This Side Up
Stories of Patient-Centered Care

Aurora Health Care®
Aurora Values

We believe ...

that every patient deserves the best care.
in responsibly managing resources.
in accountability, teamwork and respect.
Introduction

I’m proud to provide you with a copy of This Side Up – Stories of Patient-Centered Care. This collection of stories, compiled from the life and work of caregivers and patients from throughout Aurora Health Care, is much more than a book. It’s the real story of inspiring people with wonderful attitudes, values and unique approaches to doing things.

The stories you’ll read will demonstrate the power of listening and human compassion. You’ll also see a common theme – everyday people taking ownership of their work to improve the patient experience. Our cover story, the “This Side Up” onesie, is a great example of how personal empowerment and staff action can make a difference ... and even save lives.

The staff action committee at Aurora Medical Center in Manitowoc County was looking for a gift to provide to parents as they leave the hospital with a newborn. Keeping in mind the need to help parents understand the increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome when placing an infant on its stomach, they came up with the idea of a onesie that gently reminds parents to place their infant “this side up.” After much planning and discussion, and with the help of Scott Voskuil, M.D., and other OB/GYNs, they agreed that this was a wonderful opportunity to educate new parents, family members and caregivers about newborn care. They collaborated to find a way to order and print the onesies and began providing them to new parents. Now every baby leaves their care in a “This Side Up” onesie.

The initiative was such a success that it has been picked up at other Aurora hospitals and is likely to be repeated at more and more of our locations.

I hope you’ll find our stories inspiring. Our patients entrust us not only with their physical health, but with all aspects of their care and healing. It is a privilege to care for them and our communities. It’s also an enormous source of pride to know that our caregivers, no matter what their role or title, are living our values and constantly finding better ways to improve the patient experience.

Nick Turkal, M.D.
President and CEO
Aurora Health Care
Really cool ride

Jason, a 23-year-old patient with Down syndrome, quickly captured the hearts of his caregivers at Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center. Jason would draw pictures and tell funny stories, warming the hearts of those around him. His caregivers on the unit referred to him as “the heart of our floor.”

Unfortunately, Jason was nearing the end of a terminal condition. The diagnosis was extremely difficult on his caregivers, particularly since he could not fully understand his condition and did not want to leave the unit.

With special sensitivity, social worker Sue Marohl and the palliative care team of Dr. Steve Rommelfanger and Judith Hemke worked together to plan his discharge and transfer him to hospice care in an ambulance. When the plan was shared with Jason, he objected to riding in the ambulance, insisting he was not sick enough. Instead, he thought it would be “really cool” to ride in a police car.

To make the transport emotionally easier on Jason, heart failure program coordinators Tammy Freichels and Sue Carter, and security officer Kris Jungbluth, set
out to grant Jason's wish. On the day he was discharged, nurse Jeffrey Kling first took group photos of Jason, his family and caregivers so that Jason could take them with him. Then, Kris arranged for officers from the Milwaukee Police Department to arrive in uniform to escort Jason to hospice care. They drove in a security vehicle with lights flashing.

Four days later, Jason died peacefully in his sleep. His family is forever thankful to his caregivers for providing some very happy moments during a very difficult time. As for his caregivers, they refer to their time with this very special patient as a true gift.

**Managing midlife**

Nawatsie Tyars tried several treatments for her menopause symptoms, like teas and health store products, but nothing seemed to work. After about six months, she decided to go to the Aurora Women's Pavilion for medical advice. The doctors, coordinators and other caregivers helped her understand what was happening to her body, and develop a course of action. She quickly gained confidence in managing her own health care.

Nawatsie also became part of a patient forum at the Aurora Women's Pavilion. This group of women discussed the issues that were facing them and helped each other learn more about their health.

The whole Aurora experience significantly changed Nawatsie's outlook on life. She learned she could take charge of her health and be proactive by eating better, exercising and making good choices. From mammograms to yoga, Nawatsie feels the Aurora Women's Pavilion is a beautiful environment where women can find the right person and service they need. From the knowledge Nawatsie gained, she now feels good about menopause and is successfully managing this stage in her life.
**Maiga**

At age 92, Maiga Meimanis has seen the worst and the best of humanity.

A native of Latvia, she saw her country invaded twice in the years leading up to World War II.

Recently, however, Maiga has experienced human kindness at its finest. She has seen the unselfish attention of Brandy Seelow and Pam Frank, customer service representatives at Aurora Health Center in Neenah.

Maiga had suffered a broken hip as the result of a fall. Returning home from a care center, she became dependent on a walker and grab bars, but even these were useless when it came to the two steps outside her kitchen door.

“\textquote It was getting so it was harder for her to make her appointments,” Pam said. “We didn’t like to see her cancel them because she wasn’t able to make it out of the house."

Maiga told Brandy and Pam that she had looked into getting a ramp built at her home, but the $1,000 price tag was more than she could afford.

The two resourceful women put their heads together and contacted an area service club, which agreed to donate half the cost of the structure. Contributions for the balance were quickly found and the club also donated a wheelchair that Maiga has found invaluable. “I can go out now,” she said. “I was inside all the time.”

In addition to these efforts, Maiga’s doctor had nurse Amy Newell
investigate whether Maiga was eligible for some form of state aid. A social worker was soon dispatched to see if Maiga qualified for home care or financial assistance. In the process, all three women joined forces to resolve Maiga’s remaining quality of life issues.

“She is so sweet,” Pam said. “She’s like our grandma. We just love her. We want to help her keep whatever independence she has left.”

Cover me

Recently diagnosed with breast cancer, I underwent a mastectomy at Aurora BayCare Medical Center. Never having had surgery before, I was terrified. As the nursing staff readied me for the operating room, they offered me a fleece blanket. Gripped with fear, I thought to myself “I don’t need a blanket. I don’t need a blanket!”

But when I awoke after the procedure, I can’t begin to describe the wonderful feeling I had when I saw that colorful fleece blanket. For the first time in over a month, I felt so happy and comforted. That beautiful blanket has been with me every day since my surgery.

God bless all who give their time making these blankets. Please know that your time and effort is so appreciated and needed. My blanket will stay close to me the rest of my life. I will cherish it always.

— Grateful patient

Note: The breast surgeon, Dr. Collette Schmid, now writes “blanket” on all her surgical orders. The fleece blankets are made by hospital volunteers.
Positive touch


Reiki is a Japanese word meaning universal energy. The Reiki practitioner uses the flow of her own body’s energy through the heat of her hands to provide relaxation, comfort, stress reduction and healing touch to the patient. It is based on the idea that an unseen “life force energy” flows through each of us and can enable us to help one another. If one’s life force energy is low, then we are more likely to get sick or feel stress; if it is high, we are more capable of being happy and healthy. A treatment feels like a wonderful glowing radiance that flows through and around you.

We learned approximately 35 different hand positions from the forehead to the feet. The Reiki environment is calming with low lighting and soft music. The practitioner models deep breathing and can think of healing intentions if desired.

Even though the class was a positive experience for me, I wasn’t sure how it could apply to my acute care patients. Then I thought of the semi-comatose patient who has been at our hospital for months.

His mother was very concerned and often appeared very stressed. In addition to our regular family training, I decided to introduce the Reiki concepts I had just learned. His mother was very interested in the materials I provided. I demonstrated how to access relaxing images and music through Skylight ACCESS™ TV in her son’s room. I demonstrated the various hand positions she could use when he was sitting up or laying down. We reviewed deep breathing and therapeutic touch.

A quick learner, the patient’s mother began to gently give her son Reiki touch. After a short while, the patient, while unable to communicate, demonstrated a temporary reduction in grip tone (actually allowing the cone splints to fall off) and began to loudly snore. His mother became tearful, allowing herself an emotional release while she provided the Reiki to her son.
I'm happy that I had this knowledge to share. As therapists, we have the ability to teach families how to counteract all the "negative" touch their loved ones may experience during medical care, like lab draws and IVs, with more pleasant ones that are therapeutic and life affirming.

– Laura Kohler
Physical Therapist
Aurora Sinai Medical Center

**Involving the family**

A drowning victim was brought into the emergency department at Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center, and caregivers were working hard to resuscitate him. Previously, the hospital's policy was not to allow family into the area, but Chaplain Ellyn Wheeler decided to bring in the patient's wife, who helped in the decision to stop resuscitation. Being there and involved, his wife knew the staff did everything they could to save him. She said it meant a lot to her that she was part of his care, and made a big difference in understanding and accepting his death.
What will happen to me?

Recently, I was called to the emergency department to support a woman whose 66-year-old son, Kevin, had been admitted with a massive brain bleed. His mother, Mary, was distraught, emotionally switching from trying to be strong to bursting into tears.

With the nurse’s help, I got two chairs so we could sit outside the room her son occupied. As we talked, Mary became anxious about her other son in Lake Geneva, whom she desperately wanted to be with her. Mary had his phone number, but no one was answering. With the help of a police officer who was watching another patient, we eventually got the local police to make a house call to this other son and inform him of his brother’s condition. I was then able to reassure Mary that her son was on his way, and that he would be going straight to Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center, where Kevin would soon be transferred.

As soon as doctors allowed, I escorted Mary into Kevin’s room, which only brought on more tears. I asked if she would like me to pray; she nodded yes, and as we prayed she became more calm.

As time passed and medical staff continued to stabilize Kevin, Mary asked me the same questions over and over again. Each time I answered as if it was the first. She told me that she was 92 and that she just did not know what would happen to her if her son died. She would have no one to look after her. We talked about her other son and she believed he would look after her, but she wanted to stay in Milwaukee. “What will happen to me?” Mary asked again and again. Her fear was real, and only compounded her anxiety over the possibility of losing Kevin.

As time went on, I realized Mary must be hungry and got her some crackers. She promised me that when she got to Aurora St. Luke’s, she would have coffee and maybe something more to eat. I contacted the chaplain there and made sure they would come to meet Mary and take her to Kevin’s room.

Then a slight problem arose with transport. Mary had come in the ambulance with her son, but she couldn’t go to Aurora St. Luke’s in the same ambulance, as they would be driving at emergency speed.
One of the nurses suggested a taxi and I offered to go with her. However, the ambulance drivers said she could be taken in the back-up ambulance that was available.

I accompanied Mary to the ambulance and made sure she was comfortable. I assured her that her other son would be waiting for her at Aurora St. Luke's and that a chaplain would be there, also.

– Norma Barr
Chaplain
Aurora West Allis Medical Center
Niko touches lives

Dr. Brenda Reed, a licensed psychologist, brings her dog Niko to patient sessions at the Aurora Behavior Health Center in Waukesha. While she talks with the patient, Niko calmly lays there, waiting to be petted. The black Lab mix doesn’t do anything special or extraordinary – except provide a warm and loving environment where patients feel more at home.

Dr. Reed feels Niko helps her patients be more expressive, especially male patients. She saw more personality expressed from a man in one of her first sessions with Niko, than she had seen in several previous sessions.

Using dogs for physical therapy and visiting patients is pretty common, but it’s a fairly new concept for behavioral health. Research shows that dogs have a physiological effect on people, reducing anxiety and blood pressure, as well as an emotional effect. Dogs give unconditional acceptance and provide empathy and nurturing. According to Dr. Reed, patients open up easier with Niko in the room. When the conversation gets uncomfortable or difficult, Dr. Reed has actually seen patients reach out to pet Niko and talk to him. Feeling safe talking to Niko, they are able to open up more without fear of judgment.

Dr. Reed brings Niko to most of her therapy sessions, including her patients with sleep disorders at Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center. Niko’s presence integrates relaxation into these sessions and helps the patients calm down, both mentally and physically, which is critical to the therapy for this type
of disorder. Patients say that having Niko there is one of the best things she could do to help them relax.

Niko gets the staff more engaged, too. “When we walk down the hallways,” says Dr. Reed, “everyone stops to pet Niko and talk.”

According to Dr. Reed, patients that benefit from having Niko present in their therapy sessions are those experiencing anxiety, depression, loneliness or sadness. These people are more isolated and experience less physical touch, so Niko provides that missing piece.

Stranded

During Wisconsin’s recent flooding, a patient called the Aurora Wilkinson Medical Clinic in Dousman to report that she was out of her medications and was stranded by rising water. The water was so deep she was unable to drive her car. To compound her troubles, she had no family to provide assistance.

The Aurora Wilkinson team reacted quickly to help. Money was donated to purchase groceries. Nurse practitioner Carol Millman delivered them, along with the needed medications. Area flooding was so bad that the patient had to paddle a canoe approximately 150 yards from her driveway to the main access road to reach the welcomed supplies. Understandably, she was very thankful for the staff’s help, generosity and perseverance.

It's no surprise that the Dousman clinic has high patient loyalty. Patients know this team cares for them and are always willing to go above and beyond a normal day's work to help.
Marlene Moran, a collections representative at Aurora’s Forest Home Center in Milwaukee, recently contacted an elderly gentleman in his 90s about his medical bills. During the call, she learned the man was unable to pay anything. His eyesight was so bad he could not read his bills. He was an amputee. The man was so poor that he burned wood in cold weather for heat.

Marlene was very concerned for the man and not because of his inability to pay his bills. She was worried about his physical safety and was determined to do something about it.

Marlene contacted the on-site financial counselor at Aurora Lakeland Medical Center to see what could be done to help the man. She was informed that a senior care coordinator, Kathy Paul, would follow up on her request.

Kathy visited the gentleman at his home and found him very interesting and much in need.

“I was able to find his application for senior care, which had expired,” Kathy said. We were able to get the application completed so that he could continue to receive his medication. I followed up with the county and he is now receiving a friendly visitor each week to check up on him. He now has community support and believes his needs are being met. A social agency now visits the gentleman once a week to provide personal care.”

Taking her concern one step further, Kathy left her telephone number with the man. He said that he would call if he requires further assistance.
Amazing Gracie

Confined to a hospital bed in the weeks leading up to her daughter’s birth, Anna Bongle braced herself for the worst. “I was fully prepared to go home empty-handed,” she says. Sheridan “Gracie” Bongle arrived on May 6 – three and a half months premature, weighing just 15 3/4 ounces and 9 3/4 inches long. The doctors at Aurora BayCare Medical Center in Green Bay told Anna and her husband, Jon, the struggle to get their daughter home would be a roller coaster.

But as the months passed the baby’s chances improved, and on October 20, Gracie went home.

Her homecoming would not be without its worries, however. Aurora BayCare’s social services department notified the highway department and the electric company. If there would be a power outage, they wanted to make sure they got the power back on as soon as possible to keep Gracie’s equipment running. And in the event of a snowstorm, they would need to plow the Bongles’ road quickly in case they had to get to the emergency room.

Today, Gracie is doing well and making good progress. The family has learned to cope with the extra vigilance it takes to care for a preemie – like giving her special shots to ward off disease and taking her in for extra check-ups. But the best weapon they have at securing a bright future for their daughter looks up at them each night from her crib – one tiny miracle who beat all the odds, amazing Gracie.
U.S. Marine Master Sgt. Scott Malinski is at war in Iraq, but that didn’t stop him from witnessing the birth of his son at Aurora Medical Center in Oshkosh.

From his computer laptop in Fallujah, Iraq, Sgt. Malinski watched his wife give birth to their second son live via video conference. The conference was made possible by Aurora caregivers working with Freedom Calls Foundation, a charity which allows troops in Iraq to talk with family members by video – free of charge.

Alexander James, who was born by Cesarean section, and mom Amy Malinski, are both doing well. Hours after the birth, Sgt. Malinski learned that Freedom Calls Foundation would also be granting him the opportunity a few times a month to watch his new son grow and interact with Amy and their 2-year-old son Max, through more live Internet video conferences.

Aurora Medical Center in Oshkosh is among only a handful of hospitals nationwide to provide this service to its patients. Freedom Calls Foundation provides more than a million free minutes of phone calls each month and another 2,000 video conferences.

The birth broadcast was a team effort within Aurora Medical Center. Caregivers from client services and information services coordinated the broadcast using digital video equipment purchased through a grant from the Aurora Health Foundation.
Benny

Kari Schmidt, director of employee and organizational development, and her pet therapy dog Benny help to make Aurora West Allis Medical Center a brighter place for patients and their families.

Benny is a two-year old black Lab mix. He and Kari spend their Saturday mornings visiting patients on the third floor rehab therapy unit. Benny helps rehab staff work with patients on a variety of activities from dexterity to basic motor skills. He often reminds patients of positive memories of pets they’ve had in the past.

After each patient visit, Kari leaves behind a hand-written card stamped with a “paw-print” from Benny, thanking them for their meeting and encouraging their rehab journey. Patients are so touched by the cards that they are often posted in their hospital room as a warm reminder of their time together.

Librarians make the rounds

Librarians at several Aurora hospitals are now attending interdisciplinary rounds on certain patient units. Staff and librarians discuss the information needs of each patient. When appropriate, the librarian visits the patient in their room and determines what additional information they might like about their condition. At Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center, librarians work in partnership with clinical nurse specialists, who give the librarian a list of patients to visit. Their visit is then documented in the clinical documentation system.
Inseparable

When the family of James Puffer admitted their dad to Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center, little did they know that their mom would soon follow. At 82-years-old, Mr. Puffer had advanced Alzheimer’s disease and developed pneumonia. When it was apparent that he wasn’t going to get better, the family respected their father’s wishes and made the decision to let nature take its course. They requested comfort care for him.

Natalie Stuettgen, an R.N. on 10LM, cared for Mr. Puffer during his stay and got to know the family. She could tell how much they cared about each other. “It was really heartwarming to see such an involved family,” she says. His family never left his side.

One day, Mr. Puffer’s wife, Mary, suffered a mini stroke – right in her husband’s hospital room. The first response team was called to the room. Mrs. Puffer received care and was soon admitted herself. When Natalie learned that Mrs. Puffer would be on 10LM, she knew they had to be together. “This was a husband and wife who were obviously used to being together.”

According to the Puffer’s daughter, Kathy Mejac, it “meant the world” to Mrs. Puffer that she could be in her husband’s room.

Though male and female patients are not normally allowed to share rooms, this situation called for an exception to the rule. Natalie was “very happy we could really focus on what we could do to make them feel better and more comfortable.”

A smile and friendly hello

Although she doesn’t work with patients one-on-one, Shannon Samolyk in food services at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital does prepare their food. Food is often the highlight of the day for many patients, and Shannon will add a smile and a friendly hello to make their experience better. Whenever she sees a patient she knows, she addresses them by name and always asks them how they are to make them more at ease. Shannon also makes it a point to address her coworkers by name to create a more personal work environment.
As Mr. Puffer’s condition worsened, the 10LM caregivers continued to provide personalized care. Kathy was particularly grateful for the respect they showed her father. “My dad was a very modest person. When they bathed him or turned him over, they made sure he was covered up. They really maintained his dignity.”

When the end was near for Mr. Puffer, Kathy pushed her parents’ beds together and the family gave them time alone to say goodbye. A couple hours later, Mr. Puffer died. Though it was a sad time, his wife and children surrounded him to share in the last moments of his life.

Mrs. Puffer was still in the hospital the day of her husband’s funeral.

The caregivers had arranged for a transport team to take Mrs. Puffer to the funeral. Unfortunately, she took a turn for the worse and could not attend. “Even though she couldn’t go, I am just so appreciative that Aurora St. Luke’s was willing to do this for her,” Kathy says.

It’s been several months since her father’s passing, but Kathy “still gets goose bumps and teary-eyed thinking about the care her parents received. “They treated my mom and dad like they knew them personally. Some of them even prayed with our family. It’s clear that this isn’t just their ‘job.’ They showed true love, kindness and compassion.”

Mary Puffer (left) and her late husband James (right) with their family
Living the spirit

Cindy Jones serves as the manager of food and environmental services at Aurora Medical Center in Manitowoc County. Quick to share her strong knowledge, experience and belief in patient-centered care with staff and patients, she understands that leadership is not about power — but about encouraging and nurturing responsible freedom in the people around you.

Under her leadership, Cindy has improved the patient – and caregiver – experience by championing successful initiatives like all-day room service with special diet options; Healthy Wednesdays in the cafeteria; full-color picture menus for patients unable to read, speak or lacking appetite; the inflation fighter program; nutrition labels on all food served in the café; summer cook-outs on the patio for staff and visitors; and a farmers market in the hospital parking lot every Friday.

The picture menu has been a big success — not only for those who can’t read or don’t speak English, but also for stroke patients who have trouble speaking or comprehending, and patients who benefit from visual cues to stimulate appetite. The menus are also used in rehab therapy.

Patients and visitors regularly comment on the cleanliness and wonderful smells in the hospital. Maybe it’s because Cindy’s motto is “If you have time to lean, you have time to clean.”
Cindy has served as a team leader for several years, a Planetree retreat facilitator, has been awarded four Aurora Stars and most recently became part of the Pet Therapy team with her dog, Tess.

A role model for healthy change, Cindy got involved with Weight Watchers over a year ago, achieved her own personal goal and now encourages staff by leading the program one day a week over the lunch hour. Doing what’s best for our patients, doing what’s best for our staff, Cindy lives the spirit of Aurora’s patient-centered care.

**Inspirational message**

Beverly Westphal, an 80-year-old environmental services caregiver in the intensive care unit at Aurora Medical Center in Oshkosh, greets each day with enthusiasm, lightheartedness and a tremendous sense of pride in her work. Passionate about making each patient encounter memorable, she is never too busy to listen to them with care, concern and empathy.

Beverly approaches each day as an opportunity to make a personal connection with newly admitted patients and to check-in on those she’s already gotten to know – always assuring these fragile patients and their worried loved ones that they are in good hands. She also reads an inspirational quote every day to patients, from a card she places on their over-bed table, such as “Our life is what our thoughts make it.”

Along with the caring manner she showers on our patients, Beverly takes the ICU staff under her wing as well. Just as a surrogate mother cares for a child, Beverly treats each as her own, the well being of every individual being very important.

Although Beverly could have chosen retirement several years ago, her young-at-heart spirit fuels her passion and commitment. Ask her what she likes best about working in the ICU and she immediately replies, “Everything!”
Soup from the heart

Kathy McCann is a clinic application system specialist for Washington County. She supports the computer technology for three clinics, including physicians and staff. She does this by being respectful of her peers and giving them her personal attention. When answering a call for help, Kathy always responds, “I’ll be right there!” She realizes the importance of addressing concerns promptly and ensuring uninterrupted delivery of care for our patients.

Prior to the launch of any new computer program or application upgrade, Kathy arranges to be readily available to support the staff and ensure their comfort and understanding of the new systems.

Following one recent roll out, Kathy brought in a large pot of homemade soup to thank staff for their patience and cooperation in transitioning to the new program. Everyone was thankful for the meal and grateful for Kathy’s constant support, calm demeanor and attention to their individual needs.

Kathy has filled in many times as a receptionist to ensure patients have a warm smile and welcoming words as they check in. She has also come in before clinic opening to welcome a patient having a procedure, and will say, “I don’t want our patients coming in to a dark building – I want them to see that we are open and ready for them.”
Walker is a pet therapy dog at Aurora Medical Center in Washington County. His owner, Stephanie, brings him in several times a month and manages to see almost every patient in the course of a day.

Recently, there was a hospice patient in her last hours who was not responsive. Her family, keeping vigil by the bedside, asked if their mother could have a visit from Walker, as they and their mother shared a deep love of animals.

During the visit, Walker went toward the bed and laid his head next to her hand. The family placed their mother’s hand on Walker’s face and told her it was the therapy dog. She opened her eyes for one brief moment of recognition and left her family with an indelible memory they will cherish forever.
Cultural sensitivity

Modesty and childbirth usually do not go hand in hand. However, when a Muslim couple arrived at Aurora Lakeland Medical Center to have their child, the nurses and other staff quickly showed a deep understanding of their cultural requirements and thought of creative ways to address their needs.

Because female modesty is a basic principle of the Islamic culture, women wear loose fitting clothes and head coverings in public. After learning that the soon-to-be mom normally wears a veil in public, Barb Greene, nurse extern, sat down to talk with the couple.

They candidly explained their deeply-rooted beliefs and customs, and expressed great concern about privacy. “Not only was I interested, but I also realized how important it was to them and how sensitive we needed to be,” said Barb. The couple was particularly concerned about any men seeing the mother, as she would not be wearing her veil during her stay.

The staff started brainstorming ways to give her the privacy she required. They brought in a screen to cover the entry of her room so that when the door was opened, she was not immediately visible to people in the hallway. The nurses then realized
there were many opportunities when male staff might possibly enter the woman’s room, such as food servers with meal trays, laboratory technicians for blood draws, and volunteers with flowers or cards. They quickly made calls to the appropriate areas to assure that only female staff would be dispatched to the patient’s room.

Also, when the mother received her epidural, the nursing staff made sure that only a small amount of her skin was visible to the caregiver administering it.

With everything in place, their baby daughter was soon delivered healthy and happy to very proud parents.

Grateful for the hospital staff’s high level of professionalism and working together as a team, they recently wrote to Aurora and said, “We always mention your hospital and your staff every time we repeat our wonderful story to a friend, family, colleague or neighbor.”

**Reaching for the stars**

At Aurora Sheboygan Memorial Medical Center and Aurora Sinai Medical Center, volunteers and staff working on their own time painted a series of colorful murals in the stairwells. Some of the scenes include a vibrant underwater panorama of sea creatures, whimsical Wisconsin farmland and wildlife, a rolling Hawaiian shoreline and an outer space cosmos. At Aurora Sinai, community involvement included artists from a local business who partnered with Aurora Sinai by donating time, tools and talent. The brightened stairwells help to encourage caregivers to take the stairs and thereby improve their health and reduce congestion in the elevators. Patients also benefit from the more artistic, healing environment when, for instance, using the stairs as part of their rehabilitation.
Healing patchwork

Distance is no barrier when it comes to helping others in their cancer journey.

Peggy Adney, a registered nurse in the operating room at Aurora Lakeland Medical Center, heard about some quilting groups who donate pink quilts to women undergoing mastectomies. Quick to recognize a great idea that fosters patient-centered care, Peggy enlisted the help of her mother, Mary Knippelberg, a breast cancer survivor herself, to help make lap quilts for breast cancer patients at Aurora Lakeland.

Mary, who lives in Carlsbad, Calif., started quilting because her sister, who lost her battle with breast cancer in 2002, did a tremendous amount of quilting in the last two years of her life. Mary says that when she quilts, it provides her the opportunity to remember her sister. "I am truly one of the lucky ones, since it has been 11 years since my mastectomy," says Mary. "Quilting gives me the time to reflect and be thankful while hopefully making someone else's time after surgery a bit brighter."
Soothing lavender

I had the honor of caring for a frail, elderly woman with advanced stage cancer who had come to Aurora West Allis Medical Center from Aurora VNA Zilber Family Hospice. She came to day surgery for a urology procedure.

The family was very concerned about the care she would receive away from hospice. While preparing her for the surgery, we took great care in handling her gently and with the utmost dignity, quickly gaining the family’s trust.

When she was fully prepped, I offered her a warm, lavender-scented neck roll. At first, she looked quizzically at her husband. He said, “Try it. If you don’t like it, the nurse will take it off.” So on the neck roll went. Within moments, the patient began to literally purr — she was so enjoying the soothing warmth and relaxing aroma. She asked if she could wear the neck roll into surgery, which we normally don’t do; but after talking with the urology nurse, we made it happen.

When the procedure was over, we re-warmed the neck roll and she kept it on until just before she had to leave. The family asked where they could get one of the neck rolls to take home, and I told them they could purchase one in the Aurora Women’s Pavilion.

As a caregiver, being able to offer this small gesture of comfort to our patients is very rewarding and affirming that we truly are finding better ways to deliver patient-centered care.

— Dorothy Jo Davis, R.N.
Aurora West Allis Medical Center

Lavender is one of the most widely used essential oils in the world today. Diffusion of lavender is recommended to promote relaxation, feelings of comfort and ability to sleep. Aromatherapy is one of the many complementary medicine offerings being made available at Aurora Health Care.
How sweet the sound

I went to visit a patient on the fourth floor of the hospital whom I had been following throughout the week. The day before, she had found out that she was going to go home. She was very excited. But when I went to see her this day, she was crying because she had been told there were complications from her surgery and she would have to remain in the hospital a bit longer.

With these complications came a tremendous amount of pain. While waiting for the newly-ordered pain medications, I could see from her face that she was in agony. Her teeth were clenched and every muscle was tense. She lay in bed with her eyes closed, trying to deal with the pain and calling the nurse to see how long the medications would take to arrive.

While sitting with this patient, I asked if I could sing to her so that maybe she could focus her thoughts on something besides the pain. She agreed and I told her to just concentrate on my voice and the words. I carefully took her arm and began to gently rub it. Then I began to sing one of my favorite hymns, "Amazing Grace."

Jana Troutman-Miller with a patient
Halfway through the first verse, I saw the tension in her face begin to ease, her jaw relaxed and her breathing became slow and steady. As I finished the song, she remained relaxed and I realized she had fallen asleep. Even when I moved my hands away from her arm, she did not wake up.

I was so happy when I walked out of the room to know that for a few moments, I was able to help ease her pain and relax her thoughts with something as simple as a song.

— Jana Troutman-Miller
Chaplain
Aurora West Allis Medical Center

In a ditch

While a dialysis patient was on his way to treatment one morning, he lost control of his car and went into the ditch. Dr. Susan Arcaro, an anesthesiologist at Aurora Health Center in Marinette, happened to be following the gentleman and pulled over to assist. The driver informed her that he was on his way to dialysis. Dr. Arcaro helped the man get his car out of the ditch and park it at a local business. She then drove the man to his dialysis appointment.

Upon arrival, Dr. Arcaro informed the nurse and the technician of the situation. They made a call to the local police department to inform them of the situation. Then they contacted the local car dealership to arrange for a rental car for the patient and a tow truck for the damaged vehicle. Dr. Kenneth Kellner, the patient’s primary care doctor, was notified and came in early to examine his patient for any injuries.

This grateful patient was very appreciative of the way the Aurora staff went above and beyond their duties to help ease the stress of a bad day.
Baskets of Hope

Patients in hospice or palliative care programs need spiritual and medical care, and their friends and family need support as well. The Aurora Visiting Nurse Association of Wisconsin provides extra comfort to patients and their families by offering a Basket of Hope.

The Baskets of Hope program is designed to touch each hospice patient we serve in a unique way. Each Basket of Hope is filled with items designed to relieve the stress during this time in their lives. It includes items such as rice packs for cooling or warming aches and pains, herbal teas, mugs, notecards, soothing music, lotions, lip balm and a handmade blanket called a prayer shawl. Lovingly assembled by Aurora VNA hospice volunteers, Baskets of Hope are then delivered to patients by a chaplain, nurse or social worker.

The baskets are sponsored by the Aurora VNA philanthropy department through donations made by members of the community.

"We cannot say enough good things about 'Baskets of Hope.' It was an uplifting experience to receive this gift and it made Roy and me feel like someone cared enough to brighten our lives."

– Wife of a hospice patient

"You are the dearest, most kind caregivers that exist. We thank you! The Basket of Hope was a well thought out, fun and useful gift. Our best wishes to all of you."

– Family member of a hospice patient
Petal power

• A patient had just lost her spouse and was not coping well at the time of her physician appointment. As she was leaving, the clinic staff offered her a beautiful yellow rose. The kind gesture brought tears to the patient’s eyes.

• An OB/GYN patient recently came in for her postpartum appointment. She left her doctor’s office with a big smile and a congratulatory flower.

• A patient came to the clinic for a follow-up appointment after outpatient surgery. Unfortunately, she learned from her specialist that she would need to see an oncologist. The staff presented her with a fresh flower as an expression of comfort, caring and support.

• A man arrived for an appointment with his ophthalmologist and happened to mention that his wife wasn’t feeling well. On the patient’s way out, his doctor handed him a flower to take home for his wife with the message that he and his staff were thinking of her.

“It’s amazing what a simple flower can do to make a difference in someone’s day,” says Barbara Bleck, the Petal Power program developer at the Aurora Health Center in West Bend. “Our caregivers have been instrumental in identifying patients who may need a little extra touch of human caring. I’ve seen the pride they feel when their flower has helped someone get through a tough moment or time. It’s also nice when we can show our patients that we’re celebrating with them when they reach a health milestone or have a special occasion like the birth of a baby.”
Nike touches lives

Nike and her handler, Kay Detempel, have been an active part of Aurora BayCare Medical Center's pet therapy program for three years. Together they have touched the lives of many patients, visitors and staff.

Never missing a holiday, Nike regularly “dresses” for the occasion in holiday-themed apparel. Because she is agility and obedience trained, Nike performs tricks such as retrieving a scented dumbbell and picking up change off the floor. Patients love to see her costumes and are amazed at her ability to perform tricks.

Says Kay, “It feels good to help someone toward recovery.”

Kay recalls two patients in particular ...

I remember a young lady who was in a coma. When we arrived at her room, her parents and the speech therapist were at her side. They asked if I would put Nike in bed with her, which is no problem since she only weighs 15 pounds. Nike laid next to the young woman while her parents took their daughter’s hand and stroked Nike’s soft coat. Nike laid there still as could be and licked the young lady’s hand. The
patient made some eye movements during the visit, which gave a ray of light to the parents and speech therapist.

Now you have to know Nike — she is a Sheltie who is not a “sit still” kind of girl. But that day she laid there so patiently, for over 30 minutes. It is amazing — therapy dogs just seem to know who needs them and when. Even though that young lady didn’t come out of her coma that day, I still felt good about giving her family a little hope.

That same day, I was asked to visit a man who had been in the hospital a few days and was depressed and missing his own Sheltie dog terribly. The minute we walked in his room, his face lit up with a smile. He and his wife “oohed and aahed” over Nike, showed me a picture of their dog and we exchanged Sheltie stories.

At the end of the visit, Nike sat on his lap and his wife took pictures of the two of them. They were so happy to see Nike that day. It made him forget for awhile why he was in the hospital and gave him inspiration to get home to see his beloved Sheltie.

**Fifth-grader saves brother**

Sheboygan fifth-grader Matthew Kowalis performed the Heimlich maneuver on his 21-month-old brother Thomas, after Thomas began to choke. Matt’s mother called for Matt after Thomas turned blue and she could not dislodge the food stuck in the baby’s throat. After Matt applied a few Heimlich thrusts, the food came out and Thomas began breathing again.

Matt learned the life-saving skill in fourth grade during a basic first-aid class taught by pediatric nurses Anne McCraw, B.S.N., and Laura Alsteen, R.N., who work at Aurora Sheboygan Clinic.
Troubled teen

Allison enrolled at Kradwell School as a second semester ninth grader. She arrived with a bipolar diagnosis and had been hospitalized at least three times at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital.

As a sixth grader, Allison tested at the 12th grade reading level. Though bright and eager to learn, teasing started in middle school and her frustration manifested itself through loud and angry verbal outbursts. Her parents withdrew her from the public middle school and home schooled her for two years before Kradwell.

At Kradwell, Allison found academic success, although her mental health was always tenuous. She was treated with numerous medications and hospitalized a number of times during her enrollment. A major contributor to her mental anguish was the worsening alcoholism of her mother. Fortunately, her father was always there for her.

Both Allison and her father participated in the Kradwell Capital Campaign to renovate and add elementary programming to Kradwell School. A scholarship, which included transportation expenses, was awarded to Allison via the Elizabeth Brinn Foundation Scholarship for city of Milwaukee children. This lifted the financial burden from the family.

Early in her junior year, Allison’s mother died unexpectedly. Kradwell
and therapeutic staff at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital helped Allison through this difficult period.

Another blow came during the summer prior to Allison’s senior year. She became pregnant. As a result of the pregnancy, she could not take her medications. Her behavior in and out of school was cause for alarm. She was frequently out of control and at one point lashed out at the assistant principal, both verbally and physically. She was again hospitalized.

Allison decided to give up the baby for adoption. The aftermath of this decision led to further turbulence. Through it all, the Kradwell staff never gave up hope for this young girl – making accommodations to support Allison and enabling her to successfully complete her senior year. Allison graduated with a 3.62 G.P.A.

Kradwell School is a private, nontraditional, nonsectarian kindergarten through 12th grade program specializing in students who are unsuccessful in the traditional school environment. These students’ lives are complicated by emotional and psychological disorders such as depression, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders, anxiety, dyslexia and a myriad of other learning disorders. Also served are students termed “at risk” of not graduating. Though unsuccessful in the traditional school, many Kradwell School students are, in fact, gifted and talented.

No band ... no ride

Edmundo Romero and other caregivers in patient transport at Aurora Sinai Medical Center are delivering a higher level of patient safety. The first thing they do when they pick up a patient is identify that patient by their wristband. If the patient does not have the wristband, they will not move the patient until the band is in place.

Since they started this initiative, Edmundo and his department have had zero patient errors. This means every patient that is moved in Aurora Sinai is the right patient going for the right treatment and in the right location.


**Tempest and a tea cart**

At Aurora Medical Center in Oshkosh, there are two lovely volunteers, Carol and Judy, who provide a Tuesday Tea Cart service every Tuesday afternoon. One day, a very large, loud and angry man was causing quite a scene in the lobby. He was there to pick up his wife, who was being discharged. The man wanted his wife brought downstairs to the lobby, but the nurses on her floor wanted him to go upstairs to receive information and training on how to care for her.

Well, the very impatient and irritated husband wanted none of that and was being quite vocal about it. He went to sit in the lobby and wait. At this time, the unsuspecting tea cart ladies approached the husband and began offering him tea and cookies from their cart, while at the same time being good listeners to his perceived problem. After a short while, they were able to calm him down and convince him to follow procedures by going upstairs to get his wife and learn the home care techniques necessary to support her.

Thanks to Carol and Judy, and the Tuesday Tea Cart program, an unhappy service experience was avoided and patient care was enhanced because now his wife could be better cared for when she returned home.
**Something in the cards**

A patient of Dr. David Munoz was admitted to Aurora St. Luke’s South Shore. The patient, who liked playing cards, had a history of dementia and was non-verbal. When nursing staff called Dr. Munoz for admitting orders, he asked the nurse to also give the patient a deck of cards. The nurse was a bit confused and asked, “A deck of cards?” Dr. Munoz said, “Yes, a deck of cards. If she has these it will keep her calm and we won’t need to medicate her for anxiety.” The nurse quickly tracked down a deck of cards for the patient and gave them to her. Immediately, the grateful patient smiled and motioned to the nurse to come closer — then proceeded to give her a kiss on the cheek.

**Nothing to wear**

In the emergency department at Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center, patients often arrive wearing soiled clothes or their clothes have to be cut quickly from them during emergency treatment. Upon discharge, some of these patients have nothing to wear when they return home. To address this problem, the staff proposed a clothing drive, asking Aurora caregivers for donations of gently used clothes.

In a matter of weeks, the response was overwhelming! The emergency department now has clothing for all seasons to give to patients. They were also able to donate extra clothing to a local church to benefit needy people in the community.
Mental illness can be complex and difficult to treat. People with mental illness suffer considerable personal distress and tend to lead isolated lives.

To address the need for a more personal connection with their patients, the inpatient nursing and therapy staff at Aurora Psychiatric Hospital generated the idea for a summer picnic. They identified the day and determined what supplies would be needed. They also planned how they would care for patients that day without disruption and still have a wonderful event.

Eager staff from the inpatient adult behavioral health nursing unit cooked hamburgers, brats and hot dogs for about 30 patients. Mike McDonald, activity therapist, and Kathy Griffin, resource nurse on the day shift, were in charge of grilling, Vickie Bowers, behavioral health technician, assisted other staff by setting up the buffet line. Tables and chairs were set close together to encourage patient and staff interaction.

Nurses used the opportunity to educate patients on restricted diets to make good food choices and have fun. Watching the patients helping each other fill their plates and laughing and talking together with staff was a heart warming experience for all. The event was such a success that two more picnics were planned.
Helpful hands

Berdie Maigatter in patient access services at Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers saw a woman in the emergency room struggling with her oxygen tank while trying to assist her husband in a wheelchair. She was carrying the oxygen tank in a plastic grocery bag, which not only was inconvenient but also unsafe.

After helping the woman get her husband where he needed to go, Berdie started thinking about how she could help patients who carried oxygen tanks. With sewing talents learned from her mother and help from her daughter, Berdie designed a washable, reversible fabric bag with a shoulder strap to hold the portable oxygen tank, allowing the person to keep their hands free. One patient even asked Berdie to design a color-coordinated bag to match her dress for her grand-daughter’s wedding. Patients were so appreciative to have something functional, as well as fashionable.

Dressing for grandma

One evening while making his usual cleaning rounds of the men’s public restrooms at Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers, Larry Hansen in environmental services came upon a man who was struggling to dress himself because his broken arm was in a cast.

The young man explained to Larry that his grandmother was in the hospital with cancer, and she had just called for him to visit her – probably for the last time. It was always very important to his grandmother that all her grandchildren looked and dressed nice for family functions, so it was very important to him that he looked nice for her now. But having just come from work, the young man was changing into his best dress suit and was having difficulty buttoning the shirt and tying his tie.

Larry assisted him in getting dressed and sent him on his way.
Wendy Gilley, customer service representative at Aurora Health Center in downtown Milwaukee, answered a call one day from a patient wanting to cancel her appointment. As Wendy checked the appointment log, she noticed that this patient had canceled her appointment 12 previous times. Instead of just rescheduling this appointment once again, she asked the patient why she couldn’t make it in. The patient told Wendy that she had found a lump in her breast and was afraid to find out what was wrong.

Quick to take action, Wendy calmly talked the patient into discussing her fear with the clinic nurse. The clinic nurse soon found out that the patient was also afraid to leave her home and was suffering from severe depression. The nurse was able to talk the patient into rescheduling her appointment and she ended up coming in the next day.

This service experience is a shining example of how everyone at Aurora can be a caregiver. Wendy could have easily just canceled the appointment, but she went the extra mile and really helped the patient overcome her fear and, quite possibly, save her life.
You’re my angel

When Laura started having headaches and strange body movements she was not able to control, her primary physician sent her to Aurora Sinai Medical Center. A CT scan revealed metastatic cancer of the brain, from renal cancer.

Over the next year, Laura was in constant contact with her physician and clinic nurse, Ramona Lopez. No matter what she was going through, Laura always had a smile and positive attitude, and her laughter was infectious.

Laura and Ramona quickly developed a strong bond of respect, support and love for each other. Laura did not like to speak to any other nurse or medical assistant. When Laura wanted to go out of town to see her grandchildren, she called Ramona first to get advice.

Ramona extended help to Laura’s entire family too. She made sure that they all got their flu shots so as not to expose Laura’s weakened immune system to flu viruses, and supported them emotionally as they dealt with Laura’s illness.

When the holidays came, Laura surprised Ramona with an angel pin telling her, “You’re my guardian angel. I know I’m being well taken care of when you’re here.”

Ramona kept in close touch with Laura, visiting her often at home and in the hospital. Laura passed away less than a year after her diagnosis. The pain in her nurse’s heart was lessened when she recalled all the times she witnessed Laura’s positive attitude and laughter.

Laura’s memory reminds Ramona that each and every patient can fill a caregiver’s heart with love and the knowledge that their presence can mean so much to someone facing an illness.
Nurse Carrie Schubring was asked by Dr. Fred DeBoe to contact his patient, Tim, who needed some support and guidance with diabetes control. Tim’s hemoglobin A1C was significantly high. Carrie contacted the patient to explain that she was there to help him understand his disease and help in any way she could to get his diabetes under control. Tim was rather skeptical as he had heard this many times before.

It took some time, but Carrie was able to develop a very good rapport with Tim. She individualized his care by personalizing their form of communication. She e-mailed him on a weekly basis to see how he was doing. She provided education regarding diet, exercise and other healthy living tips. As Tim was seeing successes in his care, his trust in Carrie kept growing. Tim commented often that Carrie “follows through with her promises.” His trust in her has helped him to improve his health.

Carrie did many things to help Tim with the management of his diabetes. He is challenged due to the fact that he has no health insurance, no transportation and a low paying job. Carrie managed to help him with numerous resources including obtaining free insulin samples and syringes. When he told her that he could not call in every week, she started e-mailing him to
meet his needs. She found recipes and sent them to him to assist with his diabetic diet. Carrie sent him congratulation cards signed by the nurses, staff and physicians responsible for Tim’s care when his blood glucose was lowered.

The best part of the story is not only that his diabetes is now under control, but that Tim no longer feels like he doesn’t care if he lives or dies. Now, because of the relationship that has developed with Carrie, he wants to grow old and is beginning to trust people in the health care system again.

You made the difference

A 17-year-old girl came into Aurora Sinai Medical Center with a swollen finger. In the course of treatment, she was asked to fill out a depression screening and adolescent risk survey. Overall she was healthy and her swollen finger would be easily treated, but the screening information revealed she was engaged in high risk sexual behaviors. Alerted to this, nurses offered her a complete women’s health exam and lab work to assess for any other disease issues.

The young woman was quiet, but very cooperative. After the exam, she asked if the caregiver would call her mother to share with her how “good” she was during the exam. She went on to explain how she was at another provider’s office, but could not go through with the exam because she was terrified, and literally “jumped off” the exam table. “It was a horrible experience,” she said.

So what was different this time? “You made the difference,” she told the staff. “You were gentle and took the time to explain to me what you were doing and why you were doing it. It calmed me down and made me feel good. I just want my mom to know that I was able to do this and that it was a good experience.”
Aurora Health Care caregivers have a long history of extending care to the communities we serve. Here are a few of the ways Aurora Sinai Medical Center caregivers support those less fortunate during the holiday season:

**Admitting adopts a family through Aurora Family Service**
The admitting department wanted to “adopt” a family with the help of Aurora Family Service. Working with a case manager, the team adopted a family of five: a mother and her four children, ages five all the way down to three weeks old. The young mother had been homeless and living in transitional housing until recently, having just moved into a permanent home of their own. The team went shopping to provide the family with needed items for the home, and also a monetary gift.

**Supporting children at the Carter School of Excellence**
Sally Turner, director of patient-centered care at Aurora Sinai, became aware of an opportunity to adopt a classroom at Milwaukee’s Carter School of Excellence. Sally shared the request with the hospital’s Planetree Staff Action Committee leaders and management team. Within minutes, the request to adopt the class was accepted. Two days later, it was decided to adopt the *entire* school. Aurora Sinai caregivers pledged needed supplies and winter clothing such as mittens, hats and scarves, as well as a gift or two for each student.
Neighborhood House  
As a new caregiver in the intensive care unit, Kate Brandstetter, R.N., was thinking about Planetree and the idea of supporting healthier communities. Working in the ICU, she saw what poor health can do to people. Her department wanted to do something to help keep people healthy – especially those who are really vulnerable, like children and the elderly. Kate used to work for an organization called Neighborhood House, which helps residents and families improve the quality of life for themselves, their relatives, neighborhood and community. Kate’s department decided to work with them. They placed a tree in the department where staff hung donated mittens, hats and other items to help keep people warm and healthy during the winter. Everyone jumped at the chance to help.

One last holiday  
At Aurora Medical Center in Hartford, Lisa Seefeldt, R.N., was caring for a young woman whose breast cancer had spread to her lungs and bones; the prognosis was not good. With Christmas right around the corner, the patient confided in Lisa about her concerns over her medical situation, her husband’s recent unemployment, and the mounting financial burdens her family faced. She also spoke of how her 12-year-old son would probably not get any Christmas presents that year.

As a mother, this was heartbreaking to Lisa. Knowing that this would probably be the last Christmas this young boy would have with his mother, Lisa was determined to make it memorable. Together with her fellow nurses and the patient’s doctor, they took up a collection so that Christmas presents could be purchased for the child. Overcome with emotion and through tear-filled eyes, the patient said, “Thank you, thank you so much.”

As caregivers know all too well, it is often the simplest acts of kindness that provide the most healing.
The wedding goes on

Erin Schultz and Sean Jori would have never imagined their wedding taking place in a hospital. But, that’s exactly what happened after Erin was admitted to Aurora Sinai Medical Center, derailing the couple’s original wedding plans.

Just a few days before they were to be married, Erin, who was pregnant with twins, required inpatient care and bed rest for the remainder of her pregnancy. Erin had happened to share with her nurse, Laurie Drent, R.N., that she and Sean had planned to be married the following Friday. Laurie listened to Erin describe the couple’s plans. She could tell how important it was to Erin that they were going to be married before the birth of their babies. Plans that now seemed impossible.

Though it would involve the coordination of several details, recreating a wedding didn’t seem impossible to Laurie or anyone else who jumped on board to help. Laurie discussed the couple’s wishes with chief OB/GYN resident Kathy Powell, M.D., who was overseeing Erin’s care with attending physician and OB/GYN program director Tina Mason, M.D. Together, they considered what would be possible, given Erin’s delicate condition. That’s when an entire team of caregivers—employees, volunteers and medical staff—went into action, planning a complete wedding ceremony and reception for the couple within just a few days.

On the big day, Erin was transported to Aurora Sinai’s Meditation Room in a specially decorated wheelchair. Then, with family and caregivers looking on, Erin’s father walked his daughter down the aisle and into Sean’s arms.

In addition to Erin’s immediate care team, some of the other caregivers involved in creating this experience were members of Aurora Sinai’s pastoral care team and radiation oncology clinical office assistant Wanda Gray, who sang at the wedding.

Trish Harm, Candice Leuthold, Mara Litmanovich, Francine Rau, Larisa Stein and LaRhonda Tatum were also among those instrumental in the planning of the wedding and reception that followed. They and others made sure this day was as close to perfect as possible, from flowers and decorations to a ceremonial toast with non-alcoholic sparkling wine and the traditional cutting of the cake. The cake had been arranged at no cost through the generosity of OB tech Cara Jerdee and her mother. Cara’s mother
baked, decorated and donated the cake for this special occasion.

WISN Channel 12 was on hand to cover the event for that evening’s newscast. In the story, Erin described everyone’s efforts saying, “It’s amazing, we’re overwhelmed.” Sean told the reporter, “I didn’t expect this … this was the sweetest thing anybody’s ever done.”

Volunteer manager Francine Rau spoke to the bride’s father after the wedding. He said this wedding was even more special than his other daughter’s recent church wedding because, as he put it, “There is so much love here and we don’t even know most of you who did this for us.” Francine explained to the family that Aurora employees are all caregivers and that we want to find ways to create meaningful memories for our patients. Sean responded by saying, “You are certainly making great memories for us today.”

Everyone involved made Erin’s and Sean’s wedding dreams come true. As it turned out, it was just in time, too. One day after the wedding, Erin gave birth to a boy and a girl.
A new way to transport

Aurora Sinai Medical Center’s Nurse Coordinating Council worked with Arlene Riddell, R.N., wound care, to establish strategies to decrease the hospital’s high rate of pressure ulcers (sores acquired in the hospital). Arlene studied the problem and noted that pressure ulcers often occur because of skin friction or shearing that may happen when patients are transferred from their bed to a cart and then back to their bed.

Arlene offered to meet with several departments to review her findings, including patient transport. What happened next demonstrated the transporters’ high level of ownership and innovation in finding a solution for this problem.

They suggested that the rate of sores could be decreased substantially if, whenever possible, patients were transported in their own beds instead of being transferred to a cart. The transport team initiated this process and soon thereafter, the number of pressure ulcers from friction or shearing decreased. This resulted in better patient care and an improvement in Aurora Sinai’s pressure ulcer rate, which dropped from 8.5 to 1.5 percent in one year. Arlene says, “Clearly, the patient transporters impacted this score.”

Patient escort Scott Andrus explains, “Changing our process to transport patients in their own bed has been a win-win situation. Patients aren’t feeling well, they have aches and pains. They’re safer and more comfortable in their own bed because they’re not getting pushed around as much or being slid from a bed to a cart and reverse. It’s a win for us because it’s so much easier to just greet our patients and go.”

Patient escort Linda Williamson notes, “We’re spending less time having to find equipment or wait for help. Now, if we know a patient can be transported in their own bed, we don’t have to round up extra help or take the nurses away from what they’re doing.”
Staying connected with WiFi

As Aurora Health Care strives to provide its patients and their guests the best experience possible, a major part of that experience is meeting their expectations when they visit any of our facilities.

Aurora hospitals offer guests wireless Internet access, designed for those who have a laptop or notebook computer equipped with a wireless card, allowing the device to access the Internet.

By keeping people connected to their busy world, we stay connected to them in ours.

When maintenance is a caregiver

Maintenance technicians at Aurora Sinai Medical Center have a new way to leave a patient's room. Instead of saying goodbye, they ask, "Is there anything else I can do for you today?" It's a simple courtesy that prevents patients from having to get out of bed for something simple or push their call button to have the nurse come close the shades or turn out their light.

The maintenance technicians also have the opportunity to do service recovery. For patients who have a maintenance problem or bad experience, such as their room being too cold, technicians can give them a free movie pass to use with their room TV. It's a way that they can directly turn a negative into a positive.

Caregivers from plant operations provide above-and-beyond service to their internal customers as well. They let each department know that they will come around on a certain day to fix squeaky doors, dripping faucets and other things on the departments' "honey-do" list. They also bring along an appreciation cart of goodies for each area's caregivers.
Nick and Sam

Two patients of mine, Nick and Sam, have very similar problems—diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol. I hadn’t seen either of them in my office in over a year when they showed up on the same day. Both were complaining about having to urinate almost constantly and one was even having bowel incontinence. I did my usual diagnostic testing and when the results came back the next day, I was amazed to see that both men had extremely elevated levels of blood sugar.

When Sam showed up in my office that day for his test results, he told me he had stopped taking all his medications because he decided he would put himself “in God’s hands” and was relying on the power of prayer to cure his illness. Nick showed up two days later and told me the exact same thing.

Conventional Western medicine deals almost entirely with the physical organism. We believe in the physical cause of illness, and so we prescribe physical interventions—surgery, medications, behavior modifications, etc. But Planetree touches aspects of health and wellness that Western medicine doesn’t really address very well, such as a person’s interior states, their emotions, how they visualize their disease or even societal attitudes toward their disease. All of these can play a crucial role in both the cause and the cure of what may appear as simply a physical illness.

As physicians, we’re deeply involved in the science of medicine—our training orients us this way. The conventional Western medicine in my head looked at these two patients and said, “You know, you’ve spent a lot of time trying to educate these two about diabetes and all its consequences. You’ve prescribed effective medicines, you sent them to diabetes educators—it’s really a shame that their beliefs prevent them from taking advantage of what modern medicine has to offer.”

But instead of being upset that these two patients had “rejected” the traditional medical approach I offered them, my belief in Planetree helped me develop a different vision than the one I learned when I was in training. I began to see the underlying rationale of why Planetree makes sense.

Getting back to Nick and Sam ... I told each of them I actually believed in their power of prayer and its place in curing them. When I looked into both of their eyes, I wasn’t just saying it to try to manipulate their thinking, I said it
because I actually came to believe this myself. And as a result, I think they began to trust me and I was able to convince them that just as we shouldn’t only focus on physical interventions, such as my medicines, we also shouldn’t only rely on interior approaches, such as prayer and spirituality – but rather we should use both to get them better. I also asked them for permission to give their names to the prayer group at Aurora Sinai Medical Center, so that they could have many prayers said for them.

Well, I am happy to report that both Nick and Sam started taking their medicines again and they’ve made huge improvements in their diabetes control.

– Fred DeBoe, M.D.
Family Practice Physician
Aurora Health Care
Grateful heart

To the administrators, physicians, nurses, engineers and staff of Aurora St. Luke’s:

When I came to Aurora St. Luke’s as a patient, I knew that I could expect good medical care. What I did not expect was the unbelievable support that I received from everyone I would encounter in the eight months that I spent there.

Every member of the Aurora St. Luke’s team including food services, housekeeping, information technology, and shipping and receiving went above and beyond to provide a home-like atmosphere for my family and me. While I was at Aurora St. Luke’s, I missed family birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, my fiancée’s college graduation and our two boys’ first year of high school. Not only did Dr. Alfred Tector, Julie Cavey, the cardio rehab staff and the bio-medical engineers throw me a surprise birthday party, they arranged for a Christmas dinner with my entire family. I even received Christmas gifts and stocking stuffers from the 9ST nursing staff, cardio rehab staff and bio-medical engineers. I can’t tell you how much these thoughtful gestures really kept me going each day.

I feel extremely grateful to have received a second chance at life. Today, I am doing well and feeling great. My fiancée Pamela and I are getting married and I have many of you to thank for that.

I want to especially thank the entire staff on 9ST for everything, especially those daily newspapers; the cardiac rehab staff for keeping me strong and for those heart-healthy recipes; the members of the bio-medical engineering team who kept “Big Blue” (Total Artificial Heart Machine) running smoothly for all those months; and
the food services staff for putting up with me – particularly chefs Larry Elam and Larry Bushner for those outstanding meals. I’d like to give an extra special thanks to the heart transplant team and clinic for their amazing skill, patience, professionalism and compassion.

I will never forget the outstanding care and the wonderful people who went out of their way to make me feel at home during my long stay there.

— Ray Harmon
Heart transplant patient

Location ... location ... location

As the parish nurse at First United Methodist of West Allis, I have coordinated a diabetes support group for several years. Some attendees were residents at Library Square Retirement Community and were no longer able to attend due to transportation issues. I contacted Library Square to explore the possibility of moving the group to a location that could accommodate more of the participants. The facility ultimately offered our group a meeting room free of charge. The residents of Library Square were able to attend the meeting with ease and because of the neutral meeting site in the community, I’ve advertised the group to the Greater Milwaukee Free Clinic, the West Allis Health Department, West Allis Senior Center, West Allis Library and six other local churches. Monthly meeting attendance has expanded and continues to grow.

This is a perfect example of how Aurora parish nurses carefully placed in the faith communities are able to identify needs, create new and targeted partnerships with a variety of community groups who share the same mission, and are able to leverage health care resources to provide health care support for a greater number of individuals.

— Pat Shapiro, R.N.
Aurora Parish Nurse
Who does your hair?

For Shirley “Gail” Schlitt, setting goals gave her something to look forward to in an otherwise uncertain life. Things like setting up her Christmas tree one last time, decorating her home for the holidays, living long enough to share her husband’s next birthday.

Gail had a congenital heart defect that caused her to be in and out of the hospital a lot. During the six years that she was a patient with the Heart Failure and Pulmonary Hypertension Clinics at Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center, the staff got to know her well. They grew extremely close to Gail and her husband Val.

When it became clear that all medical options had been exhausted, Gail made the decision to die at home under hospice care. The day before she was scheduled to go home, the clinic staff stopped in to say their goodbyes. When it was nurse Susan Carter’s turn, Gail asked if she could ask her a personal question. “I told her she could ask me anything,” recalls Susan. “Imagine my surprise when her question was, ‘Who does your hair?’”

Gail explained to Susan how important it was to her that she look nice for her funeral. Her hair hadn’t been cut or styled in a very long time. She also wanted one last picture with her husband – she even had a special frame already picked out for it.

By sheer coincidence, that night Susan happened to have a hair appointment with her stylist, Diane. She shared Gail’s story and Diane immediately volunteered to come in the next day and cut Gail’s hair before she was discharged, and she insisted on doing it for free.

So early the next morning, Diane arrived at the hospital to cut and style Gail’s hair. Gail’s husband brought in some nice clothes for her to change into, and nurse Jeffrey Kling took photos of Gail with Val and the staff.

“When I look at those pictures, I see the happiness radiating from her face,” says Christine Kretschmer, another nurse in the Heart Failure and Pulmonary Hypertension Clinics. “Moments like that and people like Gail are what make my job so rewarding.”
That fall, Gail died peacefully at her home. She did not get to accomplish all of her goals, but thanks to the compassion of Aurora caregivers who knew how to care for Gail’s body, mind and spirit, she passed away knowing two very important wishes had been fulfilled.

**It only takes a moment**

Carrie is a 16-year-old girl with many health problems. She is bipolar and has Attention Deficit Disorder. She has periods of severe depression and mood swings. Because she chooses not to take her behavioral medications, her emotions and thoughts are sometimes in question.

The staff from the Aurora School-based Health program had the opportunity to develop a wonderful relationship with Carrie and her mother. Their social history is sad, and one that is common with many of their clients. Because of her mental health, Carrie often runs away from home; and when she seeks health treatment, she is “branded” as a noncompliant, inconsistent patient. The Aurora School-based Health caregivers have much more patience for teens that live with adversity.

One day, Carrie came in with chronic stomach pain, vomiting and nausea that had been going on for several weeks. She had already seen her regular physician, who referred her to a gastroenterologist. She was scheduled for an endoscopic exam with a colonoscopy.

But after a thorough exam, the Aurora caregivers thought to run a simple *H. pylori* screen. *H. pylori* are bacteria that can cause severe stomach disorders. Sure enough, Carrie had a positive test. This meant that with the correct medications she would be better in a few weeks — without undergoing any invasive GI procedures.

Carrie continues to be a frequent client of the Aurora School-based Health program, as they work on her many emotional health issues. She is a complex patient, but one who certainly benefited from caregivers who took the time to listen patiently, encourage trust, and work outside the box to help a young girl find her way.
The healing power of music

Harp music floats through the hallways of Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center’s cardiovascular intensive care unit, soothing patients, visitors and staff. MaryAnn Miller-Soch plays her harp tirelessly, in 15-minute intervals. This performance is for her husband. Rich has recently had quintuple bypass surgery and is experiencing serious postoperative complications. For three days and three nights, MaryAnn plays her harp, stopping only to apply a fresh cold compress to Rich’s forehead and speak to him softly.

“Look at this,” says Jeffrey Widell, M.D., Rich’s pulmonologist, shortly after MaryAnn started playing her harp for Rich. “His numbers are improving already!” Relieved, MaryAnn sinks into a chair beside Rich and holds his hand. In a few minutes she will begin playing again in hopes that Rich will continue to improve.

As holistic approaches to healing become more common, the unusual prescription of using music to help critical patients is gaining popularity. But for Dr. Widell, infusing music into his treatment plans is nothing new. “I had heard of Planetree, but I have been doing this for years,” he says. “I try to find out what sort of music the patient likes, and I use that music to help minimize their agitation as opposed to relying entirely on drugs.”

Since many of Dr. Widell’s patients are elderly, he gets many requests for Glen Miller and Bing Crosby. He’s even used the occasional “Lawrence Welk Show” rerun to complement their care.

Dr. Widell points out that music often allows family members to feel like they are playing an active role in their loved one’s care. In Rich’s case, as soon as Dr. Widell heard that Rich enjoyed harp music and that MaryAnn played the harp, he asked her to play right away. The effect was almost immediate, and he was able to reduce Rich’s sedation.

As a professional harp player, MaryAnn has also experienced the healing and comforting power of music. “I have noticed a change in the atmosphere of an entire restaurant when I play my music,” she remarks. “I have even had the serving staff tell me that they feel much less stressed at work when I am playing.”

MaryAnn has also played at several funerals, and recalls occasions when family members have told her how her music helped them get through a difficult event. “Playing my harp even comforts me,” MaryAnn
admits. "When Rich had to have a second surgery, I was a nervous wreck. Playing helped calm me."

At one point during Rich’s care, Cheryl Koehler, one of the CVICU nurses, saw how exhausted MaryAnn was becoming from playing constantly for her husband. She offered to help find a solution that would give MaryAnn a much-needed break. Cheryl arranged for Aurora Creative Services to make an audiotape of MaryAnn playing so Rich could still benefit from the music and MaryAnn could rest. The continuous music helped – Rich came through the rough patches needing less sedation than a typical patient in a similar situation.

Rich doesn’t remember anything from those rocky two weeks after his bypass surgery, except the harp music. Now doing well at home, he has many positive things to say about his experience at Aurora St. Luke’s. “I really appreciate how the doctors and nurses make you feel like you are their most important patient. My doctors popped in on me every day. Dr. Widell even checked in on Christmas Eve through the eICU camera and wished me a ‘Merry Christmas!’”

“You can definitely tell that the people here are special,” adds MaryAnn. “They look at care differently than most hospitals. And they aren’t afraid to hug you, to show caring.”
Caring for fellow caregivers

It had been an incredibly challenging year-and-a-half for Zandra Davis, a nursing assistant for the metro region float pool. Health problems had put a great deal of stress on her and her family, both emotionally and professionally. Yet she will tell you that it had also been one of the most uplifting times of her life. It all had to do with the kindness of strangers.

Zandra’s first encounter with a stranger’s kindness was after she had knee surgery and was placed on light duty. Temporarily assigned to the corporate office, Zandra did not have a key to get into the building when she arrived early on her first day of work. Her hands full with a cane and her bag, she was relieved when someone offered to help her into the building. The “young man,” as Zandra describes him, opened the door for her, walked her to the elevator and pushed the button. “He was such a gentleman,” remembers Zandra. It wasn’t until later that day that Zandra found out that the kind stranger was Nick Turkal, M.D., President and CEO of Aurora Health Care.

But Dr. Turkal’s kindness didn’t end there. He told corporate office caregiver Carole Czecholinski about Zandra. From that point on, Carole saw to it that Zandra got safely into the building each morning.

While recovering from her knee injury, Zandra noticed that she had developed a bruise on her arm. Since she did not recall injuring her arm and because the bruise was not healing, Zandra sought medical attention. Just ten months after her knee surgery, Zandra was diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer.

Zandra had surgery to remove an egg-sized tumor from her arm and began cancer treatment that same month. Being on the other side of patient care has made her an even stronger advocate for the great care that Aurora provides. “I am so thankful for my case manager, Ann Strakulski,” says Zandra. “She would check up on me on a regular basis and would take the time to talk to me. When you are going through something like this, there are times when you just need a person to talk to. She was so helpful to me.”
Since Zandra had used a large amount of her paid time off for her knee surgery, it was not long before she found herself in the middle of treatment without any time off left to use. With medical bills piling up and her stress level on the rise, Zandra turned to Sue Alauf in benefits and compensation and her supervisor, Pat Landerott, for help.

“I have always been self-sufficient, so it was extremely hard for me to ask for help,” says Zandra. Little did she know that her request for help would result in the greatest outpouring of kindness she has ever experienced.

Through word of mouth, Zandra’s story spread throughout the entire Aurora metro region. Several people from various departments — many of whom Zandra did not know — donated paid time off and sent her cards, flowers and prayers.

“I was so incredibly touched by the compassion and kindness these people showed me,” Zandra says, choking up. “Since I will never know all of their names, I just want everyone to know how humbly grateful I am.”

Zandra’s treatment went well, which she attributed not only to the medical staff that cared for her, but also to the kindness and support of her family, friends and Aurora co-workers.
Caring has no boundaries

Ngassa Mssika, a medical technologist at Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers, recently traveled back to his hometown in Africa to bring school supplies and clothing to children orphaned by AIDS. Along with him on this trip was Scott Gerard, a lieutenant for the Two Rivers police department and husband of Denice Gerard, an emergency department technician at Aurora Medical Center. Ngassa is married to Heidi Mssika, an R.N. in the Vince Lombardi Cancer Clinic at Aurora Medical Center.

This was his first time back to Africa in nine years after he left to pursue his medical career. With great excitement about seeing his family, Ngassa also was anxious to visit and hand out school supplies and clothes to the children. Ngassa knew that many families in his home town didn’t have money to purchase these kinds of supplies, and he wanted to help. Growing up in his native Tanzania, Ngassa was exposed to anti-American propaganda in school and felt this would be a good way to show Tanzanians that Americans care about others.

It is a Tanzanian custom to bring gifts when visiting and as Ngassa and his friends began to plan their trip their ideas grew. Ngassa placed an ad on the Aurora employee classified Web site requesting donations of school supplies. The employees responded and offered to help. Three fundraisers were created: an African-themed lunch was held in the hospital cafeteria featuring authentic African food, music, colorful African clothing, woven baskets and grasses for decorations; a “biskuti” (Swahili for cookie) sale was set up with the help of food service and patient access staff action committees; red ribbons were sold in awareness of the AIDS epidemic with proceeds going toward the school supplies and needs of the orphanage.

With over $2,100 raised by fellow employees, Ngassa was able to buy mattresses, school supplies, cleaning products and personal hygiene items for the Kurasina National Children’s
Home. The home houses 105 youths, ages 2 to 20, many afflicted with AIDS. He also, with the help of his friends, repainted the home and bought toys for the children living there. Ngassa brought traveler’s checks to Africa and bargained with storeowners for the supplies. When storeowners heard that they were purchasing supplies for the children’s home, they wanted to help too, and either gave more supplies than what was asked for or gave a discount.

For the hundreds of employees at Aurora Medical Center that participated in the activities, it was an opportunity to sample the taste and sounds of another culture, but most importantly, provide many needed necessities for these children.

Plans are in the making for the next fundraiser to continue to support the children in Tanzania.

**A shoulder to cry on**

A young mother was sobbing in the hall at Aurora Health Center in downtown Milwaukee while her screaming newborn was getting a blood draw. Thirty-six years ago, Karla Blank, now in occupational health at the center, felt the same way when her two-week old son had to have a procedure, and no one had been there to console her. It broke Karla’s heart knowing exactly how this new mom felt, and Karla wanted the experience to be better than her own.

Karla gave the new mom a hug, got her a tissue and sat down and talked with her. She explained what the caregivers were doing and why, and that her baby wasn’t being hurt — he was just mad. The mom’s tears stopped and she actually smiled. When the technician needed to get more blood from the baby, this time the mom walked promptly into the lab draw area, reassured that her baby would be fine.
Our journey to patient-centered care

Aurora began a radical cultural transformation in 2001 when we decided to become a member of Planetree, Inc., the international not-for-profit organization that works with health care organizations to improve the patient experience. As an established and successful health care provider, there were many among us who thought we already subscribed to the essential Planetree theme: health care should be delivered in a manner that works best for patients. But as we learned more and studied the components of Planetree, we realized there was much more work to be done. Today, we are happy to celebrate some remarkable results: better patient loyalty, increased employee engagement and better financial results than at our non-Planetree hospitals.

Now we are an active member of Planetree’s international community. We have brought the concept of patient-centered care to our clinics, pharmacies, home health and even business offices. We discovered that even though architectural components can promote healing, the most important component is our people. Listening, compassion and respect are all key elements in patient-centered care. Caregiver retreats and training have become part of our organic culture to keep us all focused on these essential human needs.

Bringing patient-centered care to life at hundreds of locations, in clinical and non-clinical settings, was no easy task. But as individuals and in teams, through our Planetree champions, work teams and staff action committees, we have made hundreds, if not thousands of improvements in the way we do things. We believe we are closer than ever to being able to simplify care for all patients and to personalize, humanize and demystify health care.

Although we’ve come a long way, we know we still have a long way to go. True patient-centered care is a journey, not a destination. We serve millions of patients throughout eastern Wisconsin. But if even one of them is unsatisfied with the experience we provide, then our work is not complete.

— Aurora Caregivers
Ten Components of Aurora’s Patient-Centered Care
as defined by Planetree, Inc.

- Human Interaction
- Architecture and Interior Design Conducive to Health and Healing
- The Importance of the Nutritional and Nurturing Aspects of Food
- Empowering Patients through Information and Education
- The Importance of Family, Friends and Social Support
- Spirituality: The Importance of Inner Resources
- The Importance of Human Touch
- Healing Arts: Nutrition for the Soul
- Complementary Therapies
- Healthy Communities
Some names in this book have been changed to protect patient confidentiality.

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