

Connections to Your Health Care

BRIDGES

SPRING 2011

HEARTBEAT OF THE HOSPITAL

IN THIS ISSUE

The many faces of nursing PAGE 3

In a Manor of speaking PAGE 5

Health care at its most personal PAGE 7



**CHESTER RIVER
HEALTH SYSTEM**
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND MEDICAL SYSTEM



As a maternity nurse and mother of three, Jen Wade has experienced firsthand the high-quality care on the Chester River Maternity Unit.

THEY WERE THERE WHEN YOU WERE BORN. They were there when your tonsils flared up. They were there when your grandmother broke her hip.

In all of their many roles, the nurses of Chester River Health System have always been there when you needed them. And they always will be. To comfort you when you hurt. To calm you when you're scared. To do their jobs knowledgeably and efficiently when your well-being depends on it.

Nurses are the backbone of the health system, constituting the

"People generally think of nurses as caring and compassionate—and they certainly are—but today's nurse has to be much more," says Josh Barnes, who holds a master's degree in nursing and serves as Chester River Hospital Center's clinical educator.

"The nurse's role has evolved into one with increasing responsibility. Nurses are doing much more care coordination and collaborating with physicians, therapists, and other care providers. They're taking on more responsibility for patient outcomes, and that means having more training and making more decisions."

EVERY DAY, CHESTER RIVER NURSES SHARE THEIR SKILL, COMPASSION, AND CARING.

largest portion of the system's professional staff and serving as the face of health care for the thousands of people who visit the Chester River facilities every year.

The Chester River Hospital Center, Chester River Manor, and Chester River Home Care & Hospice employ nearly 300 credentialed nurses. Many have different specialties, but they all share certain characteristics, some of which go well beyond the traditional traits most often associated with nursing.

Chester River nurses are embracing these evolving responsibilities—as well as the traditional values of their profession—whether they're attending to emergency room patients, caring for newborns, providing bedside care to hospice patients in their homes, or performing any of dozens of other roles.

To honor the dedication and contributions of Chester River's remarkable nurses, *Bridges* looks at the many ways they serve our community's healthcare needs.



Being a good listener and patient advocate are essential for an Intensive Care Unit nurse, says Maddie Steffens, RN.

THE MANY FACES OF NURSING

AFTER 29 YEARS AS A NURSE AT CHESTER RIVER HOSPITAL CENTER, Eileen Brooks doesn't have to think for more than a split second about the reason she's devoted to her profession.



Clinical Educator Josh Barnes sees nurses embracing new roles.

"I love taking care of patients," says Ms. Brooks, a registered nurse in the Intermediate Care Unit, which is specially designed to monitor the vital signs of patients who have had heart attacks and other serious illnesses.

"Sometimes an elderly patient will look into your eyes and give you a small smile and a slight squeeze of your hand. It's very personal and very moving."

Like many hospital nurses, she knows a large percentage of her patients personally, which contributes to a caring atmosphere in which patients are more than names and numbers on a chart.

Maddie Steffens, an RN in the Intensive Care Unit, is especially appreciative of that fact, having joined the Chester River staff 13 years ago after working in various roles

at diverse facilities, including the emergency room at one of Boston's busiest hospitals.



Eileen Brooks, RN, IMC

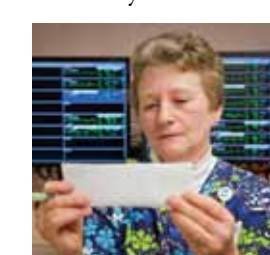
"When I first came here, I was like, wow, this is different," she says. "It took me a while to get used to it, but I tell you what, this is a wonderful hospital. What we do, we do very well, and there's a personal touch you don't get at other hospitals. I've had family members in big hospitals, and I would much rather have them here than anywhere else."

But while Chester River nurses value the intimacy of the environment, they're quick to

point out that the professional standards and skill requirements are every bit as high as they are at any hospital, anywhere.

Working on the medical-surgical floor, where patients come before and after surgery (or if they're suffering from an acute illness, such as pneumonia or diabetic complications), Agnes Pechin, RN, says knowledge, organization, and flexibility are the keys to being an effective med-surg nurse.

"You really have to know the different diagnoses so you can formulate care plans and



Agnes Pechin, RN, medical-surgical floor

work toward each patient's goal," says Mrs. Pechin, a former Maryland Nurse of the Year. "Every day is different, because the mix of patients is always different. You have to set your priorities for the day as soon as you get in, but also be able

to adjust to the unexpected."

Her observations are seconded by Alicia Weisenberg, RN, a relatively new addition to the med-surg staff. "It's a really busy place," she says. "You have to have strong time management skills to do this job."

Mrs. Weisenberg chose to pursue a nursing career after serving as an emergency medical technician with the Galena Fire Company in high school. And while it's only been a year since she earned her nursing degree, she epitomizes the fresh spirit and enthusiasm that the new generation of nurses brings to the team.

More-experienced nurses say today's young RNs are exhibiting the confidence that's required to assume a greater role in collaborating with doctors and to take on additional responsibility for patient care plans.

As a charge nurse (manager) in the Intermediate Care Unit, Lisa Eisemann gets to work with many nursing students who rotate through the hospital.

"It's great to have a fresh set of ideas coming into the hospital," she says. "The biggest difference I notice in the new nurses versus when I



Alicia Weisenberg, RN, is one of Chester River's newest nurses.



Lisa Eisemann, RN, a charge nurse in the IMC and ICU, enjoys working with student nurses.



Lisa Marx, certified registered nurse practitioner (CRNP), examines an emergency patient.

The maternity department nurses are the best I've ever worked with—compassionate, responsive, and highly skilled. The nurses help to create a calm, family-centered atmosphere, which makes my job delivering babies easier at Chester River. It's professional care with a personal touch.

—Dr. Tony Moorman, OB/GYN



Diabetes educator Chrissy Nelson, RN, works with one of her star patients, Jean Smith.

NURSES EMBRACE THEIR ROLE AS EDUCATORS

At age 83, Jean Smith is devoted to learning, and one of her favorite subjects is diabetes.

"I try never to miss my diabetes group," says Mrs. Smith, who can tell you about hemoglobin A1c as easily as her grandchildren's ages. "I've had diabetes for many years, and I give credit to those meetings for helping me keep it under control."

The diabetes support group and *Managing Your Diabetes* classes offered by the Chester River Hospital Center are prime examples of the health system's increasing emphasis on prevention and wellness. And nurses are at the center of the many educational efforts.

"We're doing a lot of outreach that focuses on prevention and getting tested for risk factors," says Chrissy Nelson, RN, head of diabetes education at Chester River. "We often recommend lifestyle changes, such as eating a healthier diet and exercising regularly."

For patients who do have diabetes, the hospital offers the support group attended by Mrs. Smith, which features a variety of speakers and research updates. In addition, there's an in-depth eight-hour diabetes education class, as well as individual counseling sessions.

Not all patient education takes place in a formal setting, however. Nurses throughout the health system are embracing their role as educators, taking time to help patients and their families understand treatments and how they can avoid future health problems through everything from proper wound care to wearing a seatbelt.

"We're focusing on not just treating the sick but helping people be proactive about their health care," says John Haines, RN, interim clinical coordinator of emergency services. "We're also becoming more involved in the community and coordinating with the health department on programs that help people stay healthy."

The efforts are not going unnoticed, says Mrs. Smith, who notes, "We're very fortunate to have these kinds of programs here."

“Emergency department nurses care for people of all ages, from newborns to the elderly, with a wide range of undiagnosed complaints. It’s a multifaceted job that requires a vast amount of knowledge, critical thinking, and the ability to remain calm under pressure—the nurses at Chester River exhibit all of these qualities.”

—Dr. Deborah Davis, Director of the emergency department

was coming out is how professional and confident they are. They're very knowledgeable, and they're not afraid to share that knowledge."

One role that has expanded in recent years is that of the nurse practitioner, a nurse with a master's degree who has received advanced training and certification to perform additional duties, such as ordering and interpreting tests.

Lisa Marx, who has worked in hospital emergency rooms since 1985, has been a certified registered nurse practitioner in the Chester River emergency department for three years. She says the ER environment is challenging because it requires quick thinking and making critical judgments.

"We see everything you can imagine, from medical complaints to accident trauma to women in labor. There's no such thing as a routine day," Ms. Marx says.

While she's handling a wide range of patients, she and the ER nursing team are constantly learning about new diagnoses, treatments, and procedures as they stay abreast of the latest medical advances.

The professionalism of Ms. Marx and the other ER nurses has been critical in enabling the emergency department to adopt new procedures for speeding up the time it takes to move

patients from the front door to a bed in under five minutes.

Whether they're in the ER or the Maternity Unit, patients appreciate the quality care they receive from the Chester River nursing staff, and they often express their gratitude when they encounter nurses in the community.

In fact, patients recently voted Chester River one of the top hospitals for maternity services in the state, in a survey conducted by the Maryland Healthcare Commission.

Results like that mean a lot to the nursing staff, but the words of gratitude from former patients they meet in the community mean even more, says Jen Wade, an RN with obstetrics certification who works in the Maternity Unit.

"People will come up to me in the supermarket or other places and say, 'Look at my baby! Thank you so much for everything,'" says Mrs. Wade, who delivered two of her children at Chester River. "I can't imagine a more rewarding experience than sharing that moment of birth with a family."

"To know that they appreciate my contribution is what it's all about for me as a nurse." ▶

IN A MANOR OF SPEAKING

IN HER CAREER AS THE HEAD OF A PRIVATE SCHOOL, Anne Shoemaker interviewed and hired dozens of teachers and assistants. That experience sprang to mind recently during two rehabilitation stays at Chester River Manor.

"I thought to myself, What kind of interview process do they use to come up with a staff this great?" says Mrs. Shoemaker, 88, who was recovering from a broken leg both times. "I have never met a staff that was so thoroughly nice, cheerful, encouraging, and sympathetic. I never felt like just another patient."

For their part, the nurses at the Manor say they have never met "just another patient."

"I try to put myself in their place," says Tracy

Homonko, a licensed practical nurse who specializes in helping rehabilitation patients. "They might be recovering from a major bone break or a joint replacement, and rehabilitation can be painful for them. I try to think of them as a family member and treat them that way."

Treating patients as individuals is also important to Yolanda Green, an evening shift charge nurse on the Skilled Care Unit.

"One of the most important things I do is go in and talk to every patient to see how the day went and how they're doing with physical therapy," Ms. Green says.



Anne Shoemaker enjoys being back on her feet at home after inpatient rehabilitation at Chester River Manor.

"I want to see if there are any issues I might have to call a doctor about, and I also just let them vent a little bit. They're going through some real challenges, and it helps to let them know that we care and want to listen."

She adds that the physicians who serve the Manor are an integral part of the care team, which prides itself on communication.

"Giving high-quality care isn't just about respecting the patients, it's about respecting the other people on the team, too," Ms. Green says. "Our doctors are great with that. They're very easy to talk to and they respect our contribution." ▶



Nurses Yolanda Green and Tracy Homonko have different roles but a shared commitment to serving Chester River Manor patients with compassion.



Education is important both professionally and in the community for Becca King (left) and John Haines. Becca is interim director of emergency services and EMS nurse liaison, and John is interim clinical coordinator for emergency services. Also pictured is Debbie Spence, RN.



Communication is essential for Anne North (left) and Danielle Pierzynski, Infusion Clinic nurses.

TEAMWORK 'INFUSES' CLINIC NURSES

As a registered nurse in the Infusion Clinic, Anne North is entrusted with a vital task: to properly administer powerful intravenous medications, such as chemotherapy drugs.

But beyond being meticulously careful about the type, dosage, and proper infusion of the drug, Mrs. North is paying close attention to something else as well—the patient.

"We're very sensitive to physical and emotional changes," she says, "and we pass any concerns

we might have along to their doctors. We don't just take orders and administer medication. We're patient advocates, and that requires treating the whole patient."

The Infusion Clinic team feels strongly that an essential part of treating the whole patient is working together to share observations and review one another's work.

That might mean double-checking dosages to avoid errors, jumping in to help when a member of the team is called away, or comparing notes about a patient's condition and demeanor.

HEALTH CARE AT ITS MOST PERSONAL

IN A 31-YEAR NURSING CAREER that has included a variety of hospital roles, Melissa Maule, RN, has found a professional home that's, well, in the home.

For the past 15 years, Mrs. Maule has been a nurse with Chester River Home Care &



Melissa Maule, RN

Hospice, where she specializes in providing end-of-life care. "It's very different working with someone in their home rather than the hospital," she says. "You're in their space, and you have to meet them at their level. Every patient and every



Katie Davis, RN

family is in a different place emotionally, so educating the family and providing comfort for them, as well as for the patient, is an important part of the job."

Katie Davis, RN, couldn't agree more. "It's a whole different experience being in the home environment," she says. "You learn a lot more about the patient when you see the whole picture."

With hospice patients, she adds, starting care sooner rather than later has a big benefit, because it gives nurses more of an opportunity to get to know patients and their families.

"It's best when we're called in when people are still doing well, because earlier intervention means we can help them have a better quality

of life later on," says Mrs. Davis, who has spent almost all of her nine years as a nurse working with hospice and home care patients.

All of the Chester River Home Care & Hospice nurses see patients who are rehabilitating at home as well as hospice patients. Brooke



Brooke Smith, RN

Smith, RN, spends most of her time with home care patients, who have ranged in age from infants to 100-year-olds. "I love the one-on-one interaction," says Ms. Smith, who has been with Home Care & Hospice for seven years. "Probably the most



Mary Lynn Price, RN

important aspect of it from a nursing standpoint is being strong on your skills. You're out there by yourself, so you have to be confident that you can handle a variety of situations."

Another nurse who specializes in home care, Mary Lynn Price, RN, also enjoys the variety of her job, but her biggest reward is watching patients get stronger and healthier.

"Most patients get better when actively receiving home care services," says Mrs. Price, who has been an RN for 25 years. "Being able to help them return to doing things they enjoy in life is my greatest satisfaction as a nurse." ■

HOSPICE TEAM BRINGS DIGNITY TO THE FINAL DAYS OF A BELOVED COMMUNITY MEMBER

As a certified nursing assistant who once worked with terminally ill patients, Linda Parry knew she was facing the most difficult experience of her life when her husband, Chuck, was diagnosed last summer with an aggressive form of bladder cancer.



Hospice nurses helped make the final days of Linda Parry's husband, Chuck, easier for both of them.

"We recognized early on that having him at home and keeping him comfortable was going to be the best we could hope for," says Mrs. Parry.

For 16 weeks, she and her husband relied on Chester River Home Care & Hospice to make Mr. Parry's final days as comfortable and high-quality as possible.

Mr. Parry was an active 74-year-old who founded the Rock Hall Yacht Club Sailing School in 2002 and loved working with kids, so watching him lose his robust health was especially difficult for his wife.

"The daily reassurance of the nurses and the other caregivers was the greatest benefit for me—just knowing I didn't have to go through it alone," Mrs. Parry says. "And Chuck really looked forward to their visits. He would say, 'Is Lisa or Della or Melissa coming today?'"

When the end came on a Friday in December, Mrs. Parry was comforted in knowing that her husband lived his final days with dignity.

"Hospice made it possible to have what Chuck and I prayed for, which was a peaceful, painless death here at home. That's all he asked for, and thanks to hospice we were able to make that happen."

“Our nurses are open-minded and quickly adapt to new procedures and processes. It is a real team atmosphere between the doctors and the nurses at Chester River Hospital, allowing for collaboration that benefits each and every patient.”

—Dr. Keri Jacobs, Director of the Hospitalist program

**MATERNITY DEPARTMENT
OPEN HOUSE!**

May 12, 5:30 p.m.—7:30 p.m.
2nd Floor, Chester River Hospital Center
Come check out the new hydrotherapy tub.

**SAVE THE DATE! 17TH ANNUAL
GOLF TOURNAMENT**

June 3, 8 a.m. & 1 p.m. Tee Times
To register and for more information regarding sponsorship opportunities, please call Deb Lauser at (410) 810-5661.

Proceeds will be used to purchase a digital vital signs monitoring system for the emergency department.

NATIONAL NURSES WEEK MAY 6-12

*Thank you, Chester River nurses!
For your steadfast caring and professionalism.*

“Chester River nurses provide care that is patient-centered. Our nurses are motivated caregivers and they empower each other to do their best. I really haven’t worked with a more caring and compassionate team of nurses, and I have been a nurse for more than 30 years.”

—Mary Jo Keefe, Vice President of Patient Care Services

Congratulations to Sam Ricketts, RNC,

for being named a finalist for the 2011 Health Care Heroes Award!

Cheryl “Sam” Ricketts, RNC, of Chester River Home Care & Hospice, was named a finalist for The Daily Record’s 2011 Health Care Heroes Award. This award recognizes individuals in the health-care industry who embody the spirit of the word “hero” and who have made outstanding achievements within their specialty. Sam is an exceptional nurse and educator who always puts patients first.

Again, congratulations to Sam for this wonderful accomplishment!

