## celebrateGIVING

Spring 2022 | Issue 12

## ratitude grief

Healing Patch Coordinator & Her Family's Hospice Journey



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: Upcoming Events | Same-Day Joint Replacement Pediatric Home Connection | UPMC Dignity & Respect Winner



## aligning excellence

A MESSAGE FROM PAULA THOMAS

It is always a joy to welcome spring in West Central Pennsylvania! I hope this Spring 2022 issue of *Celebrate Giving* finds you well.

The vitality of this season is reflected in the story of Maggie Conrad, who credited her UPMC Home Healthcare Physical Therapist Dave Wyland with helping her recover after same-day hip replacement surgery.

Maggie's perseverance reminds me of young Sophie, our Pediatric Home Connection patient who lives with spina bifada. Her larger-than-life personality fuels her confidence to push through hard things – like managing the cumbersome braces that allow her to walk and stand. This has been made easier with her BILLY zipper shoes that were purchased through your support of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation.

Our Healing Patch Coordinator Melody Ray is no stranger to walking through hard times. Similar to the work of the Healing Patch, she opens the door for conversation and comfort by graciously sharing her own story. She welcomes us into her experience with her mom's Family Hospice journey and her own grief and gratitude.

Being grateful in the midst of difficult circumstances gives us perspective and hope. As healthcare evolves, our team is continually challenged to do more with less. I am grateful for our dedicated team members who are working tirelessly to meet the needs of those in our community.

One of our special team members is Michelle Wysong, Case Manager for the AIDS Intervention Project and volunteer for the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program. Michelle was selected as a 2021 UPMC Dignity & Respect Champion for the exceptional way she leads by example to create an environment where everyone feels included, valued, and appreciated.

Our community steps up each year to make others feel included by meeting their physical needs. This year, the Home Nursing Agency Foundation's Mercedes Moment fundraiser is celebrating 20 years of changing lives. Your support of Mercedes Moment and other donations benefit the children, adults, and families who receive our services.

Because of you, WIC families are accessing formula as nationwide recalls have created shortages in WICparticipating grocery stores. Because of you, UPMC Home Healthcare patients can get grab bars that help to prevent falls and unnecessary hospitalizations. Because of you, Family Hospice families have sheets, bed pads, and other necessary items to care for someone at the end of their life.

You lighten the burden for many in our care and give them a reason to be grateful. For that, I say, "Thank you."

Sincerely,

Jula Thomas

Paula Thomas President, UPMC Home Healthcare & Family Hospice

## UPCOMING EVENTS



#### **Mercedes Moment**

#### Thursday, May 19, 2022

A \$100 ticket gives you a chance to win a 2019 Mercedes A 220 or \$30,000 cash\*. The winner is based on the first 3-digit PA Lottery on Thursday, May 19 at 7:00 p.m. (excludes Wild Ball). Only 1,000 tickets are sold!

To purchase a ticket, call 1-855-GIVE-HNA or visit HomeNursingAgency.com to download a ticket order form.

#### Mercedes Moment Night at the Altoona Curve

Each Mercedes Moment ticket buyer receives a voucher admitting TWO people to Peoples Natural Gas Field for the Altoona Curve home game on May 19.

\*If winner chooses car, winner must pay sales tax and title and transfer fees. Price of ticket is not tax deductible. Taxes are not included. Players must be 18 years or older.

#### **Decades Club**

*Reverse Raffle Drawing & America's Greatest Music to Benefit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program* 

#### Saturday, October 8, 2022

Blair County Convention Center, Altoona

A \$100 ticket includes one chance for cash prizes (need not be present to win) and admission for two for appetizers, dinner, drinks, and entertainment. Only 250 tickets will be sold with more than \$4,500 in cash prizes, include a \$3,000 grand prize. Other exciting games of chance will be available throughout the night, and all proceeds benefit the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program!

To purchase a ticket, call 1-855-GIVE-HNA or visit HomeNursingAgency.com.

## WAYS TO HELP

You can make a difference for residents of our West Central PA region who receive UPMC Home Healthcare, Family Hospice, or other services by donating to the Home Nursing Agency Foundation.

Return the enclosed envelope with your donation or give securely online at HomeNursingAgency.com. You can also call the Foundation hotline at 1-855-GIVE-HNA to donate by credit card. For more information about ways you can help, please contact Kim Helsel, Director of Development/ Marketing Communications, at 814-947-7024 or khelsel@HomeNursingAgency.com.

The official registration and financial information of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. If you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact the Home Nursing Agency Foundation at 1-855-GIVE-HNA.



## WHEN THE GRIEF IS YOURS: Facing Death As A Grief Specialist

This is an abbreviated version of a blog post shared by Melody Ray, Healing Patch Coordinator. Read the full post online at HomeNursingAgency.com/blog/

### giving perspective

I would like to start with a disclaimer. This is my personal and unique grief journey. There is no exact right way to grieve and no exact road map to follow. This is simply my path and perspectives gained.

Over the past decade, I have companioned families through their grief journeys, listening, supporting, validating, and connecting them to others facing similar losses and feelings by attending a peer support group. My prior work in child welfare, foster care, and adoption also dove into the world of losses. My social work career has been transformative, and I consider it a privilege to support others during difficult life transitions and losses. I found myself in this place of life transition and loss in December 2020 when my own mom was benefiting from Family Hospice care in her home.

#### "Death Is Part of life"

My mom was an introspective person. When I was a young child, she explained death to me in this way: "Our bodies are like a shell of a nut. They get discarded, but the special stuff inside the nut (our souls) is what lives on long after our bodies or shells are no longer needed." This analogy remains clear in my mind and continues to be a part of conversations I have had with my own daughters and with Healing Patch families. As my mom experienced close deaths in her life, she maintained the attitude of "Death is a part of life." With time I realized that my mom wasn't negating grief but rather acknowledging the normalcy of it and to take comfort in this.

#### **Family Hospice Journey**

Mom's several-year cancer journey resulted in the cancer metastasizing to her brain and other organs. She decided to start Family Hospice care at home in early December 2020 when treatments were failing, and recovery was no longer viable. Family Hospice provided the medical equipment, medication, and knowledge to aid us in this journey. The choice for hospice was a natural one. Hospice care is not about giving up hope; it is about recognizing that death is inevitable and the value of prioritizing how time is spent. My mom chose to have a peaceful death at home surrounded by loved ones' voices and hand holds instead of dinging machines and strangers' voices. I am thankful she had the opportunity to make this choice and that our family was able to make this possible.



#### **Anticipatory Grief and Being a Caregiver**

From the time of her prognosis, I went through anticipatory grief. I treasured holidays, birthdays, family gatherings, walks, shopping trips, and talks even more so. The weeks prior to her death I laid on her lap and sobbed. I was present as my mom faced her mortality by encouraging visitors to pick out a knickknack from her shelves and went through a period that I describe as hyper-spiritual agitation. She stayed up for 24 hours straight journaling God's blessings and spiritual words of wisdom. This was quite the experience for my siblings, our families, and me that ultimately ended in peace for my mom.

My siblings and I took on the caregiver role for mom's care. Mom was always kind and loving, showing appreciation, and making statements such as, "Thank you for loving me." As a retired nurse aide, I felt she knew how difficult caregiving is, and she did everything in her power to make the role more manageable. I wanted her for so many more days, but her body had other plans. As her quality of life declined, I understood that death was ok, for this was no way for a body to live. Mom died on December 29, 2020, surrounded by family. Her last words to my 11-year-old daughter hours prior to her death was, "I love you bunches." My daughter included this sentiment in the note she wrote to be placed in my mom's casket.

#### **Coping and Finding Joy**

The day my mom died I found the need to take a walk in the woods. I went back to early grief and life skills training to remind myself of the importance of self-care. I took deep breaths of the fresh air and felt the cool breeze and the brightness of the sun on my face. I allowed the tears to flow as they needed to flow and smiled when I needed to smile. In the depths of my pain, I allowed myself to feel the world around me and took comfort that despite my pain, the world somehow seemed to go on.

On my walk I came across a young couple in love holding hands, giggling, and enjoying each other's company. We crossed paths with a friendly "hello" and ended up at the hike's destination – a lovely waterfall – about the same time. They were taking photos of the waterfall, and I asked them if they wanted me to snap a photo of them together with the background of the flowing waterfall. They excitedly agreed, thanking me. Amid my grief and sadness, seeing the beauty of young love spouting in front of me and allowing that joy to enter my heart was quite moving.

I have learned there is no "grief expiration date." The pain will come and go; the loss is lifelong. There are no quick five or six steps for forever healing. I allow joyful moments when I can and don't overlook them. The grief will be there again, but I don't allow it to paralyze other life-fulfilling emotions. The day humbled me by seeing the beauty in the world. By showing kindness, we continue to carry the essence of the ones who are no longer with us.

#### **Gratitude and Grief**

Gratitude is the one theme in my personal grief journey. Gratitude for every family that allowed me to companion them on their grief journeys because they helped formulate my own perspectives. Gratitude for the oncologists and Family Hospice doctors, nurses, and social workers who provided my mom's care. Gratitude for the knowledge and wisdom imparted by my mom. Gratitude for the 42 years I had a mom on this earth. Gratitude for family and friends who supported us. Gratitude that I could be there and that I could support her through others' supporting me. Gratitude for memories made, love given, and love living on. Gratitude for the ongoing rhythm of life: sunrises, sunsets, snowflakes, spring flowers, new lives, loves, and beginnings. Gratitude with the understanding that life is loss and change.



For more information about Family Hospice, visit upmc.com/FamilyHospice or call 1-800-445-6262. For more information about the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program, visit HomeNursingAgency.com or call 1-800-445-6262.





A Living Legacy

Melody's family chose to honor her mom's life by requesting that donations be made to Family Hospice. Family members and friends made memorial contributions that, funneled through the Home Nursing Agency Foundation, are used to benefit other Family Hospice patients and caregivers. These donations provide necessities like medical or safety equipment not covered by insurance, quality of life experiences, special recognition of patients who are veterans, bereavement resources, and more.

Memorial donations can also be accepted for the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program. These gifts support the sustainability of this free service for grieving children and their families.

All donations are acknowledged with a letter, and family members are notified that a gift has been made in their loved one's memory.

For more information about memorial contributions, please contact Kim Helsel, Director of Development/ Marketing Communications at khelsel@ HomeNursingAgency.com or 814-947-7024.

### giving movement

## UPMC Home Healthcare Allows Same-Day Joint Replacement Patients To Recover Better At Home

After a positive experience with her left hip replacement and recovery in 2017, Maggie Conrad of Altoona prepared to repeat the process for her right hip in November 2021. She was ready for surgery by Dr. Adrian Clayton of UPMC Altoona Elite Orthopaedics and recovering at home with UPMC Home Healthcare and her Physical Therapist Dave Wyland.

This time, however, she returned home hours after surgery instead of the next day. Her physical health made her a prime candidate for same-day surgery, which requires close collaboration of the teams at UPMC Altoona Elite Orthopedics, UPMC Altoona, and UPMC Home Healthcare.

"There are a lot of moving parts to coordinate, and everyone is starting to get them down," Dave says. The UPMC Home Healthcare team received text updates as Maggie was in recovery so that her physical therapist and nurse could meet her at home. The first therapy visit focused on safety: escorting her inside, ensuring home safety, and teaching her how to transfer and move with assistive devices and manage her pain. "Compared to my first surgery, I liked being home," Maggie shares. "It's a lot quieter at home, and I slept much better than at the hospital." Upon returning home, her UPMC Home Healthcare nurse hooked up intravenous antibiotics, and a nurse came the next morning to administer the final dose of antibiotics and remove the IV. With nursing visits complete, Dave began working Maggie through a rigorous therapy protocol, and she gained range of motion and strength with each day.

"Physically, the recovery is similar for same-day patients and those who stay overnight in the hospital," Dave observes. "Psychologically, emotionally, and comfort-wise, people recover better at home. Nobody wants to be in the hospital if they don't have to be. I have not yet seen an infection in a same-day joint patient. It seems the sooner the patients get home in their own environment, the better they recover."





Just months after getting her new hip, Maggie had resumed her active lifestyle, including daily rides on the stationary bike and walks on the treadmill. When she received a form to make a donation in thanks to someone on her UPMC Home Healthcare team, she immediately knew who to recognize with a Heart of Gratitude pin.

"Dave put me at ease and never pushed me to do something I couldn't but encouraged me," Maggie says. "He answered my many questions and gave suggestions for continued healing. The physical therapy was such an important part of my recovery."

To learn more about UPMC Home Healthcare, visit upmchomehealthcare.com or call 1-800-445-6262.





## giving movement

## Pediatric Home Connection, Home Nursing Agency Foundation Enhance Quality of Life

Before she was born, Sophie's family knew she was going to have spina bifada. What they didn't know was how her spunky personality would allow her to face this chronic condition with determination and a smile.

Having gone through nearly ten surgeries since she was born in June 2018, Sophie perseveres daily through the challenges of her limited mobility. While her parents work, Sophie is in the care of a Pediatric Home Connection nurse, usually Janine, or "Neener" as Sophie calls her. Janine accompanies Sophie to school at the IU8 and has been integral in continuing her exercises so that she gains strength and independence.

Wearing shoes is important for Sophie's stability, but traditional shoes don't fit her braces and are very difficult to put on. This process was significantly improved through your support of the Home Nursing Agency Foundation. Grant funding purchased a stylish pair of BILLY shoes with zippers so that Janine and Sophie's parents can put on her shoes more easily and encourage her to walk and stand.

Pediatric Home Connection cares for patients from birth through age 21 in Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Centre, Clearfield, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Indiana, Juniata, Mifflin, and Somerset counties. To learn more about services, visit HomeNursingAgency. com or call 814-942-4239.

To donate to the Home Nursing Agency Foundation, return your donation in the enclosed envelope, visit HomeNursingAgency.com, or call 1-855-GIVE-HNA.



## giving respect

## AIDS Intervention Project Case Manager Recognized as UPMC Dignity & Respect Champion

Michelle Wysong, Case Manager for the AIDS Intervention Project (AIP) and volunteer with the Healing Patch Children's Grief Program, was one of only 15 employees throughout UPMC selected as a 2021 Dignity & Respect Champion.

Her colleague and AIP Nutritionist Katherine Haar nominated Michelle for this recognition. This excerpt explains why she was selected:

"Michelle works exclusively with low-income people living with HIV. Many of her clients have different races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations than she does. Michelle is always working to understand people who are different from her. She attends trainings, then thinks deeply about the content and how she can improve. She listens deeply to clients then acts. Even when she doesn't have all the facts and there's no clear path forward, Michelle problem solves and uses her resources, keeping clients' best interests at heart the entire time.

Among Michelle's recent clients was Tim\*, who was new to the area, originally from Mexico, and undocumented. Michelle learned to use UPMC's translation services, and she assisted with his housing while working to find him permanent housing. She made sure he had the medications and doctor's appointments he needed while dealing with an insurance she had never worked with before. She helped him with issues of child custody and visitation. She researched and coordinated a class for him for English as a second language. Michelle assessed his unique needs and did everything she could for him.

Now, hanging in her office, there is a brightly colored painting of an elephant done by Tim himself, with the words 'Gracias Michelle!' scrawled on it. Every day Michelle brings to work her whole self – her gentleness, compassion, and tenacity. She is a true Dignity and Respect Champion."

#### \*Name has been changed.

To learn more about the AIDS Intervention Project, visit HomeNursingAgency.com or call 814-944-2982.

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We create a safe environment where quality is our guiding principle.

#### **QUALITY & SAFETY**

We treat all individuals with dignity and respect.

#### **DIGNITY & RESPECT**

We listen to and care for our patients, our health plan members, our fellow employees, our physicians, and our community.

#### **CARING & LISTENING**

We perform our work with the highest le of responsibility and integrity.

#### **RESPONSIBILITY & INTE**

We think creatively and build excellence to everything that we do.

#### **CELLENCE & INNOVATIO**

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### givingthanks

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The generosity of community partners – individuals, businesses, local governments, and organizations – helps to ensure that our mission of providing care and services for those in need will continue.

#### Every dollar matters. Every gift has a story.

The following donations of \$25 or more were received July 1, 2021 -December 31, 2021.

Thank you to the following donors who have helped make a difference in the lives of our neighbors and our communities.

We apologize for any errors or omissions to this list.

Every effort is made to assure that proper information is recorded. Please call the Home Nursing Agency Foundation at 1-855-GIVE-HNA to make us aware of any corrections or changes.

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