Commitment to colleagues inspires excellence

An engaging smile, a warm word, a willingness to listen. These qualities can help build successful work teams and lasting friendships. The School of Nursing at Mercy College of Health Sciences (MCHS) is blessed to experience these attributes from Spirit of Mercy Award winner Samantha Aust.

Colleagues say "Sam" sets the tone daily with a heartfelt smile that brightens a room. As the School of Nursing's administrative coordinator, she keeps nursing school leadership and students in sync. Sam "owns" her role and commits herself to developing processes that result in excellence.

Sam is known for her attention to detail and for engaging others in a common mission. Her skill with a computer, and willingness to share her knowledge, are a blessing. These traits helped as MCHS was preparing recently for an accreditation site visit. Colleagues say Sam "contributed extra hours, including late evenings and sometimes weekends," to make sure all materials and processes were in order. Her smile and positive attitude reassured leaders the visit would go well.

If a colleague is in need, Sam can frequently be found ministering to them. Her compassion has helped many in the School of Nursing navigate life's challenges. Sam's caring nature has also shown colleagues that everyone has a role in serving others.

Thank you, Sam, for your caring spirit and dedication to MCHS and MercyOne Des Moines. The selfless sharing of your gifts and demonstrating MercyOne's Core Values for others, help us improve all parts of the health care experience.

Congratulations to our newest Spirit of Mercy Award, Samantha Aust!

Stroke Coordinator presents at International Stroke Conference

Congratulations to Terri Hamm, stroke coordinator, on her poster presentation at the International Stroke Conference 2019. Terri's poster presentation is formally named Utilizing A Communication Platform To Improve Stroke Care, which focuses on the use of Pulsara – an acute care telecommunications app.
Partners in progress: new dyad leadership model introduced

The critical care units at MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center continue to experience an increased demand for services, a trend expected to continue. To help further strengthen and develop the service line, a new dyad leadership model is being introduced.

By definition, a dyad consists of two elements or parts. The dyad leadership model in health care is essentially a partnership where an administrative or nurse leader is paired with a physician leader, bringing together “the best of both worlds” of skills and expertise.

Byron Johnson, D.O., FAAP, is now partnered with Administrative Director of Critical Care Services Julie Tuel to co-lead the service line. Through collaboration, research and planning, the two will work together to make patient-centered decisions impacting the short and long-term future of the service line.

“This partnership has demonstrated the ability to drive quality of care and team engagement by bringing together key players in the care delivery model,” said Julie. “Through this collaboration, a new care model has been adopted at MercyOne Des Moines’ critical care units. I look forward to the exciting changes this new dyad relationship will create.”

Plans call for the dyad leadership model to be implemented in other service lines and areas throughout the organization. These partnerships are expected to yield considerable dividends in terms of clinical quality and patient outcomes.

Leadership Updates

Sam Schone, MHA, FACHE, has been named market director of the orthopedic service line. In this newly expanded position, Sam is responsible for the direction and coordination of the ortho service line at all MercyOne Central Iowa facilities. His responsibilities include strategic planning, budgeting, integration and achievement of organization goals. Sam transitions into this role after serving as the market director of patient flow at MercyOne Des Moines central campus since 2017. He also oversaw Mercy Connect and served as Mercy’s first director of innovation, creating an internally-operated regional transfer center, which resulted in a 25 percent growth of patient transfers.

In an effort to better streamline incoming stroke patients, Mercy Des Moines implemented Pulsara. The app puts an end to a game of telephone, as Pulsara unifies the entire stroke team to one HIPAA-compliant database. Pulsara lets EMS personnel update patient information, send pictures and alert the hospital team before arrival. It provides more accurate communication and more rapid intervention, thus benefiting the patient as it reduces time to treatment.
As a neuroscience case manager and patient advocate at MercyOne Ruan Neurology Care for nearly 20 years, Valerie Stickel-Diehl, R.N., has met with countless newly diagnosed patients and families. With warmth and compassion, she helps them understand their diagnosis, find support, connect with a social worker if needed, and begin to figure out their next steps.

But when she began to notice her own mother, Joan Mills, was showing signs of memory issues a year ago at age 88, Valerie learned that even with her own expertise, she wasn’t totally prepared to experience the other side of the process.

“I knew that it can take months to get an evaluation scheduled with a neurologist, but I didn’t fully realize how long until we needed one for Mom,” she says, noting it was about six months from her mom’s referral until her scheduled evaluation, which ended up happening on an urgent basis after she was hospitalized for another illness. “In hindsight, I should have asked her primary care doctor to consider a neurology referral sooner. For many reasons, including the various causes of dementia and the available medications that can help preserve quality of life, it’s better to start the process as soon as you think there might be a need.”

Valerie says she was apprehensive when she brought her mom for the appointment with Heike Schmolck, M.D., central Iowa’s only fellowship-trained neurobehavioralist.

“Mom still lived alone and read the paper every day—she didn’t have a clue about why she was coming to the doctor. I had all these fears about how she would react to the evaluation, but those went away,” Valerie says. “I was able to see for myself what a fabulous job Dr. Schmolck does with the patient interview and evaluation. It didn’t feel threatening, and she was so incredibly patient and kind.”

The evaluation included short-term memory exercises, counting backwards by 7s, drawing a clock and answering questions, such as looking at a picture of a zebra and identifying where it lives.

“If my mom couldn’t remember something, Dr. Schmolck would gently prompt her with cues, and when she remembered, she would tell Mom what a good job she was doing,” Valerie says. After about 90 minutes, the doctor told her, ‘Joan, you’ve done really well on these tests. I believe you have mild cognitive impairment.’ She didn’t say ‘Alzheimer’s’ or ‘dementia’—it was very gentle.”

“Dr. Schmolck has a real gift for gaining patients’ trust, and they feel that she really cares for them. And, they don’t leave the appointment feeling that they failed, which makes them more willing to come back for follow-up appointments,” she says.

Dr. Schmolck prescribed an antidepressant in addition to cognition-enhancing medication, which can help improve mental function. She also provides dementia patients and their families with a helpful checklist of ways they can help preserve their memory and cognitive function.

With her mother now settled in an assisted-living residence, Valerie is profoundly grateful for the care she received.

“Thank God for Dr. Schmolck. She cares so much about her patients—I’ve seen her reply to emails on a Sunday afternoon! We’re very lucky to have her here in Des Moines.” – Valerie Stickel-Diehl