Creating New Systems of Support for NICU Babies and Families

Written by Tracey Fitzgerald

In fiscal year 2018, 325 newborn babies were cared for in Saint Agnes Hospital’s Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Some were born prematurely. Others faced health complications at their time of birth, requiring an increased level of monitoring or a specialized plan of care. Seventy of those babies were diagnosed with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome – a condition causing a wide range of medical challenges for infants born addicted to drugs, and who then experience symptoms of withdrawal.

“We do everything we can to help comfort and soothe babies who are in withdrawal,” said Kathy Goad, nurse manager in the Saint Agnes NICU. “We recently invested in musical pacifier machines which help tremendously. When a pacifier is connected to this machine, it plays a soft lullaby whenever the baby sucks. The music is calming and therapeutic and motivates them to develop and strengthen oral motor skills, which are severely lacking with these babies but critical for feeding, nourishment, and weight gain.”

That investment was made possible with support from the Saint Agnes Hospital Foundation. The funds needed to purchase the musical pacifier machines were generated in part through a “Giving Tuesday” campaign the organization launched on its social media pages. The community responded positively, leading to the acquisition of five machines, all of which are used daily by the NICU team and the babies it cares for. Babies are also consoled by volunteer cuddlers, who devote their time to holding and rocking little ones, providing much needed support to both parents and clinical care providers.

“Babies in withdrawal are typically not feeling very well, and require a lot of specialized care and attention,” said Goad. “We are grateful for the support we receive from our volunteers, and the love they

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“I have lived a magnificent life!”

Written by Season Voelker

I met Annie when she called to inquire about supporting new rocking chairs in the Saint Agnes NICU through the Elkridge Rotary Club where she is a member. During our conversation, I learned about her long-standing relationship with Saint Agnes. It started with an internship as a young woman in the biomedical department, giving birth to three of her four children, a patient of Dr. Michael Vietz and then ultimately being diagnosed with breast cancer.

Annie will tell you that she was not above traveling to save her life, but she knew that she wanted a team of clinicians that partnered with her and were equally engaged in her treatment. And that place was the Saint Agnes Cancer Institute.

The Saint Agnes Cancer Institute strives to turn every cancer patient into a cancer survivor, it is proud of the multidisciplinary team that offers a personalized approach to the treatment of each individual patient. Annie’s team was led by Paul Gormley, MD. Dr. Gormley ordered a biopsy, Annie would find out that she had a 3.5 cm tumor that had already invaded other tissue. At 47, she was diagnosed Malignant Lobular Invasive Breast Cancer. Annie’s treatment would include chemotherapy, a mastectomy, and reconstructive surgery. Ultimately, at the end of her treatment, she would be told she was “Dancing with NED”, Annie will joke that Ned is the best dancer. This term refers to there being no evidence of disease. Annie has had no evidence of disease for nearly 20 years. Each year on Christmas Eve, which is the anniversary of her mastectomy, Annie calls her treatment team and says, “thank you for saving my life”. She is grateful for the exceptional care and continues to seek Saint Agnes as her healthcare partner. She will tell you that she has lived a “Magnificent Life” and credits the Cancer Institute for allowing her to watch her children grow up and to meet her grandchildren!
provide our patients, alongside our outstanding team of clinical care providers. “One of those volunteers is Michelle Greenberg, who chooses to give back to Saint Agnes after her own child was born prematurely in 2011, and received extraordinary care in the NICU for nearly three months. In addition to rocking and cuddling newborns, Greenberg meets and greets with NICU families on a regular basis to provide guidance and support from the perspective of someone who has “been in their shoes.”

“Having a baby in the NICU can be difficult and scary,” said Greenberg. “Parents need someone there who will listen and be part of the journey with them, on good days and bad. I had that support from my family when my daughter Cora was in the NICU. Not everyone has that. I wanted to give back to the hospital for the great care our family received, and also provide a system of support for other parents when they simply need an ear, or someone to encourage them or answer their questions.”

Greenberg’s presence on the unit has been so well received that in Fall 2018, in collaboration with the Saint Agnes Foundation, she launched a formal monthly support group meeting for NICU families. Some meetings take place in a conference room and others happen in a patient room, at the baby’s bedside. Regardless, the goal is to make families feel well supported, and to remind them of the many resources available as their baby continues to be cared for in the NICU, and is eventually, and hopefully, discharged to go home.

“There is something so warm and inviting about walking into the doors of Saint Agnes,” said Greenberg, who has also donated money to the Saint Agnes Foundation faithfully, every year since her daughter was born. “Saint Agnes Hospital is a place that is near and dear to my heart, and I am thankful to be part of the good things happening here.”

Saint Agnes Foundation celebrates Doctors’ Day 2019

Written by Season Voelker

On March 29, 2019 Saint Agnes Foundation & Physician Services partnered to honor physicians on National Doctors’ Day. They hosted a wonderful breakfast equipped with a made to order omelet station, yogurt parfait, fruit and lots of coffee. As part of the celebration, the Foundation requested comments from patients asking them to “Honor their Doctor”, 426 comments were received honoring 135 physicians. The comments were displayed on a slide show as well as written on cards that were presented to those physicians. Each doctor received a commemorative doctors’ day pin and enjoyed fellowship with their peers. A special thanks to Blush Republic of Catonsville for providing all the floral arrangements.

Thank you for Honoring your Physician on National Doctors’ Day

THE NUMBERS

1 Mission Driven Hospital

17 Most Times One Physician was Honored

3 Week Giving Campaign

$20,490 Dollars Raised

426 Individuals Participated

197 Physicians Honored

All funds raised will assist the most vulnerable within Saint Agnes and the communities we serve, providing greater access to services and support.
A Life at a Time Reception

Written by Season Voelker

April 11, 2019, The Saint Agnes Foundation hosted the “A Life at a Time” Reception where more than 30 guests attended at the home of retired surgeon, John Singer M.D. in Baltimore. The purpose of this reception was to introduce guests to the work at Saint Agnes Healthcare and the SBIRT (screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment) program. The SBIRT program works with individuals that present with a substance abuse disorder access treatment and services.

Leave a Lasting Legacy

When you include the Saint Agnes Foundation in your will, your life’s work will continue to impact communities and people in need through the Saint Agnes mission of providing quality healthcare to everyone, especially to the poor and vulnerable in our community. You will always be remembered for your kindness and generosity, while leaving behind a meaningful legacy.

If you have questions about legacy giving or if you have already designated a gift to the Saint Agnes Foundation in your estate plan, please contact the us at 667-234-2734 or email Foundation@stagnes.org.

Visit www.givesaintagnes.org
What is your connection to Saint Agnes Hospital:
That is easy! When I was five I got stitches in the Emergency Department, I spent my high school years in its shadow at Cardinal Gibbons, while in trig class in 1984 I saw my brother and his wife drive out of the parking lot with their first child, and did I mention the doctors and nurses at Saint Agnes saved my mom’s life!

Why did you choose to join the Saint Agnes Hospital Foundation Board of Directors?
Saint Agnes’ role is so unique. It provides medical care to such a diverse group of people, who live in three surrounding counties and the city of Baltimore. Not to mention the plans for Gibbons Commons. It is very important to me, and so many alumni, that the Cardinal Gibbons property continue to be a place where young people can be young people and learn the skills that we learned as students.

What makes Saint Agnes special?
Last week I was visiting my 86-year-old mom, we had crabs, ate at her favorite restaurant and sat on the porch talking - that makes Saint Agnes special to me.

What do you see as Saint Agnes’ role in the community?
Before my first meeting, my answer would have been caring for sick and injured people; but I see it different today. Saint Agnes’ role is to care for people before they get sick or injured. Saint Agnes has a commitment to pro-active health care. So many individuals suffer from preventable illnesses and Saint Agnes is looking to increase opportunities for healthy living in the community from the weekly Fresh Produce Market to reimagining Gibbon Commons. Saint Agnes is being proactive in working towards educating individuals about healthy lifestyles, making better food decisions, and the importance of exercise.

Q&A
With Ralph Sapia, Esq.
The Law Office of Ralph L. Sapia