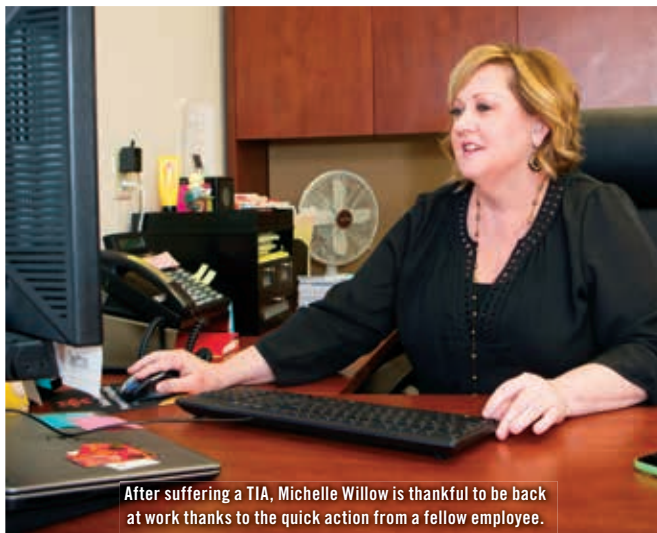
those symptoms,” Shain said.

Michelle spent the next six weeks recovering, but felt she was on an emotional roller coaster. “I was afraid of everything; I was so afraid of dying that I was afraid to live,” she remembers. “I asked ‘how did I get here? What do I do now? Why did this happen to me?’ But I already knew the answers. I knew the risk factors, the

of her neck. But the cholesterol and blood pressure medications and aspirin are a daily reminder that she has been given a second chance. Michelle says she has learned to not over-extend herself, and is spending more time with the people she loves.

“If you wait until tomorrow to live your life, it may be too late,” Michelle said. “I never got the idea of the bucket list until this happened; now I totally get it. Go see Fleetwood Mac? Check that off the list. Next up: Ireland. But no jumping out of a plane; I’m not crazy.”

Shain is thrilled how Michelle has taken control of her life and how far she has come from that day they walked unsteadily to the emergency department. “As a nurse, I know bad stuff can happen sometimes and here was my friend; I knew what she was up against,” Shain said. “She was terrified. But it scared her enough to make some lifestyle changes and manage her risk factors. I’m really proud of her; she’s done a



After suffering a TIA, Michelle Willow is thankful to be back at work thanks to the quick action from a fellow employee.

“The vascular surgeon told me I was a lucky girl. I was a week, maybe two, away from a massive stroke.”

—Michelle Willow, Marketing & Communications Manager at Dignity Health - Mercy & Memorial Hospitals

they’re in an age range where it doesn’t apply to them.”

Her situation was severe enough to require immediate admittance to the hospital, and two days later, Michelle underwent a carotid endarterectomy, a surgical procedure to remove the plaque material, or blockage, in the lining of her artery, constricted by the buildup of deposits.

“The vascular surgeon told me I was a lucky girl. I was a week, maybe two, away from a massive stroke. I had dodged a bullet.” Michelle said.

According to Shain, TIA symptoms are like a greeting card, an invitation letting you know something’s wrong, which is why anyone who has them should never delay getting medical attention. “Because about 50 percent of patients who have their first TIA go on in the next 12 months to have a total ischemic stroke, it’s really important to identify symptoms early, get a workup, identify the risk factors and the causation of

signs, and my family history. I knew my cholesterol was dangerously high, that I was too stressed, and I wasn’t taking the time to care for myself.”

Today, Michelle barely notices the scar that runs from her ear to the center

good job and I know it’s not easy.”

Michelle also feels lucky to be working in a hospital with a certified stroke center and a good friend nearby who knew immediately what was wrong. While Shain is flattered, she cautions that not everyone has a best friend who is a medical professional. “That’s why it’s important to be your own advocate, learn the signs and symptoms of stroke, understand what your risk factors are, know what your blood pressure is, what your lipid profile is,” she said.

“This year for Mother’s Day, my son bought me a necklace with a four leaf clover,” Michelle said. “It continually reminds me how fortunate I am to have friends like Michele and how lucky I am to be a part of the Dignity Health family. My job is to share stories, but I never thought it would be my own. If there is someone out there who is ignoring the signs that something is wrong, I truly hope my story will inspire them to take action right away.” ■

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF STROKE: F.A.S.T.

Face Drooping – Does one side of the face droop, or is numb? Ask them to smile.

Arm Weakness – Is one arm weak, or numb? Ask them to hold out their arms.

Speech Difficulty – Is speech slurred? Ask them to repeat a simple sentence.

Time – Time to call 9-1-1 and get them to a Certified Stroke Center immediately. Check the time you first noticed the symptoms so you can tell the emergency medical team.

To take our free online Stroke Risk Assessment, visit: ChooseMercyMemorial.org/

Dignity Health
PO Box 119
Bakersfield, CA 93302

Nonprofit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Bakersfield, CA
Permit No. 294



Schedule your mammogram with the click of a mouse.

Online scheduling now available
at the Women's Imaging Center
at Mercy Hospital Southwest.

Schedule your mammogram online at:
ChooseMercyMemorial.com

POWERED BY
InQuicker



Dignity Health[™]
Mercy & Memorial Hospitals