

# 2024 CHA HEALTHCARE HEROES

This document contains all of the descriptions of CHA's 2024 Healthcare Heroes organized alphabetically by last name. Hospitals across Connecticut have selected individuals to recognize and celebrate their invaluable contributions to their field and the community at large.





## Gayle Appleby, MSN, RN, CAPA

### Perioperative Services Nerve Block Registered Nurse, Stamford Health

As a dedicated nurse, Gayle Appleby epitomizes the qualities of compassion, resilience, and unwavering dedication to patient care. Gayle goes above and beyond to ensure that every patient she encounters receives the highest level of care and support. Her passion for nursing is evident in the way she interacts with patients, treating each individual with empathy and respect. Gayle’s ability to connect with patients on a personal level not only comforts them during challenging times, but also fosters a sense of trust and security.

Gayle was recently nominated by one of her peers and was the recipient of the prestigious DAISY Award. Her nomination for the DAISY Award was based on a patient who was admitted

for ambulatory surgery who had endured extremely difficult life events, including the loss of their family and home, who was forced to relocate to a shelter. The patient underwent hernia surgery, where recovery can be extremely painful. Due to the shelter’s regulations, they were not able to use prescription medications for pain. In addition, the patient did not have access to an ice machine that is necessary for our reusable ice packs, which was their only source of pain relief. Gayle was extremely worried for this patient, and despite the busy day and various responsibilities, she took the initiative to search the entire facility for single-use, squeezable ice packs for the patient to take home. The patient was so grateful they had tears in their eyes.

This is just one example of the qualities that set Gayle apart in her commitment to her profession, even in the face of adversity.

Gayle truly lives Stamford Health’s values of Teamwork, Respect, Integrity, Compassion, and Accountability. She approaches each day with a positive attitude and an indomitable spirit, inspiring those around her to strive for excellence. She is always willing to lend a helping hand, whether it’s assisting a colleague, advocating for patients’ needs, or implementing innovative solutions to improve patient outcomes.



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## Ranbir Bains, PhD, APRN

### Pediatric Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, Yale New Haven Hospital

Ranbir Bains, PhD, APRN, has been a nurse practitioner with Yale New Haven Hospital for 20 years. Her commitment to superlative patient care and education shines through in her work with inner city children within the Barnard School-Based Health Center (SBHC), where she has been the clinician since its inception. In her work there, she has provided comprehensive healthcare to patients (students), designed, and implemented health education programs, provided education to students, their families, and teachers on numerous health topics. She continues to oversee day-to-day operations of the clinic and maintains a high patient safety standard while continuing to post terrific student, teacher, and parent satisfaction scores over the years.

Ranbir has run multiple programs at the SBHC – from the obesity prevention programs to bringing nutrition education to students in collaboration with the Hispanic Health Council. Ranbir has run classes for various ages of students, from the hand and dental hygiene sessions to monthly nutrition classes, to puberty classes. She hosts annual health nights for parents and students; helps with speakers for the career fair for seventh and eighth graders; teaches classes at Parent University; and assists with annual dental screenings for all students.

Ranbir is a thoughtful, caring, and family-centered clinician and is self-motivated to continue to learn. In addition to completing her PhD in Nursing, she has published papers on school-based healthcare in peer reviewed journals.

Ranbir is highly regarded by many and was recognized as the 2023 YNHH Magnet Nurse of the Year. She protects the rights of students

and advocates for them. Locally, she is active in roles at the hospital and at the Yale School of Nursing. Ranbir has also joined the National School Based Health Alliance program, responsible for growing and sustaining school-based healthcare and engaging in policy and administrative efforts to make sure SBHCs flourish throughout the country and thus impacting tens of thousands of children.





## Jennifer Baldwin, MD

### Director of Hospital Medicine, UConn John Dempsey Hospital

UConn John Dempsey Hospital is honored to nominate Dr. Jennifer Baldwin for the Healthcare Heroes Award. Dr. Baldwin has been responsible for expanding our hospitalist program that now manages approximately 60% of the inpatients; more specialty services have yielded care to the hospitalists as the primary team due to their performance excellence. She has created a highly successful nocturnist program to address the increasing volume of Emergency Department admissions and inpatient care demands during the nighttime hours. The fact that a nocturnist won a teaching award is also testament to the educational impact that this program has had on our residents. In her leadership role, she was highly effective in staffing the hospitalist service during the peak

of the COVID crisis and has selfishly and consistently taken on additional clinical responsibilities when needed.

Dr. Baldwin has been an instrumental member of our patient safety team. She regularly attends our every-morning Patient Safety Huddle, helps investigate and analyze safety events, including as a member of our Safety Event Review Committee. She provides significant contributions to improvements in workflows, development of clinical care guidelines, and creation and implementation of EHR decision supports that have had palpable impacts on the safety of our patients.

She serves as the Patient Safety Faculty Expert for the Internal Medicine Residency Program, helping to teach residents about error analysis and quality

improvement. She has been the primary contributor to the development of our Patient Safety curriculum for medical students. She has, thus, been instrumental in developing our culture of safety and high reliability and her work has significantly contributed to JDH achieving national awards in quality, safety, and patient experience.

She consistently demonstrates a high level of professionalism, is collaborative and team-focused, and is extremely well-respected by all of our clinical leaders.

We are extremely proud and appreciative of Dr. Baldwin's contributions.



## Ava Boornazian, APRN

### ED Crisis and Behavioral Health Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, Saint Mary's Hospital

Ava Boornazian, APRN has been working with behavioral health patients at Saint Mary's Hospital for 21 years. Initially, Ava saw patients in the outpatient clinic, eventually transitioning to the Emergency Department's crisis and behavioral health division. She currently splits time between the ED and Inpatient Behavioral Health unit with the consultation liaison service, working to ensure patients have the best quality of life as possible, by attending to their mental health as well as their physical health.

"There is a tremendous amount of suffering that people with mental health conditions experience, it's a stigmatized illness," said Boornazian.

"I've always been attracted to working with underserved patients, many of which have co-occurring substance use disorders, and it's a challenge. But I've always felt this compassion toward people whom we don't always have the answers for, when it comes to taking care of them."

Ava also finds working therapeutically with families very rewarding. She said, "Sometimes it's very hard because patients don't always have families who are still involved in their lives or there's been some burnt bridges and it's very hard to rebuild and restore. So being a liaison between patient and family is rewarding."

In their selection of Ava as Healthcare Hero recipient, Saint Mary's Hospital

Senior Leadership team shared, "Every day, Ava does her work with grace, showing reverence and understanding for every patient.

The Behavioral Health unit, and ED crisis behavioral health area in particular, serve perhaps the most challenging, vulnerable, and underserved patients in the community. Ava's empathy and compassion, combined with her diagnostic expertise and skilled therapeutic abilities are among the myriad of reasons Ava was selected as Saint Mary's Hospital's Healthcare Hero."





## Jillian Cacopardo, MPT, ATP/SMS

### Outpatient Physical Therapist and Clinical Program Coordinator, Gaylord Wheelchair Services, Gaylord Specialty Healthcare

A 21-year Gaylord employee and “2022 Gaylord Employee of the Year,” Jillian is an outpatient physical therapist and clinical program coordinator for Gaylord’s Wheelchair Assessment Services.

Jillian is one of the most highly respected and recognized seating specialists in the nation and a fierce advocate for Connecticut’s wheelchair community.

She works with wheelchair users throughout the state to ensure they receive appropriate equipment customized to their needs to improve mobility within their home and community, provide proper positioning to ensure their safety, comfort, and skin preservation, and ultimately empower their independence and quality of life. She spends countless hours – often on her own time – documenting and

advocating for patients’ needs with their insurance.

She readily shares her extensive knowledge with other seating professionals through numerous articles she has contributed to national publications including Rehab Management Magazine, Directions Magazine (a publication of NRRTS), and Mobility Management Magazine. US News and World Report recently tapped her knowledge of power seating in a feature article. Another notable article helped other professionals understand the complex Medicare cushion code system to procure the best patient outcomes.

She has appeared in several webinars and created a CEU course on pressure injuries through the National Registry of Rehabilitation Technology Suppliers. She has testified in support of legislative

efforts, including a bill to better serve Medicaid recipients with complex medical needs who require complex rehabilitation technology.



One patient’s mom said, “Brilliant in her field, Jillian connects with my son and goes above and beyond to ensure he can accomplish a comfortable space in his chair. Though he is immobile and can barely speak, Jillian takes the time to provide exceptional care, accompanied by a few humorous moments. We can trust that my son is getting the best possible care because of Jillian.”

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## Matthew Cassavechia

### Emergency Medical Services Director, Danbury Hospital

An Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) is a trained medical professional who provides immediate care to patients in emergency situations. Their role is multifaceted, encompassing first-response, patient transport, coordination with other healthcare professionals, and more. They are directly responsible for all aspects of pre-hospital care including ambulance readiness, shift briefings, call response, initial assessment, administering care, and care coordination.

The very nature of the job is that it is unpredictable and as such, it requires continuous learning. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel often deal with traumatic situations taking physical and emotional tolls on team members. This is a high-stress job with many physical demands too.

However, the diverse and dynamic nature of the job means it can be very rewarding. Working closely with team members and fellow clinical partners

makes an immediate and meaningful impact on people’s lives.

We believe our EMS Corps are invaluable and are deserving of the Healthcare Hero recognition, and we are pleased and proud to bring forward this nomination.





## Michelle Cunha, BSN, RN

### Emergency Department Nurse Manager, Johnson Memorial Hospital

Michelle Cunha, RN, serves as the Nurse Manager in the Emergency Department (ED) at Johnson Memorial Hospital, a position she has held for the past year.

Michelle grew up locally in a family of firefighters, and she followed in their footsteps, becoming a volunteer firefighter before deciding on a career in nursing, and she is grateful for the opportunity to provide care so close to her hometown. With her background, she knows that she often sees patients on what can be the worst day of their lives, and she understands the importance of staying calm during an emergency because those same patients will follow her lead.

While Michelle keeps her patients' clinical care at the center of everything she does, she also focuses on their comfort and dignity. She recently spearheaded a clothing drive to gather items for distribution to patients in need. The clothing drive was a tremendous success, collecting pants, shirts, sweaters, winter coats, shoes and sneakers, as well as gloves, scarves, and hats – ultimately restocking the closet to capacity. When Michelle sees a need, she takes action – especially when that need involves Johnson's patients.

Michelle is also credited with supporting members of the ED team who suffered trauma in the aftermath of providing treatment to one of the young victims of a fatal fire. In

addition to acting as a calming, compassionate influence, Michelle helped set up debriefing sessions for colleagues and represented Johnson at the child's funeral.



For her part, Michelle says she tries to give her patients "110 percent of her energy, taking time to explain things so that they feel safe," and those positive experiences inspire her to keep moving forward. Indeed, Michelle is truly an asset to Johnson Memorial Hospital, and through her actions, she is also an asset to the local community.

## Lisa DeCarlo, APRN

### Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, Preventive Medicine, Windham Hospital

The East Region Preventive Medicine team of Lisa DeCarlo and Barbara Sinko have made a huge difference in the eastern Connecticut community with some of the most challenging patients. By identifying patients at high risk for readmission and poor health outcomes through a series of criteria and subsequent interventions, their work reduced the number of patients coming back to the Emergency Departments or being admitted to the hospital.

- Total inpatient/observation encounters saw a 54% decrease
- Total inpatient/observation hospital days saw a 63% decrease
- Average length of stay saw a 28% decrease
- ED visits saw a 39% decrease for inpatient (IP) and ED Multi-visit Patients (MVP) program

Last year they were chosen to present a poster they developed titled "APRN Led Preventive Medicine Team Improves Health Outcomes and Reduces Hospital Utilization for a High-Risk Population" at the American Association of Nurse Practitioners Conference.





## Lori Dilg, RN

### Surgical Nurse, Greenwich Hospital

Lori Dilg is a second career nurse in the Surgery unit at Greenwich Hospital who came to nursing after a successful career as a paralegal. As a bedside nurse, Lori is known for her passion for providing the best care and experience for her patients. As charge nurse, she leads the unit very efficiently and is very supportive and loyal to her team. Although Lori is known for her humility and doesn't seek the spotlight, her commitment and dedication to her patients and her team does not go unnoticed. As a mom of six, Lori has mastered her many roles with ease and generosity. She is the queen of celebrations and is the first one to bake cupcakes and personalize balloons, signs, and gifts for the patients and staff.

From creating memorable send-offs for special patients to celebrating the birthday of the unit's Abilis (special needs organization) intern with his favorite red velvet cupcakes, Lori's enthusiasm is unmatched.

Lori is passionate about honoring veterans like her late father. Last Memorial Day weekend, she learned that her patient, a Korean War veteran, would not be able to participate in the Stamford Memorial Day parade as he had planned, so she brought the parade to him. She decorated his room and door with American flags, made cupcakes and asked fellow staff to come parade in and out of his room, thanking him. It was a

momentous day! But her efforts did not stop there – she later created a hospital-wide celebration for all veterans on Veterans' Day. Lori collaborated with Patient Experience/Guest Relations and Food and Nutrition so that each inpatient veteran would receive a meal tray decorated with American flags, commemorative pins and a celebratory cupcake! Lori truly is one of a kind and our own Greenwich Hospital Healthcare Hero.



## Olufunmilayo Falade

### Medical Director, ICU and Division Chief, Critical Care Medicine, St. Vincent's Medical Center

We, at the Hartford Healthcare St. Vincent's Medical Center, are privileged to select our Chief of Critical Care, Olufunmilayo Falade, MD, as our Healthcare Hero nominee for 2024. Dr. Falade (Funmi) is a natural leader with proven expertise in managing a large, closed medical-surgical intensive care unit.

and looking for intrepid solutions while dealing with the unknown. Recruiting and organizing provider staffing to help deal with the overwhelming work during the pandemic was no small task, but Dr. Falade rose to the occasion and created unique solutions that assured everyone was cared for and the staff was supported.

with our local and regional diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) initiatives that support awareness and community engagement.



Funmi stepped up to this role during the COVID-19 pandemic. For many of us at the medical center, and across the greater Bridgeport community, her leadership during the pandemic stands out as a concrete example of how much of a hero she really is. She tirelessly sacrificed personal protection and precious time with her young family during the lockdown to prepare the ICU for the impending surge early on. She remained a stalwart presence in the hospital, at all hours of the day and night, constantly assessing the ICU's needs

Personally, when my own mother was dying in the hospital in March of 2020, she was by my side as the world collapsed around us, explaining to my father, with the greatest of patience and empathy, how we would not be able to save my mother from the pandemic's scourge.

Dr. Falade is also a leader in medical education. She serves as an academic and clinical mentor for the internal medicine residents and Quinnipiac University's medical school students. Most recently, she was selected to receive the Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine Excellence in Clinical Teaching Award for 2024.

Since 2020, Dr. Falade has continued to have an incredible impact on the medical center and the Hartford HealthCare system through her strong leadership as the chair of Hartford HealthCare's critical care council. She is also actively engaged

Finally, it is Dr. Falade's natural instinct to go above and beyond, her consistent and highly professional, compassionate care for her patients and colleagues alike that makes her our healthcare hero.



## Jerry Galipeau

### Mission Integration Executive Director, Saint Francis Hospital

Jerry Galipeau has served Saint Francis Hospital as the Executive Director of Mission Integration for seven years, responsible for ensuring that the organization’s Mission and Core Values are the driving force behind decisions and the way patients are treated. In his role, Jerry provides a caring, comforting presence through transitions and challenges, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and its recovery. His tireless support of colleagues and compassion for the most vulnerable members of the community served by Saint Francis is felt by all those he comes in contact with.

Through his daily reflections, thoughtful video messages to colleagues and patients, steadfast commitment to rounding with leaders and colleagues, lending of support to colleagues in

crisis, creation of comfort spaces both portable and permanent to alleviate the stress and burnout of colleagues, attending to relationships with community organizations, and organizing groups of musicians, Jerry makes a concerted effort to lift the spirits of colleagues, patients, and families. Jerry has also worked closely with Board members to assure their alignment with Mission, and upheld relationships with the Archdiocese of Hartford and other religious and nonreligious organizations, including the founders of Saint Francis Hospital, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambery. In addition, Jerry has provided collaborative leadership in ethics, guidance, and support to community events, and a moral compass to fuel the directionality of hospital and

health system efforts. Jerry truly embodies the heart of Saint Francis.

Throughout his time at Saint Francis, Jerry has spearheaded numerous projects and events that support and recognize his colleagues. Most recently, he developed a video series designed to highlight colleagues from various departments around the hospital and their reflections on what calls them to serve. These videos are meant to inspire others to embrace and enhance their everyday work in Catholic health care.



## Sarah Galloway, RN

### Registered Nurse, Bristol Health

One of the services the Families Are First (FAF) Birthing Center at Bristol Hospital performs for our community pediatricians is obtaining routine blood work on infants. Recently, we had parents present from their pediatrician’s office, with an order to obtain a serum bilirubin level on their 5-day-old infant. Sarah Galloway, a staff nurse since July 2023, greeted the family and proceeded to prepare the infant for the heelstick. Fortunately, Sarah’s astute assessment and critical thinking skills helped prevent the ultimate heartbreak for these new parents.

It was a normal day on FAF when a 5-day-old baby presented for a serum bilirubin level from a local pediatrician’s office. While collecting her supplies

and preparing to obtain the bloodwork, Sarah began a routine conversation with the parents inquiring about the infant’s eating and sleeping habits. During this conversation, Sarah noted the mother had stated, though she had originally breastfed the infant, she had recently changed to formula as the infant would not latch or nurse. She also stated that it was becoming increasingly more difficult to formula feed the infant, as the baby was difficult to arouse for feedings. During this conversation, Sarah noted that the infant felt extremely cold, and the blood was flowing very sluggishly while obtaining the specimen.

Sarah reported her findings to fellow staff members. A rectal temperature

was obtained and read 89 degrees. Our pediatric hospitalist was called to examine the infant. More labs and a lumbar puncture were obtained, an IV and antibiotics were started, and the infant was transferred to a higher level of care. The infant was found to be septic, with a diagnosis of listeria.

Sarah’s assessment skills were the first step in recognizing severe illness in this infant and ultimately led to timely treatment, most likely, saving this infant’s life.





## Thomas Horkan

### Emergency Medical Services Supervisor, Sharon Hospital

This nomination is for the entire Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Corps serving the greater Sharon Hospital community. Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) and Paramedics are a vital part of the healthcare system. They are the frontline responders to medical emergencies, from accidents to acute medical conditions. An EMT is a trained medical professional who provides immediate care to patients in emergency situations. Their role is multifaceted, encompassing first-response, patient transport, coordination with other healthcare professionals, and more. They must have contemporary medical knowledge,

strong communications skills, physical stamina, and emotional resilience.

In this rural community, whether illness, injury, or emergency management situations, the Sharon EMS teams are available 24/7, ready to save lives. No two days are the same for an EMT. They must adapt to new situations and patients daily. As frontline responders, many of whom are volunteers, the EMS Corps are quickly at the scene, skillfully triaging the patient, determining the right next steps care prior to hospital transport. This requires a unique level of skill, expertise, and compassion that sometimes goes unnoticed. Not unlike the Postal Service motto, these

professionals dutifully answer the call day and night in all kinds of weather to address the variety of ailments, injuries, and emergencies that patients of all ages and backgrounds present in the greater Sharon community on any given day.



We believe our EMS Corps do such important and wonderful work and are deserving of the Healthcare Hero recognition. We are pleased and proud to bring forward this nomination.



## Tracy Huneke

### Director, Griffin Hospital School of Allied Health Careers, Griffin Health

Tracy Huneke is Griffin's 2024 Healthcare Hero. In 2009 Tracy founded the Griffin Hospital School of Allied Health Careers as a response to the need for qualified and compassionate phlebotomists.

Tracy's vision was sparked by the recognition that the skill level of certified phlebotomists fell short of our standards. Tracy embarked on the mission to create a school that would provide highly skilled and compassionate healthcare professionals, equipped to address the evolving needs of the community.

Tracy's commitment to educating future healthcare heroes compelled her to expand school offerings to include programs in Medical Assistant, Nursing Assistant, and Patient Care Technicians. It's because of Tracy's hands-on, and loving approach to each and every

student, graduates have excellence in national certifications, often ranking in the 99th percentile and achieved remarkably high job placement.

Beyond this, Tracy's care for socially vulnerable youth compelled her to create career pathways for local high school students. Innovative partnerships with Ansonia and Seymour high schools have allowed seniors to participate in specialized Patient Care Technician programs, preparing them for healthcare careers upon graduation and addressing economic vulnerabilities in our community. Considering that a recent ALICE study revealed that 50% of households in Ansonia and Seymour face challenges meeting basic living needs, this program helps to ensure that our community's socially vulnerable youth

can be gainfully employed and pursue a better quality of life – immediately.

Tracy's groundbreaking work also paved the way for Griffin to establish a Practical Nursing program to help alleviate the nursing shortage, providing a vital pipeline of well-trained professionals to meet the diverse needs of our community. This in turn allowed the Griffin School of Allied Health Careers to step-up to offer a lifeline to the displaced Stone Academy students, providing them with hope and a clear path forward despite their financial hardships.







## Aaron Katz

### Emergency Medical Services Director, Norwalk Hospital

Norwalk Hospital Emergency Medical Services (EMS) stands as a beacon of selflessness and dedication in the healthcare industry. These remarkable individuals are not just first responders; they are heroes who embody the true essence of service. Their unwavering commitment to saving lives, often in the most challenging and urgent situations, is nothing short of extraordinary.

As the oldest hospital-based EMS agency in Connecticut, day or night, rain or shine, the Norwalk Hospital EMS team is always on the front lines. Not only serving Norwalk but also the towns of New Canaan, Weston, Westport, and Wilton and providing Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) staffing for the Wilton Volunteer Ambulance

Corp. This dedicated team is always at the ready, providing the same emergent care in the pre-hospital field, given with compassion and expertise. Their quick-thinking and decisive actions have saved countless lives, making them invaluable members of the community. Their dedication to continuous learning and improvement sets a high standard in the healthcare industry, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps. Their commitment to community is immeasurable as they interact with all ages and aspects of the region, such as when they visit local schools during EMS week.

In times of crisis, Norwalk Hospital EMS shines brightly, demonstrating resilience, empathy, and unwavering

professionalism. They are not just first responders; they are leaders, setting an example for all healthcare professionals to emulate. Their selflessness and dedication make them true heroes, deserving of our deepest gratitude and respect.

We believe our EMS Corps do such noble work and are deserving of the Healthcare Heroes recognition, and we are pleased and proud to bring forward this nomination.



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## Iwona Kraska, CNA

### Certified Nursing Assistant, The Hospital For Special Care

Iwona has been working as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) for over 20 years. For the last six years, we have been lucky enough to have her working at HFSC (Hospital for Special Care). During her time at HFSC, she has worked in various departments, including the Cardiac Medical Unit and the Professional Development Department, where she served as a CNA mentor. Recently, she has been assisting with HFSC's CNA Training Academy.

Iwona, a bedside CNA, always provided exemplary care to her patients. She comforted those in need and treated them like family. Her expertise was utilized to mentor new hires, ensuring they were onboarded to practice

with the highest standards of clinical excellence. Iwona reinforced correct bedside nursing care practices and supported entire teams with her can-do spirit. She also led CNA meetings to empower the group and help them solve any concerns. Her diplomatic approach has helped engage our CNA workforce and improve retention.

Last year we launched our CNA Training Academy, and Iwona assisted with the design of the program. She also led student groups in both the classroom and clinical settings. Iwona is loved by all the students who work with her, and it is not surprising that many of her protégés have signed on to work with us at HFSC. Just last week, one of our academy graduates came out of

her certification exam smiling and hugged Iwona. She passed both written and clinical portions of the exam.

The graduate attributed her success to Iwona's support. In addition, the CNA examiner also gave Iwona a compliment, stating, "You do an amazing job teaching these students. Well done!" Being a CNA is by far one of the most demanding roles in healthcare, but Iwona makes it look easy. She provides top-notch care while shaping the future of caregiving.

We consider Iwona a healthcare hero.





## Seana Lynch, RN

### Registered Nurse, Lawrence + Memorial Hospital

A nurse’s compassion extends through death to include organ donation.

An intensive care nurse who stood by her patient through death and then through an ensuing organ donation procurement helped provide solace to the man’s grieving wife.

Seana Lynch, RN, had been caring for the patient, Kenny, and comforting his wife, Billie, for days, even changing shifts so she could continue helping the family to the very end. After the patient’s death, as L+M Hospital staff held an “honor walk” and Kenny’s body was transported to the Operating Room for organ harvesting, Lynch stayed with the wife for support. Lynch then took the

unprecedented step of going into the OR to witness the organ procurement.

Days later, the L+M team received word from New England Donor Services that a man in his 50s and a woman in her 60s were freed from dialysis through the gift of the donor’s kidneys. Additionally, a woman in her 50s received the donor’s liver, and a man in his 50s received the exceptionally rare and special gift of the donor’s heart.

As a keepsake, Lynch gave Billie a printout of Kenny’s EKG, rolled up and stored in a small bottle. She also created an ultrasound recording of Kenny’s beating heart that she provided for Billie, gestures that helped the wife appreciate

the value of his organ donations despite his untimely loss.

The wife described Lynch as a nurse with “the biggest heart ever,” and, in summing up the organ donation experience, she said, “The biggest thing for me was that his heart would go on beating,” Billie said. “I know it’s up to the recipients of the organs if they want to contact me, but someday, if they do, I hope to hear my husband’s heart again.”

Seana is truly our healthcare hero.



## Peter Morgan, MD, PhD

### Chair of Psychiatry, Bridgeport Hospital

Bridgeport, being a large urban center with complex socioeconomic issues, is no exception to the growing national mental health crisis.

In walks Peter Morgan, MD, PhD, who took the helm as chair of psychiatry at Yale New Haven Health’s Bridgeport Hospital in November 2021 when the community was ripe to increase services for adolescents struggling with mental health issues. Dr. Morgan’s greatest strength is identifying patients’ needs and building consensus around how to meet them both from a high-level standpoint of community partnerships to meaningful daily patient interactions.

Child psychiatry was one of these needs. Dr. Morgan onboarded a child psychiatrist to our REACH program. The REACH Program provides intake assessments, medication management, group therapy, case management and after care planning. Through Dr.

Morgan’s leadership, the REACH program has enhanced its role in the community and relationship with other community organizations.

Discharge is a major issue facing inpatient care. Patients can benefit from a certain number of days in the hospital. Once they reach that threshold, they should be discharged swiftly both for their own benefit and the benefit of other patients needing care. Dr. Morgan aligned his team around improving the discharge process and dropped the average length of stay by four days, allowing the team to care for hundreds more patients in the past year and reducing overcrowding in the ED.

Dr. Morgan mobilized his staff and community resources to create an intensive outpatient program that applies gold-standard Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) treatment to improve patients’ lives including their

school/work life, friendships, family relationships and self-worth. This program is one of only two like it in the nation and has been nominated as one of three finalists for Associate of Ambulatory Behavioral Health award.

Perhaps Dr. Morgan’s most impactful feat over the past two and a half years has been strengthening the culture in his own department. He restructured how care was delivered to ensure all providers are working at the top of their license. By infusing their work with ownership, accountability and pride, Dr. Morgan has facilitated the downstream impact of more trusting therapeutic relationships with patients—a key driver to success in any healthcare setting.





## Joseph Ochieng

### Emergency Department Personal Care Assistant, Waterbury HEALTH

Joseph Ochieng is a Personal Care Assistant (PCA) in the Waterbury Hospital ED, who is also the founder of God Provides Ministries international, a non-profit organization that helps the homeless and those coming out of homelessness.

Every day Joseph Ochieng’s phone is filled with text messages or voicemails from homeless or formerly homeless people. He’ll zip across town in his Dodge SUV with food, furniture, a few dollars, and a bed for someone who needs it.

Joseph has been a PCA at Waterbury Hospital for a decade, working nights. This gives him more time, he said, to dedicate to his calling: helping those less fortunate.

He grew up in Kenya, where his mother is a preacher and his father is a retired teacher. A calling started when he was young, still in school studying to be a clinical officer back in his home country. He used what spending money his parents sent him to feed homeless boys. Since 2014, Joseph’s work with the homeless has intensified after he began to live “a life of sacrifice and self-denial.”

“Taking care of people has helped me a lot,” he said. He says that life and work with the less fortunate is very fulfilling.

In 2017 after Waterbury Hospital highlighted his work on social media, Joseph found great support for his work, establishing God Provides officially as a non-profit organization that has grown with a weekly mobile food pantry

feeding 200 clients a week at various locations in Waterbury. God Provides runs the largest Spring Giveaway event, connecting thousands of individuals and families with donations of food, clothes, and housewares. The event is supported by the City of Waterbury and other organizations including Waterbury Hospital. Joseph has been recognized by different Waterbury civic organizations for his work, including by the Waterbury Regional Chamber as a Healthcare Hero, Rivera Memorial Foundation, and others.



## Kimberley Palma

### RGH Site Administrator and Administrative Director of Therapeutic Services, Manchester Memorial Hospital, ECHN

ECHN has selected Kimberley Palma as our “Healthcare Hero” because of her commitment to bring high-quality care to our community through the creation of many new programs and preservation of long-standing programs. Kim is an instrumental individual at ECHN because of her ability to foster communication and collaboration with a caring and respectful attitude no matter who she is interacting with.

Kim Palma stood up many programs at ECHN that have the patient at the center that include our Sleep Disorders Center, the Center for Healthy Living,

our Infectious Disease services, and our Palliative Care program.

One employee said, “Kim was instrumental in the launch of the new Palliative Care program which has also been beneficial to both the hospitals as well as home health and hospice. The palliative care program has helped with early identification of goals of care and referral to the appropriate service line Post-Acute. Patients and families are given the option of considering a palliative approach to care that focuses on the patient instead of the disease process. This has helped to increase the awareness in the system and in

the community of what Palliative Care is and what this kind of care means and how this care can be delivered. Kim’s tireless dedication is a testament to the success of this program.”

In addition, Kim is a supportive leader who works to put processes in place to increase efficiencies and the quality of care that we provide as an organization.”





## Barbara Poirier

### Catering Associate, The Charlotte Hungerford Hospital

Barbara Poirier knows that every aspect of a hospital visit leaves an impression – even if it’s as simple as a warm smile with a hot cup of coffee.

As a catering associate in The Charlotte Hungerford Hospital (CHH) cafeteria, patients and colleagues alike stopping in for breakfast or lunch have probably been greeted by Barbara and her genuine kindness at the register. She knows nearly every employee’s name – and she makes sure to address

everyone personally for that extra sense of community.

Barbara’s positive attitude has brightened countless days as she makes everyone in the café feel welcome and at ease. But Barbara’s involvement doesn’t stop there. Always interested in recognizing others and bringing people together, she also suggested the hospital recognize national health observances by wearing the color of the recognition that day. Now, colleagues

at CHH have an opportunity to wear certain colors to promote awareness about diseases.

Barbara is truly an inspirational colleague who always helps others feel their best by truly taking an interest in what matters most to them.



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## Luis Rivera

### Community Relations Manager, Connecticut Children’s

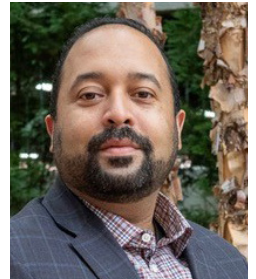
Through his work as Connecticut Children’s Community Relations Manager, Luis Rivera is a champion and advocate for children and families in Hartford. Luis is a true Healthcare Hero. He is an integral part of Connecticut Children’s Office for Community Child Health, which is dedicated to helping all children reach their full potential. Luis strives to create opportunities for Hartford students and young professionals to interact with healthcare professionals. Most recently, he developed a summer internship program for Hartford students that will launch in the Summer of 2024. He also developed and launched a mentoring program for Connecticut Children’s team members to learn from more experienced managers

in various healthcare roles. Luis also represents Connecticut Children’s in the community. In doing so, he worked closely with the Connecticut Hospital Association’s *Diaper Connections* program and the Salvation Army in Hartford to establish Connecticut Children’s participation in a diaper drive benefitting Hartford residents.

As part of his role, Luis leads the development of Connecticut Children’s Community Health Needs Assessment, which is produced every three years, and the development of Connecticut Children’s Community Benefit Report, which is produced annually. He is also a strong injury prevention advocate and has worked to teach children in Hartford a variety of safety skills, including fire

prevention, bicycle safety, water safety and other areas. He is a NHTSA certified Child Passenger Safety Instructor and Special Needs Transportation Instructor and has worked with parents to ensure their children are safely transported in vehicles.

Luis has a master’s degree in social work in public policy from the University of Connecticut and is currently pursuing his PhD at Liberty University. He has worked at Connecticut Children’s for the last 14 years.





## Jennifer Shin, PharmD, BCPS Pharmacist, Middlesex Health

Jennifer Shin is a Middlesex Health pharmacist and an important member of the health system’s team.

Jennifer received Middlesex Health’s Annual Great Save Award for identifying a safety concern. In 2023, Jennifer determined the mixing instructions for a pediatric antibiotic order were incorrect. By catching this error, she prevented harm to a young patient. Ultimately, she prevented a medication overdose, and the patient was able to receive the proper

amount of medication. In response to Jennifer’s great save, changes to Middlesex Health’s pediatric antibiotic policy were made, and this will improve care in this high-risk population.

Jennifer has worked at Middlesex Health for 11 years. She earned her doctorate in pharmacy from Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and is a board-certified pharmacotherapy specialist. She consistently demonstrates a positive

and respectful attitude, and with her knowledge and experience, she is a resource for other pharmacy staff, nurses, and providers.

Jennifer’s attention to detail, respect, and willingness to go above and beyond allows everyone to work better together in order to best serve patients.



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## Barbara Sinko, LMSW

### Licensed Master Social Worker, Preventive Medicine, Backus Hospital

The East Region Preventive Medicine team of Barbara Sinko and Lisa DeCarlo have made a huge difference in the eastern Connecticut community with some of the most challenging patients. By identifying patients at high risk for readmission and poor health outcomes through a series of criteria and subsequent interventions, their work reduced the number of patients coming back to the Emergency Departments or being admitted to the hospital.

- Total inpatient/observation encounters saw a 54% decrease
- Total inpatient/observation hospital days saw a 63% decrease
- Average length of stay saw a 28% decrease
- ED visits saw a 39% decrease for inpatient (IP) and ED Multi-visit Patients (MVP) program

Last year they were chosen to present a poster they developed titled “APRN Led Preventive Medicine Team Improves Health Outcomes and Reduces Hospital Utilization for a High-Risk Population” at the American Association of Nurse Practitioners Conference.





## Eugenia (Ginny) Soucie, RN Emergency Department Clinical Leader, Hartford Hospital

Ginny Soucie, a registered nurse and clinical leader in the Hartford Hospital Emergency Department (ED), arrives at work every day with a genuine commitment to excellence. Not only is she known for her compassion, mentoring, and ability to bring people together, but she also has a track record of improving patient care through implementing new processes, especially through collaboration among different disciplines.

Ginny recently facilitated several initiatives to benefit patients in the Emergency Department. To improve patient experience, she partnered with the nursing leadership team to develop an extension of the existing welcome ambassador role. The goal of this pilot is for the welcome ambassador to frequently round with patients in the waiting room, facilitate updates, and provide them with comfort measures as they wait. The role also assists in connecting patients with their loved

ones during their time in the ED. The welcome ambassador works in partnership with the first nurse, triage nurses, PCAs, and comfort associates to ensure a safe and comfortable environment in the triage and waiting room area.

Another initiative, this time from the ED Operational Optimization Workgroup, involved developing a “team triage” model where a nurse and APP partner evaluate the patient together upon arrival, facilitating faster assessment, testing and treatment. She was instrumental in enhancing the patient flow through our waiting area in partnership with other services such as phlebotomy and radiology, as well as standardizing a process for nurses and providers to reassess patients that may be waiting for extended times secondary to volume surge.

This past year she also formed the ED Workplace Organization Committee in

which colleagues review workflows and equipment in the department to streamline more efficient processes while also reducing clutter of supplies.

This committee involves many different members of the ED team, including nurses, equipment aides, and PCAs. With the fast-paced, unpredictable nature of the ED, maintaining a consistent environment of care is critical – and the committee works to ease this, while improving workflows and reducing supply waste. The committee ensures equipment and supplies are stored appropriately and participating in environment of care rounds to maintain accountability.

All of these initiatives have contributed to increased efficiency in throughput, reduced “left without being seen” rates, and improved patient experience.



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## Stacy St. Louis

### Women’s Center for Wellness Imaging Team Lead, Rockville General Hospital, ECHN

ECHN has selected Stacy St. Louis as our “Healthcare Hero” because of her patient centered care. Stacy always makes her patients her main priority. She treats each patient with a warm, friendly smile and with integrity and excellence, as if they were a family member. Stacy has a calming nature that puts patient at ease.

As shared by one co-worker: “As a patient, you would be lucky to have her to do your exam. Not only is Stacy technically great with her skills for scanning patients, she connects with each of them on a whole different level. She knows how to read the room and

follows what the patient needs in that moment. If the patient is terrified or anxious, Stacy is calm and empathetic towards them, making them feel so much more comfortable. If they want to talk/chat during the exam, she will connect with them and keep their mind busy making them not worry about what they are actually there for. After an appointment you can hear Stacy and the patients laughing and talking until they walk out the door. That connection she shares with each patient is special.

“In addition to her patient care, Stacy is a tremendous leader. Stacy is engaged with every employee and

always takes the time to listen, is supportive of new ideas, and has followed through consistently. She is easy to approach with questions/ concerns and communicates thoroughly with her team about any issues or updates that need to be shared. She has a positive attitude towards life and her work and is a great example of our fantastic leader!”





## Caitlyn Sward

### Director of Dietary, Day Kimball Healthcare

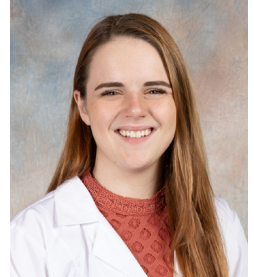
Caitlyn Sward is a Registered Dietician who originally came to Day Kimball as a dietician in our Oncology department. Caitlyn quickly identified the need for food assistance on the hospital premises, as nutrition recommendations made to patients by the dietitian were not being implemented secondary to lack of funds and poor access to transportation to other food assistance facilities. An analysis of the Connecticut state population showed that Northeastern CT has one of the highest food insecure rates in the state, with 11.9% of the population of Windham County experiencing food insecurity. Caitlyn established a "Cupboard" in the spring of 2020, when new data emerged, showing that the food insecurity rate had increased by an estimated 34.1%, resulting in an estimated 16%

of Windham County residents who regularly struggle with food provision. In addition to these staggering statistics, cancer patients are often put under undue financial burden - 42% of patients diagnosed with cancer spend their entire life savings within two years of their diagnosis. This program, designed to address food insecurity issues for patients being treated within the Oncology department, has affectionately been named "Caitlyn's Cupboard."

Since Caitlyn's Cupboard began, over 200 patients had been provided with food supplies within the first 15 months as well as limited non-food supplies, nutrition education, and coupons for fresh produce and dairy. Caitlyn's Cupboard has been able to partner with IHSP's Daily Bread (a food assistance organization in the community) to

provide these coupons as well as to bring more awareness to the importance of cancer nutrition.

Caitlyn is a true inspiration and asset to our organization as well as to her patients and community she serves. The Caitlyn's Cupboard program continues to grow in its service to patients in our Oncology program and is supported via donations from the community and from Day Kimball staff. Caitlyn is a perfect example of what it means to be a Healthcare Hero, and through her efforts and commitment to serving our patients and the community, she is a true inspiration (in spite of not wearing a cape)!



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## Matthew Tichauer, MD

### Director, Emergency Critical Care, MidState Medical Center

In his nearly nine years with Hartford HealthCare, Dr. Matt Tichauer has seen a lot of patients who didn't have the smoothest post-op experience. But perhaps one of the most memorable is an elderly male patient who experienced an unusual complication from anesthesia. This complication has a high mortality rate.

With minute-to-minute changes in his vital signs, the patient required one-to-

one care. Dr. Tichauer and the nursing team spent the first six hours after surgery at this patient's side.

Understanding the complexity of what was happening, Dr. Tichauer arranged a transfer to another hospital for more intensive monitoring. He followed the ambulance and provided an in-person handoff at the bedside to a second ICU physician.

That case wasn't over for Dr. Tichauer however. He continued to follow the patient closely and kept the family updated.

It was a long five days, but the patient is expected to make a full recovery.





## Kelly Walsh

### Director of Public Safety and Emergency Management, The Hospital of Central Connecticut

Since starting her Public Safety Director career in the Central Region of Hartford Healthcare in early 2022, Kelly Walsh has implemented programmatic changes that allow staff and patients to feel safe providing and receiving care in our space.

Kelly revitalized community outreach meetings to include all local law enforcement leadership, EMS, and fire. Through these partnerships, Kelly kicked off HHC live Active Shooter drills at both

HOCC and MidState Medical Center. Kelly has also implemented security dog programs at both hospitals, factoring in the need for not only safety but therapy dogs as well. As part of this program, the dogs and handlers are trained to work within the healthcare space to ensure safety for visitors, staff, and patients as well as to provide a calming presence in what can sometimes be traumatic spaces.

In an ever-changing world where illness

and violence are both becoming increasingly complex and volatile, safety, and security are at the forefront of healing in healthcare. Kelly has demonstrated the impact of this as our Healthcare Hero.

