



Mt. Washington
Pediatric Hospital

Handprints

FALL 2024

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40+ Years of Service MWPH Celebrates Denise Pudinski's Retirement



After more than 40 years of service to Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital (MWPH) Vice President of Patient Care Services and Chief Nurse Executive Denise Pudinski, MSHCA, BSN, RN, CCM, NE-BC will be retiring in September 2024. Denise has been instrumental in our hospital's evolution from a long-term nursing facility for children to the state-of-the-art, pediatric postintensive care and multidisciplinary rehabilitation center of excellence it is today.

"For more than 40 years, Denise has seen MWPH's journey, witnessing its evolution clinically, operationally, and even physically. When she started at MWPH, we were still in the old mansion, not the current building," said Scott Klein, MD, MHSA, president and CEO of MWPH. "She oversees so many of the



hospital's essential functions, all with her trademark enthusiasm and dedication."

It is difficult to summarize Denise's impact on our hospital in just a few sentences. For more than four decades at MWPH, Denise grew her career from a bedside nurse to the chief nurse executive. She joined the MWPH team in 1983 as a nurse on weekends. She eventually moved to weekdays, then transitioned into a role on the care management team. She spent many years as the hospital's director of care management before being promoted to vice president of patient care services, overseeing more than a dozen departments in addition to serving as the hospital's top nursing officer.

continued on next page >>

40+ Years of Service *continued*



Throughout her career, she has never lost sight of the life-changing impact of caring for the family’s needs as well as the patient’s. Her proudest achievements have had a measurable impact on staff and patients alike, from establishing interdisciplinary teams to creating care pathways, and enabling increased communication between nurses and families through programs like AngelEye.

“I have had a wonderful career here. The engagement of the staff—not only of the departments I’ve managed but all the departments I have been able to work with—and the commitment of the physicians have enabled MWPH to grow from a long-term nursing facility to the premier location to send children after acute care to give them what they need to transition home safely,” Pudinski said. “It has been an awesome experience.” Denise has big plans for retirement. A lifelong horse lover, Denise and her husband own property in Florida, where she will own horses. She has also connected with volunteer organizations there, including a rehabilitation center for abandoned horses, which will enable her to continue to work to promote the well-being of others, even if they walk on four feet rather than two.

Here in Maryland, she will spend time by the water, doing volunteer work at a center for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities on the Eastern Shore, and near the beach in Ocean City, Maryland. She and her husband also plan to travel the country in their 27-foot trailer and spend lots of time with family, including Denise’s parents. Even with all those plans, “I want to come back to volunteer at MWPH and spend time with the kids and the older children. My passion for nursing was caring for patients and families, and I’d like to get back to those roots,” she said. ♥

Congratulations on your well-deserved retirement, Denise! We’ll miss you.

**DONORS CELEBRATE DENISE
WITH GIFTS TO SUPPORT THE FUND FOR FAMILIES**

For the past few months, MWPH’s donors have been contributing to MWPH’s Fund for Families in Denise’s honor. The Fund for Families provides direct assistance to low-income families and fills the gaps in services and resources ensuring that parents and caregivers with medically-complex and fragile children have everything they need for their child to not only survive, but to thrive.

To make your gift in honor of Denise, visit mwph.org/give and select Denise in the Designation dropdown.



MONTHLY FAMILY DINNERS

Please check signage around the hospital for dates.

Questions? Call Michelle Hanover at 410-578-2651

SEP
29

**WALKING WITH GRACE
FAMILY FUN WALK**
McDonogh School, 9–11 a.m.

Join us at the beautiful McDonogh School campus for our third annual Walking with Grace Family Fun Walk. Register here ▼



OCT
10

**CPK – PIZZA WITH A
PURPOSE**
California Pizza Kitchen
Hunt Valley, All day

Mention MWPH and 20% of your order total (in-store or carry-out) will be donated to MWPH!



NOV
13

BMORE SPORTS TALK
Woodholme Country Club
6-8pm

Join us for cocktails and conversations with some of Baltimore’s sports writers and reporters! More details coming soon! Email Paula Bragg at pbragg@mwph.org for sponsorship opportunities or questions.

DEC
19

**11TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY
TOY SHOP**
SAVE THE DATE!

More details coming soon.

Message from the President

Dear Friends,

I'd like to take this opportunity to celebrate the incredible career of Denise Pudinski, our hospital's vice president of patient care services and chief nursing executive. After 42 years at MWPH, Denise will retire on September 5.

Denise first came to MWPH as the parent of a premature infant. As a clinician, Denise approached her career not only as someone looking to do meaningful work that fit into her life but also as someone who understood what the patients and families were dealing with here. This combination of experiences has given her a truly unique perspective.

Although she started as a bedside nurse, Denise has done so many different things here beyond nursing. She has been involved with hospital operations, helping to optimize patient flow from referral to admission to discharge, and even follow-up care. She is one of those rare people who builds a career by going outside her comfort zone. A highly skilled nurse, Denise was called upon to do something new—case management. Rather than backing away, Denise said yes, figured it out, and then did the work so well that she was soon leading the department.

One of Denise's core strengths, which I really appreciate, is a fundamental enthusiasm: an excitement for life, for the work,

for the hospital, and for the staff. She takes on every challenge with a can-do attitude that, over 42 years, has been contagious in many ways.

A good example of what makes her so special is how well she has helped us prepare to find her successor. I have found her counsel very important as we think through the future of nursing at MWPH. Even as she moves on into her life's next chapter, Denise Pudinski will always want the best for our hospital. On behalf of everyone at MWPH, thank you, Denise, for 42 wonderful years.



Sincerely,

Scott Klein, MD, MHSA
President and CEO

Where Are They Now?—Stella Greene

In October 2020, Stella Greene was born at just 23 weeks, 5 days. After spending four months in Johns Hopkins' NICU, Stella was transferred to MWPH on a snowy day in February 2021—her original due date, as it happened.

She spent five weeks at MWPH, where she focused on learning to eat. Among the conditions Stella faced was Erb's palsy, a brachial plexus injury that made using her right arm difficult. At MWPH, she participated in intensive rehabilitation.

Stella's mom, Amanda, who is a physical therapist, remembered their experience. "At the time, having to transfer there seemed like the worst thing," she said. "But it was the best possible experience we could have had."

At MWPH, Stella worked on bottle feeding, as well as with the lactation team. When she came home, Stella continued with outpatient feeding, physical, and occupational therapy.



Stella then



Stella now

Stella has always loved animals, and she has formed a special relationship with MWPH's therapy dog, Babs. She met Babs as an inpatient, and Babs has participated in Stella's outpatient therapy appointments periodically as well. Babs and her handler, Lindie Ashman, manager of child life and therapeutic recreation at MWPH, have been a very meaningful part of Stella's MWPH journey.

Today, Stella is 3-and-a-half and a physical therapy graduate. She still loves animals—in fact, she participates in a farm-based occupational therapy program. She also enjoys swimming, books, and reading and loves to sing and dance. She is currently participating in a music class as well as a ballet class.

"Seeing their expertise, and the way they work with families who are in a difficult position, makes you realize that MWPH is a special place with special staff," Amanda said. ♥

EMPLOYEE NEWS



GET TO KNOW OUR STAR EMPLOYEES

The STAR employee award honors those employees who personify our CARES values— Considerate, Attentive, Respectful, Efficient, Safe. These honorees are recognized as outstanding role models in our hospital

July



Name: Habte Asmare
Title: Network administrator
Department: Information security
How long have you worked at MWPH: Two years
What is your favorite thing about your job: Resolving IT-related matters and making my colleagues' days a bit better.
Name one thing that most people don't know about

you: I love adventures. My last one was at the Danakil Depression, the lowest as well as the hottest place on the planet (330' below sea level).

August



Name: Katherine "Katie" Pabich
Title: Administrative coordinator, executive offices and outpatient services
Department: Finance (and outpatient)
How long have you worked at MWPH: 7 years
What is your favorite thing about your job: Oh gosh, this is so hard! I think my favorite part of my job is being able to support my co-workers in helping our patients go home and being an advocate and voice for parents who are scared about their initial admission, because I have been in their shoes.
Name one thing that most people don't know

about you: I am a secret Disney nerd! I love the movies, the music, and the parks (I am spending my birthday there next year). But mostly, I love the magic of seeing it through my kids' eyes ♥.

DAISY AWARD



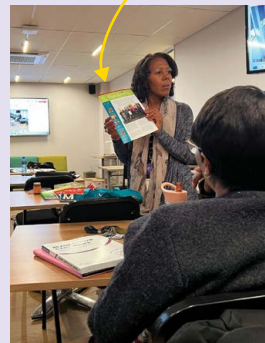
CONGRATULATIONS, Kathy Clark, RN!

"Kathy consistently looks for opportunities to provide the best care possible to our patients. Kathy is resourceful, thorough, and compassionate. She frequently exceeds the expectations of her role to ensure that the patients receive the best care possible during their admission." Thank you for all you do for your patients and families at our Capital Region unit!

CONGRATULATIONS ERICKA!

Handprints goes international!

MWPH Capital Region speech-language pathologist Ericka Janifer, MS, CCC-SLP, CLC participated in a cultural immersion and career enhancement trip to South Africa sponsored by the National Black Association for Speech Language and Hearing (NBASLH). Ericka and 16 other SLPs from across the U.S. traveled to Johannesburg and Cape Town in June 2024 to explore how speech, language, and hearing services are delivered in urban and rural communities in South Africa. Ericka had the opportunity to meet association leaders of the South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the National Black Speech Language Hearing Association-South Africa. As the only speech-language pathologist specializing in infant feeding, Ericka was able to share her expertise in pediatric dysphagia at the University of the Witwatersrand and at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital. In addition, the group explored the rich history, culture, and heritage of South Africa, including Robben Island, the Apartheid Museum, and a safari game reserve.



MYTHBUSTERS



*Myth busted by Virginia Keane, MD
Attending Physician*

MYTH: Fevers are dangerous and should be treated.

FACT: Many studies have shown that fevers help fight infection. Most germs can only live in a narrow range of temperature, and a high temperature helps kill the germs. The truth is that **fever is your friend**.

Why does fever cause so much worry? Most people feel miserable when they have a temperature over 102°F, though some children can tolerate much higher temperatures without problem. In addition, everyone knows someone who has had a fever with seizure, called a febrile seizure, though only 10% of people have ever had one. These occur most commonly in children ages six months to six years. Half of people who have a febrile seizure will never have another one. Febrile seizures are not dangerous.

So, if you or your child over two months old have fever with mild symptoms that goes away in two to three days, you can take care of it at home. I usually tell my patients **not to take fever medications unless they are over 102°F and miserable**; otherwise, **let the fever do its job**. Remember that for every degree of temperature elevation, you need 10% more fluid, so drink lots! Eat ice pops and ice cream. Rest.

5 MINUTES WITH Debbie Fike

MWPH payer relations and credentialing specialist Debbie Fike has worked at MWPH since 2005. She began her career at the hospital as the clinic coordinator for the Weigh Smart® program and moved to payer relations and credentialing in 2015.

Her work spans multiple roles. People in admissions, patient accounting, authorization, and other departments know that when a payer situation gets sticky, Debbie Fike is the person to call. And on the other end of the phone, insurance companies know they can trust her to provide accurate and reliable information—all for the benefit of MWPH patients and families.

What brought you to MWPH and your field?

I have known Dr. Katz for many years; we worked together in San Diego as well as in Baltimore at Johns Hopkins Hospital and another local pediatric facility. Dr. Katz reached out because he was starting a new program at MWPH, and I was ready for a change. I stepped away from the hospital for about a year in 2014, and I returned to MWPH in this payer relations and credentialing role. I was looking for an opportunity, and MWPH wanted to hire someone who could learn the job. It was a good fit for both of us.

I was happy to come back, because I love the hospital and the mission. It's such fulfilling work.

What is your role's biggest challenge? What do you find most rewarding about your work?

The most difficult part of my role is that it goes in so many directions. Each major responsibility area has a lot of different kinds of tasks. They touch, but they're really separate things. It's hard to put on one hat one minute and another hat the next minute.

I get the most satisfaction from patient financial assistance. I also feel good when we solve a big problem with the insurance company, and MWPH gets paid as a result.

What kind of impact do you hope to have on MWPH?

The major impact I have on the hospital comes from keeping the insurance information up to date. I make sure we're compliant with insurance company credentialing and other requirements of contracts, so the claims flow through, families don't get an unexpected bill, we get money coming in, and there are no hiccups.

The ideal situation is for everything to flow smoothly through the system. When something gets jammed up along the way, I am generally able to work with the departments and payers to figure out what is wrong, and we get it fixed.



LANGUAGE SERVICES GAINS NEW TECH



The Language Services team—L to R: Carlos Alvarez, Sebastian Tirado, Melanie Garcia

Clear, two-way communication between healthcare team members and patient families is a cornerstone of quality care and a positive patient experience. But for families who speak a language other than English, it's extremely difficult to ask questions and make informed decisions if you're receiving information that is not in your preferred language. That's why the work of MWPH's language services department is so important.

MWPH's dedicated in-house language services team provides in-person interpreting, at no cost to patients and families, to make it easier for families to be active and informed members of their child's care team. Currently, all three staff interpreters speak Spanish. But what about families who speak French, Haitian Creole, Burmese, or another language? That's where PAULE comes in.

PAULE is the hospital's new video remote interpreting (VRI) technology system. PAULE, which stands for Professional Assistance Using Language Everywhere, offers more than 240 languages, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It offers video and audio, so the users and the interpreter can see as well as hear each other. MWPH has seven PAULE systems at the Rogers Avenue location and two more at the Capital Region location.

In addition to the wide variety of languages available, PAULE offers other benefits. It's easy for clinical teams to operate themselves for both outpatient and inpatient needs. Its interface is familiar—the user experience is similar to FaceTime or Zoom—and it launches with a simple, user-friendly app. It's accessible across the hospital, and in case of slow Wi-Fi, the system can switch to audio-only.

The system is a big upgrade from the hospital's old VRI system, MARTTI. "With PAULE, the connection is substantially better compared to MARTTI. Language Line (the company that offers PAULE) offers more languages than MARTTI did, including American Sign Language," said Sebastian Tirado, who became the hospital's language services manager in April 2024. "This system is also very cost effective compared to an in-person interpreter."

Language services has also recently welcomed two new interpreters to MWPH: Carlos Alvarez and Melanie Garcia. "Both come from interpreter agency backgrounds and have been great additions to the team," Tirado said. "It has helped us provide a balance between in-person interpreter services and the VRIs." ♥

Community Health Needs Assessment Sets Course for a Bright Future

On June 27, MWPB's board of trustees approved its latest community health needs assessment (CHNA). The CHNA, which is completed every three years, is the result of a detailed, community-led evaluation and assessment process that identifies the health needs of Baltimore City residents.

"The CHNA is important because it drives the hospital's community benefit programming for three years," said Tamara England-Wilson, DMin, MWPB's director of community benefit. "It helps us to see the needs of the community from the community's perspective as opposed to us coming up with programs that address our own priorities."

MWPH and the Baltimore City Hospital Collaborative worked together throughout 2023 to gather the perspectives of residents, community members, partner organizations, and other stakeholders, to determine what they viewed as the top health priorities. The city uses that broad input to identify Baltimore's priorities. For this CHNA cycle, Baltimore selected mental health, access to care, and chronic health conditions.



John Benton-Denny, Community Benefit Coordinator and Tamara England-Wilson, DMin, Director of Community Benefit.

After that process, the hospital develops an implementation plan, in collaboration with community partners. MWPH works with several community organizations through the Community Health Advisory Board

(CHAB). The hospital's CHAB strategic team worked with a facilitator to understand the city's priorities and what was happening in MWPH's service area, leading to goals and objectives for the hospital to address.

MWPH adopted the city's three priorities and added two others—violence and safety, as well as social determinants of health—for a total of five priority areas. Programs will roll out slowly and intentionally, resulting in measurable progress on the priority areas after three years.

"Since I arrived in October of last year, my work has been focused on developing an intentional and deliberate approach to programming to improve the health of persons in our service area who do not have the same access to healthcare that others have," Dr. Wilson said. "Dr. Klein has provided a valuable framework to help us all view community benefit through the proper lens of equity, ensuring that our work meets federal and state regulatory guidelines. With this, I believe we are on the right path." ♥



MWPH: IN THE COMMUNITY

It was a great two days of advocacy and fun in our nation's capital for Family Advocacy Day 2024. Special thanks to the Cahill family for sharing Milan's story and advocating for children's health on behalf of MWPH. We're grateful to our congressional delegation for substantive meetings: Congressman John Sarbanes, Rep. Jamie Raskin, Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger, Senator Van Hollen.





Patient Parent Perspective

Christina Wilson



Christina Wilson is mom to a 21-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son, Amir Rich. Born two months early, weighing two pounds, Amir spent a total of 452 days in the hospital. His acute care experience included time in a medically induced coma, time on ECMO, and 3 months intubated. Of those 452 days, about six months were at MWPH.

How did your family first connect with MWPH?

Amir transitioned to MWPH from acute care, where he received physical, occupational, and speech therapy.

What other services has your family received?

As an outpatient, Amir has continued with physical, occupational, and speech therapy. He is also participating in applied behavior analysis therapy at MWPH. Amir is on the path to getting his trach out as well.

What stands out about MWPH?

Their dedication to 1) the kids and 2) the training and the patience they have with the parents. Speaking for myself, they showed me what to do step by step and gave me the confidence to work with his trach. My mother, my sister, and I all got the training, and it was imperative to making us feel comfortable taking him home.

MWPH's outpatient services are awesome. Dr. Virginia Keane is amazing when it comes to coordinating care of these medically complex kids.

What advice do you have for other parents?

Fight for your child to get to MWPH, because most places don't give this type of training and experience. It is needed for anyone who will be taking care of these kids when they transition home. Second, always ask questions. Advocate for your child, and always speak up.

KUDOS for our Caring Staff

"Very good care, kindness and respect and a lot of interest in the patient and understanding."

—Patient Parent

"We appreciate the expertise of our OT, Brendan. Brendan has been wonderful to work with! He's very knowledgeable, respectful and responsive. My child has come a long way since starting OT with Brendan."

—Patient Parent

"Dr. Sponseller and his team are AMAZING providers. The administrative staff and support staff at Mt Washington are also very attentive and exceptional, as well."

—Patient Parent

For information or questions about *Handprints*, contact **Katie Yeager**, Communications Manager at katharine.yeager@mwph.org



Mt. Washington Pediatric Hospital

Where Children Go to Heal and Grow

Est. 1922

An affiliate of University of Maryland Medical System and Johns Hopkins Medicine



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Follow us on Instagram @mwphstories



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