From the desk of the CMO

Where Did the Time Go?

Spike Lipschutz, MD, Chief Medical Officer

“Wasn’t it just Friday?” We hear that comment, which is more of a statement than a question, often lately as the weeks just seem to fly by. The more common phrase used to be “TGIF” when the workweek was stressful or particularly challenging.

To many of our dedicated hospital and medical staff members, it seems as if early March was just a few days ago. As of the time of this writing, Yale New Haven Health had cared for 4,028 COVID patients within a few months, an astounding number of patients to have with the same overall diagnosis. Greenwich Hospital cared for 678 of these patients. The disease attacked many different organ systems and physiologic processes of our patients in ways that fascinated, confounded and challenged us.

Huge resources, both human and system, were dedicated to tackling this ‘plague.’ COVID brought ALL of our disciplines together, and our staffs performed outstanding clinical care. In prior newsletters, we identified every department in our hospital for their incredible contributions during the continued pandemic battle. Unfortunately, 579 patients throughout Yale New Haven Health have died from complications from COVID, sadly 77 of them were at Greenwich Hospital.

“It’s hard to believe it’s July,” is another common phrase we are hearing this month. It seems as if it was only yesterday that we were knee deep in donning PPE to treat COVID patients. Only yesterday, we looked down the halls of our medical and surgical units and saw new people and new and unfamiliar equipment. Only yesterday, we were having seven-day-a-week COVID clinical rounds and hospital incident command meetings. Only yesterday, our lobby was filled with 17,000 meals donated from community supporters.

Hospitals are always caring for patients – every day of the year, day and night. But usually, the nights are a bit quieter than the days and the weekends quieter than weekdays. Not so for the past several months. The intensity and compassion of care was blind to the time of day or day of the week. We wait for the “next wave,” but right now we have more of a sense of normal. Surgeries and outpatient procedures have increased, heading back to the pre-COVID volumes. Non-COVID patients are once again occupying the vast majority of our beds. Our transformation is progressing forward as we strive to return to life as usual. Walking through the same halls, though, feels somehow different. We were always family,

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but now the family is stronger and more confident as we have grown in our competencies and in our confidence with each other. New relationships have been forged. New appreciations have come from our working so closely with one another. And it seems as if it happened in a flash.

Many of our staff have had little or no real time off. For some, a day or two off felt like a mini-vacation, such was the difference in the intensity of their work day versus the respite and sanctuary of home. Yesterday was early March and today is late July. Let’s look back in awe of our accomplishments, and look forward to some restful and recuperative days and weeks. Thank each other and I offer my thanks to you all. Job well done.

Wallace Family Foundation grants $5M endowment for neuroscience named director position

Greenwich Hospital received an endowment gift to establish “The Jean and David W. Wallace Medical Director Neurovascular Surgery Program at Greenwich Hospital.”

The $5 million gift will create a permanent footprint for neuroscience-specific patient care, research, and education at Greenwich Hospital. It will have an immediate impact in the delivery of innovative techniques for treating patients with stroke, carotid disease, brain aneurysms and vascular malformations of the brain and spinal cord. Patients needing neurosurgery for brain tumors, adult-onset hydrocephalus and traumatic brain injury will receive the highest level of care with state-of-the-art technology.

Akli Zetchi, MD, cerebrovascular neurosurgeon, will serve as inaugural director in this position. Board-certified in neurosurgery, Dr. Zetchi has expertise in brain surgery and interventional neuroradiology. His research interests span diseases and structures of the brain, carotid artery and spinal cord as well as testing tools for improving surgical education.

Officers of The Jean and David W. Wallace Foundation, longtime benefactors of Greenwich Hospital with an active interest in the field of neuroscience, maintained that “the gift is an acknowledgement of Greenwich Hospital’s vision for advanced neurological and neurosurgical standards of care.”

Successful employee testing program yields reassuring results

Yale New Haven Health reached and surpassed its goal to test 10,000 asymptomatic healthcare workers for COVID-19 and found that less than 0.25 percent tested positive for the virus. Many thanks to everyone who volunteered and helped conduct employee COVID-19 testing, which ended July 3. Employees without COVID-19 symptoms who want to be tested should contact their primary care provider.

“Widespread healthcare worker testing has been a key component of the system’s COVID-19 transformation and recovery plans,” said Thomas Balcezak, MD, YNHH chief clinical officer. “The reassuring results confirm that the current risks of asymptomatic transmission in our health care settings are low, and that our facilities are safe. This will speed our return to providing the full spectrum of care for the communities we serve.”

While widespread employee testing has ended, YNHH is testing all patients coming into our hospitals and ambulatory locations for surgeries and other procedures; opening more temporary testing sites; and deploying mobile testing units for the communities.

Some important reminders:

- **Employees who experience COVID-19 symptoms at work** should leave immediately, contact their manager and call the YNHH COVID-19 Call Center, 833-275-9644 (833-ASK-YNHH) to be connected with Occupational Health to arrange testing.

- **Employees who experience symptoms at home** should NOT come to work, but isolate themselves immediately and call the COVID-19 Call Center.

YNHHS helps staff deal with COVID-19’s emotional toll

At Yale New Haven Health and worldwide, experts are seeing COVID-19’s emotional effects on healthcare workers, and taking steps to help them cope.

YNHHS clinicians who cared – and continue to care – for COVID patients in intensive care units are vulnerable to stress, particularly those who previously cared for other types of patients.
“There was a lot of disruption when units were rapidly disassembled and converted into ICUs for COVID patients,” said Kimberly Yonkers, MD, chief of Yale New Haven Health’s Division of Psychological Medicine. “Dealing every day with very sick patients who are on ventilators and may never come off puts intense stress on clinical staff. Add personal stressors like financial worries, childcare or other family issues, and it is a very challenging time for staff.”

For all care providers, the severity of illness and death toll associated with COVID-19 have been difficult, especially with social distancing restrictions.

“There’s no touching or hand-holding for consolation. You can’t stay in the room with a patient for very long,” Dr. Yonkers said. “You can’t be the doctor or nurse you want to be.”

Under the direction of Psychological Medicine, YNHHS has implemented various resources for physical and emotional wellbeing. These include a “buddy system,” in which staff members identify a fellow employee with whom they check in daily. There is also information available about mindfulness, resilience, coping with stress, nutrition and physical wellness. Clinical staff also received a stress self-assessment questionnaire, which links to support programs.

“One of the challenges is that, as doctors and nurses, we are not trained to reach out and ask for help,” Dr. Yonkers said. “We learn to ‘stick it out and carry on.’”

Though the intensity of the pandemic has begun to wane, the psychological stress on medical workers is likely to continue and even worsen, which may lead to a wave of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Dr. Yonkers said.

“When you’re in the thick of things, you just think about surviving. Then the dust settles and you realize all that’s been lost,” she said. “The real challenges will come in the weeks and months ahead as we process the losses.”

She encourages staff to continue supporting one another and seeking help if they experience any PTSD signs: trouble sleeping or concentrating; negative thoughts; feeling overwhelmed, inadequate or isolated; feeling detached; or irritability and angry outbursts.

“Asking for help when you need it is not a sign of weakness,” Dr. Yonkers said. “It’s a sign of strength.”

**Newsmaker**

Eleanore Black, MD, will serve as chief resident for the current academic year. A graduate of the Florida State University College of Medicine – Daytona, Dr. Black is known as an outstanding clinician and leader of resident teams with an emphasis on wellness, performance improvement and patient safety. She is the recipient of the 2020 Dr. Henry E. Markley Humanitarian Award in Medicine.

**Newsletter submissions**

Deadline for submission of content for the August 2020 issue of *Medical Staff News* is Wednesday, August 5. Please submit items for consideration to Spike Lipschutz, MD, at 203-863-3904 or spike.lipschutz@greenwichhospital.org or Myra Stanley, Yale New Haven Health at 203-688-1531 or myra.stanley@ynhh.org.

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**Check yourself!**

Remember STAR to help your brain catch up with what your hands are getting ready to do.

**Stop** – Pause for 1-2 seconds to focus on the task at hand.

**Think** – Consider the action you’re about to take.

**Act** – Concentrate and carry out the task.

**Review** – Check to make sure the task was done correctly and you got the correct result.

STAR reduces your chances of making an unintended mental slip or lapse by more than 10 times.

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**CHAMP for safety**

High reliability organizations operate successfully in high-risk industries. For hospitals, CHAMP is a mnemonic used to help eliminate instances of preventable patient harm.

C – Communicate clearly

H – Handoff effectively

A – Attention to detail

M – Mentor each other

P – Practice and accept a questioning attitude
Medical Staff Changes (June 2020)

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Resignation/Non-Renewal of Privileges

Qurat Ul Ain Jelani, MD
(Cardiology)
Joon Ho Jang, MD
(Medicine)
Melissa Jones, DO
(Pediatrics)
Alice Kim, MD
(Radiology)

Change in Status

Arnold Korval, MD (Pediatrics) was granted a leave of absence

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Office Move

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In Memoriam

Bartel “Bart” Crisafi, Sr., MD (Cardiology), member of the Honorary Medical Staff, passed away in June.