Lifeline Campaign Triggers Outpouring of Stories from Grateful Patients

Over the past few months, an outpouring of online tributes to Albany Med have been posted on Facebook by people who were thankful for the care they received at the Medical Center.

The tributes came in response to a multimedia campaign that features patients who recounted how Albany Med was a lifeline for them in their time of need, and invites others to share their personal stories. The response has been tremendous.

Here is a sample of messages received and the caregivers who were thanked:

**DANIEL BONVILLE, DO, and ANGELA MEXTORF, RN**
Department of Surgery

“Though I did not ‘choose’ to go to Albany Med, I was transferred there after a severe car wreck in December, 2010. I had extensive internal damage and complications, which kept me in the unit for three months. Were it not for the extreme level of care I received from the doctors, intensivist and nurses, in particular, Dr. Bonville and nurse Angela Mextorf, I certainly would not have survived the injuries.”

**MOHAMMAD EL-HAJJAR, MD**
Department of Medicine

“Albany Med saved my life. I flatlined in a parking lot, and they brought me back to life. I love the hospital; I thank them for life. A special thank you to my heart doctor, Dr. El-Hajjar.”

**JENNIFER LINDSTROM, MD**
Department of Medicine

“My husband and I are wowed by the level of professionalism and efficiency at the Latham facility! In my long lifetime, and even as a nurse and social services administrator, I have never encountered a more professional, thorough and warm medical doctor than Dr. Lindstrom.”

**ANKESH NIGAM, MD**
Department of Surgery

“I am grateful to Albany Med for two reasons. First, for saving my life when I nearly died from a GI bleed several years ago. The care and professionalism were extraordinary! Second and more importantly, was the extra time Albany Med’s amazing surgeon Dr. Nigam gave to my mother. Thank you so very much!”

**NEIL DEVEJIAN, MD, and LEWIS BRITTON III, MD**
Department of Surgery

“Dr. Devejian was the surgeon when my daughter had open heart surgery three years ago. Though she is an adult now, she was born with several congenital heart defects, so Dr. Devejian, a pediatric surgeon, along with Dr. Britton, performed her sixth open heart surgery.

We were told no one in Albany could do it, but they were wrong. Dr. Devejian looked me in the eye and said he could do it and he did! Thank you to everyone at Albany Medical Center! You are my heroes!”

Nursing staff, nursing alumni, volunteers and employees recently came together to unveil the Nursing Organization’s commemorative quilt, which is now on display near the C5 elevators. The beautiful patchwork contains 56 squares representing different units of the hospital and was the culmination of months of hard work by all involved.

Sharon Wheeler, manager of Healing Arts at Albany Med and a music and licensed creative arts therapist, presented the idea to Albany Med’s nursing leadership, and they moved forward with the help of Kelly Morrone, manager of Volunteer Services, and Kim Read, administrative assistant.

“This project brought together a large group of people for a beautiful purpose,” Wheeler said. “Auxiliary members and nursing alumni, some who haven’t seen each other in a long time, were able to bond with current nursing staff to create a lasting legacy.”

Each quilted square features different colors, materials and textures. The Pediatric STAT Team’s square, for example, features tiny painted handprints, symbolic of the young patients they serve, while the Post Anesthesia Care Unit’s square displays an embroidered heart being carefully cradled beneath the words “wake up in good hands.” All the squares encircle a large sunflower, which is often used to represent the Nursing Organization at Albany Med.
Area Man Thanks Albany Med for Life-Transforming Surgery

Larry Myers, of Albany, looked to Albany Med to help him in an extraordinary fight to achieve better health in the face of tremendous obstacles.

Almost eight years ago, the 39-year-old had a terrifying wake-up call when his extreme weight caused him to slip into a coma. At that point, Myers weighed almost 900 pounds.

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Larry was dealing with a lot of excess skin because of his tremendous weight loss, which at the time was close to 400 pounds,” said Dr. Agag. “It was so extreme that it made walking and working out very difficult for him. Together we came up with a care plan that involved converting his gastric sleeve into a bypass, which helped him lose an additional 145 pounds. Then we elected to remove the excess tissue.

“Larry has been an inspiration to all of us,” Dr. Agag said. “It’s reassuring to know that he, the nurses and the rest of the staff always have my best interests in mind.”

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Larry Myers before embarked on his weight loss journey (left) and after the gastric bypass surgery recommended by Dr. Richard Agag.
Spotlight on the Surgical and Neuroscience ICU Caregivers

Like all Albany Med caregivers, those in the Surgical–Neuroscience Intensive Care Unit (SICU and Neuro ICU) are known for going the extra mile for patients and their families.

“Often they arrive here by helicopter or ambulance,” said Sophia Socaris, MD, co-director of the SICU. “They’re a long way from home, distressed and displaced. Sometimes the only things they have with them are the clothes on their backs.”

While there are accommodations to help make families more comfortable, including shower facilities, an expansive family lounge with computer access, and two healing gardens, the human touch can make all the difference.

When one patient was unable to attend her granddaughter’s wedding on a cruise ship, her team of caregivers connected her to the ceremony via Skype.

When another patient was in the SICU on her 60th wedding anniversary, her nurse, Angela Mextorf, RN, bought her a pink nightgown, did her hair and brought her a card from the gift shop to help her celebrate the milestone with her husband.

“When the ICU is large,” Mextorf said, “we are more like a very small village when it comes to taking care of people.”

For years, the unit’s physicians, nurses and staff have brought in personal care supplies for teenage patients at Albany Med for a long time to come.

Thanks to the generosity—and the fundraising prowess—of Northwestern Mutual’s Tronco Financial Group, the $5,000 gift will be put toward brand-new items for the teen room inside the children’s hospital, a getaway of access, and two healing gardens, the human touch can make all the difference.

Nothing is too good for these kids.”

Recently, this spirit of teamwork and service helped a SICU patient who realized she’d left $300 in cash in the pocket of a gown she had sent to the laundry. “We all knew the chance of finding that money was like looking for a needle in a haystack,” Prairie said.

Still, she called Carlos Martinez, director of Environmental Services, who, along with his colleagues Supervisor Tom Hawkins, Team Leader James Gage and Housekeeper Durga Dhamalaa, split up, searched through laundry bags both inside the hospital and outside on a truck, and recovered the money.

“It was amazing,” Prairie said. “When we say ‘Albany Med cares,’ that is what we mean.”

Teenage Patients Get a Gift from Northwestern Mutual

In December, Northwestern Mutual made a generous gift to the Bernard & Millie Duker Children’s Hospital that is sure to brighten the lives of teenage patients at Albany Med for a long time to come.

To learn more about being part of Albany Med’s Lifeline campaign and Albany Med’s role as a vital regional resource—a place known for its expertise and chosen for its care—go to www.amc.edu/give, email Development@mail.amc.edu or call (518) 262-3322.
Lou-Ann and Vincent Verdile, MD, Named Co-Chairs of 2015 Capital Region Heart Ball

The decision to chair the 2015 Capital Region Heart Ball was an easy one for Vincent Verdile, MD, ’84, The Lynne and Mark Groban, MD ’67 Distinguished Dean at Albany Medical College and executive vice president for Health Affairs. “There’s not one of us who hasn’t been affected by heart disease—or stroke—in one way or another,” said Dr. Verdile, who, with his wife, Lou-Ann, is co-chairing the annual event to benefit the American Heart Association (AHA).

Trained as an emergency department physician, Dr. Verdile has seen firsthand the devastation of heart disease. “Emergency physicians are typically on the frontline when patients suffer heart attacks, so I have seen hundreds of cases over the years,” he said. “In most instances, they can be prevented.”

Dr. Verdile also pointed to the important role of the research that the AHA is conducting in conjunction with scientists across the U.S., noting that the Heart Association is currently funding seven cardiac research studies at Albany Med totaling $1.47 million.

“Much of our biomedical research informs our clinical strengths, including cardiovascular care,” he said. Albany Med has a strong relationship with the AHA’s Capital Region chapter. Edward Philbin, MD, the George E. Patinkin Chair in Cardiology, is a former board chair, and Sulagna Mookherjee, MD, is the current board president. Neil Devejian, MD, the region’s only pediatric cardiovascular surgeon, was honored as the first Donald Led Duke Heart Hero at the 2013 Heart Ball. Last year, Augustin “Gus” DeLago, MD, was also named a Donald Led Duke Heart Hero for spearheading Albany Med’s TAVR program.

The Verdiles are working with a team of area business leaders to put on the Heart Ball. They include Albany Med President Jim Barba, who served as the 2013 Heart Ball chair, and Albany Med Board Directors John Nigro and Daniel Pickett, among others.

Dr. Fish Honored for Distinguished Work in HIV and AIDS Treatment

At a World Aids Day event last month, Douglas Fish, MD, received a New York State Commissioner of Health Award for his outstanding work in the field of HIV/AIDS medicine.

Dr. Fish was one of 13 people honored with the award for his strong commitment to reducing new HIV infections among New Yorkers, thus contributing to the state’s plan to bring the AIDS epidemic to an end by 2020. For the past 16 years, Dr. Fish served as the head of Albany Med’s Division of HIV/AIDS Medicine and the medical director of Albany Med’s AIDS Treatment Center. Under his leadership, the center became the largest provider of care for HIV in upstate New York, serving over 1,600 patients.

This month, Dr. Fish became medical director of the New York State Department of Health’s Office of Health Insurance Programs, but he leaves a lasting impact on Albany Med and on thousands of patients’ lives.