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Join us to celebrate

Health Care Heroes® Award Honorees

and for a

Special Tribute to all First Responders For Hurricane Ian



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MAY 17, 2023

To HEALTH CARE HEROES SUPPORTERS:

To Health Care Heroes Supporters:
South Florida is becoming a global destination for top-quality health-care, and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce has been at the forefront of the industry's evolution. Our annual Health Care Heroes celebration recognizes the leaders who have fueled that growth and contin-

ue powering our best future. For more than two decades, Health Care Heroes has been the premier community gathering where our local outstanding professionals are honored by top leaders from hospital systems, physician groups, managed care providers, biomedical innovators, goods and services suppliers, and other pillars of the healthcare economy. There may be no industry changing as quickly, and no local economy better positioned to harness the power of that change. South Florida is also uniquely vulnerable to business and regulatory movement due to our unique population. That's why it's more important than ever for the healthcare leaders of South Florida to find common ground and work together in ways that benefit all our neighbors. That work starts with close, collaborative relationships that celebrate our shared success at events like Health Care Heroes.

This 24th Health Care Heroes® Awards program will celebrate and recognize the tremendous efforts, dedication, and achievements of our healthcare professionals and first responders. The luncheon program will feature a video tribute to first responders for Hurricane Ian. We also will be honoring the achievements of physicians, nurses, researchers, institutions, volunteers, and others who have contributed to the health care delivery system and overall welfare of South Florida and its residents. We are excited to announce that Equitable Advisors will be the Chamber's partner in this program for the 24th consecutive year. Consistent partners like Equitable Advisors and presenting sponsor Florida Blue are the foundation for us to strengthen and grow our healthcare community.

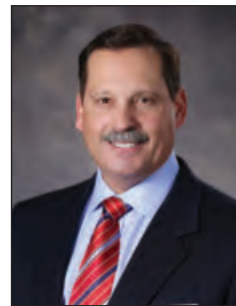


Bryan Stewart, PhD
Chairman, Healthcare Committee
Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce

Every year the number and strength of our Health Care Heroes nominees grows, making it more difficult for judges to pick just one recipient from each category. This is a testament to the relentless pursuit of excellence that defines this honor and, indeed, the mission of healthcare in South Florida and around the world.

Sincerely,

Luis G. Chiappy, CFP, CLU, ChFC, LUTCF
President, Southeast Complex
Senior Manager, South Florida Branch,
Equitable Advisors, LLC
Founding Sponsor, Health Care Heroes®



JUDGES

- Cliff Bauer**
Vice President Government Relations
and Joint Ventures
Miami Jewish Health
- Ashaki Bronson-Marcellus**
Business Banking Market Leader
BankUnited
- Jorge Martinez**
Senior Regional Communications Lead
Florida Blue
- John W. Newcomer, M.D.**
President & Chief Executive Officer
Thriving Mind South Florida
- Bridget A. Pelaez, MA, BSN,
RN, EMT-P,CEM**
Director-FIU Disaster Response Team
Assistant Director, Division of
Operations and Safety
Florida International University
- Whitney Schiffer, CPA**
Director, Audit and Attest Services
Berkowitz Pollack Brant
- Evelyn Terrell, OTD, MHSA,
OTR/L**
Director of Telehealth
and Special Projects
Nicklaus Children's Health System

RECOGNIZING THE BEST OF THE BEST IN THE HEALTH CARE COMMUNITY



**24TH ANNUAL HEALTH CARE HEROES®
AWARDS LUNCHEON**

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

May 17, 2023

Jungle Island
11:15 A.M.-1:30 P.M.

AWARD CATEGORIES

Join us for a special tribute to first responders for Hurricane Ian and to present the Health Care Heroes® Awards in the categories of Lifetime Achievement, Health Care Professional, Individual of Merit, Organization/Program, Nurse, First Responder and Youth Volunteer.

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\$95 per person | \$950 table of 10

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EQUITABLE ADVISORS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT

DANIEL ARMSTRONG, PHD

Professor & Executive Vice Chair, Department of Pediatrics

Director, Mailman Center for Child Development, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine

Since 1999, Dr. Daniel Armstrong has been the director of the Mailman Center for Child Development, a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and the only center at the University of Miami to have a federal statutory designation. He is also the executive vice chair in the university's Department of Pediatrics. But his administrative appointments and various responsibilities have provided a launching platform to go far beyond the boundaries of the University of Miami.

Dr. Armstrong is a fervent advocate for children with developmental and acquired disabilities, and has secured funding at the local, state, and federal levels to support research, center-based and community-based pediatric healthcare, and innovative new programs for community outreach, leadership training, and specialized pre-professional training. He has provided testimony to the Florida Legislature and state agencies, served as a leader of local, state, federal, and national foundation advisory councils and boards, and through advice or consultation, has been a source of influence for diagnostic and treatment standards of care, greater understanding of disease processes, and establishing a foundation for short-term and long-term treatment and follow-up.

A premier researcher whose initial focus was pediatric chronic diseases including sickle cell, acute lymphoblastic leukemia, cystic fibrosis, HIV, malignant brain tumors, short-term and long-term effects of anti-cancer therapies in children, and new diseases such as Zika and COVID-19, Dr. Armstrong's research efforts have improved quality of life for these affected children and have influenced treatment regimens.

As the senior associate dean for child health, Dr. Armstrong was responsible for coordinating integration of child health services across all child health programs in the Miller School of Medicine, UHealth System, and Jackson Health System. He was also responsible for leading the early development of an interdisciplinary, cross-departmental system of basic, clinical, translational, community, and health services research in child health. He is a champion for community outreach, and supported his faculty in development of partnerships between the Mailman Center and the East Little Havana community and Overtown. These focused on enhancing community capacity to address the needs of children with special health care needs. Community representatives have access to

Mailman Center faculty and facilitate opportunities for community education designed to improve developmental (health and education) outcomes and quality of life.

Dr. Armstrong and his leadership team initiated a reorganization of the Mailman Center to enhance collaboration across professional disciplines, bringing professionals of different backgrounds together to develop new programs and activities and enhance older programs with new purpose and direction. Five IPCs (Inter-Professional Collaboratives) were developed through the reorganization: Neurodevelopmental Intervention Science, Community Wellness, Lifespan, Neurodevelopmental Discovery Science, and Promoting Behavioral Health. It is important to note that all five IPCs have a community focus toward individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities and persons with chronic illnesses.

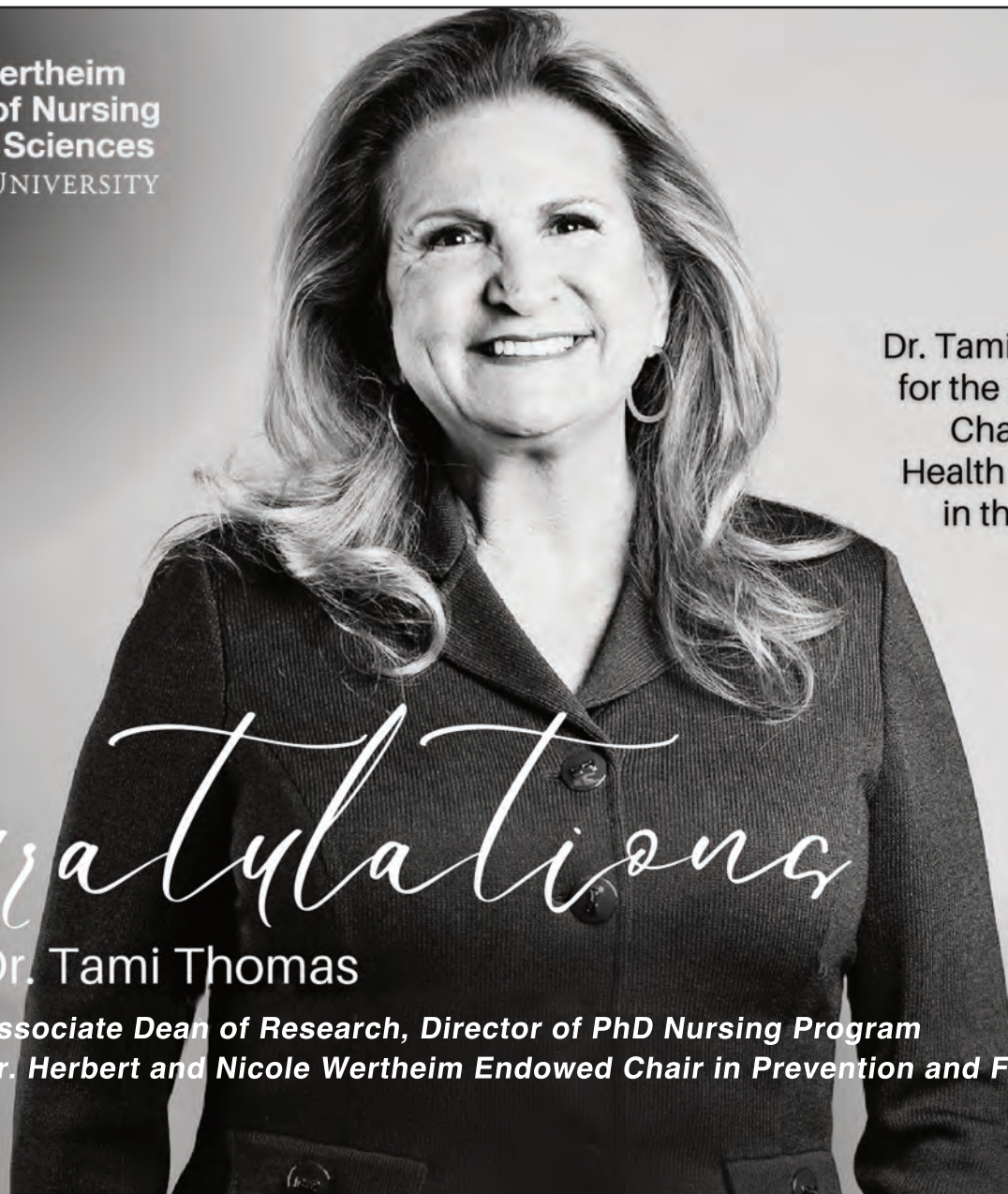
Having spent his entire professional life as an advocate for children, Dr. Armstrong's efforts have been supported by local, state, and federal funding for healthcare programs and research, systems change to improve quality of life for children with chronic diseases, children who had minimal or no access to healthcare, and children with previously unknown diseases. Through innovation, he laid the programmatic foundation for development of leadership qualities among self-advocates with disabilities, their allies, and family members.



"His kindness, generosity, humility, professionalism, and dedication are qualities that should be emulated by all professionals. Dr. Daniel Armstrong has applied these characteristics to develop and enhance a far-reaching, comprehensive program of the highest standards to improve the lives of children families."

-Robert Fifer, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Director
of Audiology and
Speech-Language Pathology
University of Miami, Mailman
Center for Child Development

FIU | Nicole Wertheim
College of Nursing
& Health Sciences
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



Our very own
Dr. Tami Thomas is a finalist
for the 2023 Greater Miami
Chamber of Commerce
Health Care Heroes Award
in the category of Nurse

Congratulations
Dr. Tami Thomas
Associate Dean of Research, Director of PhD Nursing Program
Dr. Herbert and Nicole Wertheim Endowed Chair in Prevention and Family Health

HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

LILIAN ABBO, MD, FIDSA

Associate Chief Medical Officer,
Infectious Diseases,
Jackson Health System
Professor of Clinical Infectious
Diseases at University of Miami Miller
School of Medicine and Miami
Transplant Institute



“Dr. Lilian Abbo is a dedicated infectious disease physician who is passionate about delivering the highest quality, evidence-based healthcare for all of her patients. Because of her contributions during the pandemic, lives were undoubtedly saved—not just in Miami-Dade County, but throughout the world.”

Carlos A. Migoya
CEO
Jackson Health System

For more than 20 years, Dr. Lilian Abbo has been passionate about delivering the highest quality, evidence-based health care for all of her patients. She is currently the associate chief medical officer of infectious diseases at Jackson Health System.

Since joining Jackson and UHealth–University of Miami Health System in 2008, she has dedicated her career to making innovative contributions across the health systems in antimicrobial stewardship, infection control and prevention, and outbreak investigations, with special expertise in multidrug-resistant bacterial infections.

Dr. Abbo was at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading Jackson, Miami-Dade County’s academic and safety net health system, through these challenging times. Under her leadership, the system developed a coordinated, effective, and safe response to the pandemic across a complex multi-campus health system serving a diverse and multiethnic community. Jackson had to plan, prepare, and adapt clinical and organizational operations with standardized protocols, therapeutics, testing, education, and supply chain of personal protective equipment (PPE) across four adult acute-care hospitals; pediatric, behavioral, and rehabilitation inpatient hospitals; two long-term care centers; three in-jail clinics; a network of primary and specialty care centers; a network of urgent care centers, and employee health services.

Dr. Abbo worked tirelessly through the pandemic as a key clinical leader and decision-maker and became a trusted voice in the community through her collaboration with elected officials. She also educated the public through various interviews in English and Spanish with local, national, and international media.

Aside from leading the COVID pandemic efforts, she also led the Monkey Pox epidemic at Jackson, and worked closely with the county to open a vaccination site for high-risk patients. Through her entire healthcare career, Dr. Abbo has been devoted to patient care, infection prevention, public health, education and research.

ILEANA LEYVA, MD, FAHPM

Regional Medical Director
South Florida & Georgia
VITAS Healthcare



“Dr. Ileana Leyva is a proven hero among her team members, students, patients, and families, and has been for many years. As one of her medical directors told us, former colleagues from nearly two decades ago remain amazed at her influence and still ask about her work.”

Betty Bel, RN, MHS
Vice President of Operations
VITAS Healthcare

As a regional medical director and top oncology expert for VITAS® Healthcare, Dr. Ileana Leyva oversees and leads the VITAS hospice teams throughout South Florida. With her vision and passion for end-of-life care, she is a champion of standardizing care across inpatient units (IPUs). At MedSquare Kendall’s IPU, she designed a staffing model to enable physicians to work with interdisciplinary teams the entire day rather than brief check-ins, providing optimal collaboration and yielding the highest CAHPS survey results of the VITAS programs.

Especially remarkable during the COVID pandemic, Dr. Leyva advocated for the ventilator withdrawal program, revising policies and procedures so patients could realize their preference for dying at home, sensitively tailoring her approach toward the local South Florida culture. With her enthusiasm, professionalism, and clinical care delivery, Dr. Leyva inspires fellows to choose hospice as their career path in medicine.

As a faculty member at the University of Miami Hospital, Dr. Leyva trains medical students, residents and fellows. A recent graduating class witnessed four out of five fellows choosing to work for hospice, which demonstrates the potency of her mentorship and leadership. Dr. Leyva fosters relationships throughout the South Florida medical education community, especially with administrators, to expand HPM education. As a seasoned medical practitioner, faculty member, and HPM quality leader, Dr. Leyva exhibits the characteristics of a dynamic role model. Her colleagues describe her as an approachable leader who provides both direction and support to ease patients’ and families’ concerns in facilitating patients’ dying wishes.

**M. SANDRA SEVERE,
PHD, MPH**

Senior Vice President and Chief
Executive Officer
Jackson North Medical Center



“Sandra believes in paying it forward and leaving a legacy, which is evidenced by her commitment to her community outside of a very demanding, executive role.”

Merdochey T. LaFrance
Director,
Local Engagement Verizon

M. Sandra Severe is senior vice president and chief executive officer of Jackson North Medical Center Hospital, a 382-bed acute care hospital located in North Miami Beach that is affiliated with Jackson Health System. Dr. Severe was the executive lead on Jackson Health System’s robust COVID-19 lab operations during the pandemic, which provided nearly 200,000 COVID tests to patients, physicians, and employees, and was a model for other healthcare entities in developing testing algorithms used to ensure patient safety and throughput. The child of Haitian immigrants who made their way to the U.S., Dr. Severe is the first of her family born in the U.S. in the very health system where she is now a senior vice president and CEO. In addition to her role at Jackson North Medical Center, she has also been an adjunct professor at Florida International University’s Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing and Health Sciences and Florida Atlantic University’s College of Business, as well as a regular guest lecturer and panelist at Florida Atlantic University’s College of Business’s Executive Master of Health Administration (MHA) Leadership Bootcamp.

Dr. Severe serves as a mentor and sponsor to many aspiring healthcare administrators both at Jackson and other healthcare systems throughout Miami-Dade and Broward counties. She is also a proud member of the United Way of Miami’s Women United affinity philanthropy group, one of 2,500 purpose-driven women who are passionate about making a difference through philanthropy and service. Dr. Severe is also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., a public service sorority, and has been involved in the Dr. Betty Shabazz Delta Academy, which augments scholarship in math, science, and technology of young girls and promotes opportunities to provide service in the form of leadership through service-learning.



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NURSES

**GUERNA BLOT, DNP, APRN,
FNP-BC, MBA/HM, OCN**

Director of Nursing
Mount Sinai Medical Center



"Guerna Blot fully and wholeheartedly dedicates herself to whatever task/projects she undertakes. She strongly believes that anyone can make a difference in the lives of others. Her enthusiasm is contagious and influences people around her to participate and be more involved in their communities."

Agatha Samuel, RN, MSN
AVP, Nursing
Mount Sinai Medical Center

Guerna Blot's achievements and contributions to the nursing profession are unparalleled. Since the inception of her nursing career in 1989, she has devoted herself to improving her community here and abroad through volunteerism, community work and humanitarian medical missions. Ms. Blot conducts weekly health fairs to help improve the health of the underserved population of Miami Dade County, Broward County, Homestead and Immokalee, FL among many other locations nationally and internationally. In the early '90s, she was involved in a door-to-door campaign educating young women and families on the importance of breast self-exam while promoting the importance of mammography, and this work has continued throughout the years with Ms. Blot encouraging other nurses to participate and get involved in the fight against cancer. Her nursing experience encompasses many specialties including oncology nursing, emergency medicine, telemetry and medical surgical, and Advanced Practice Nurse. In her 33 years as a nurse, she has occupied different leadership roles and engaged in mentoring new nurses, serving as an advocate for patients and helping nurses transition to leadership positions. She provides leadership and expertise at an Annual Leadership Institute conducted by the Haitian American Nurses Association of Florida to assist nurses to develop their leadership skills. Devoting herself to educate others, she is a host on a weekly radio and television show on health education, teaching and presenting relevant topics such as diabetes, hypertension, stroke, mental illness and more to improve the health of the constituents of her district. She works to promote community health and well-being to help eliminate health care disparities that plague underserved groups.

**JOSEPH FALISE, MSN, RN,
CCRN, CSC**

Director of Nursing,
Critical Care & Progressive Care
University of Miami Hospital



"Joseph Falise's deep experience in critical care, team leadership, planning and launching programs, and creating new systems during a health crisis helped the hospital confront the pandemic, save lives, and prepare for future public health challenges."

Tanira B.D. Ferreira, MD, FCCP
Chief Medical Officer
University of Miami
Hospital and Clinics

Joseph P. Falise, M.S.N., R.N., CCRN-CSC has served at the University of Miami Hospital since 2008 in positions of increasing responsibility, earning a reputation as a role model and leader who routinely goes above and beyond the call of duty. He currently serves as the director of nursing in critical care and progressive care/dialysis where his duties include implementing infection-prevention procedures, shift changes, recruitment, onboarding nurses and allied health professionals, and training new nursing staff. He also plays a key role in developing goals for staffing and standard of care. His recent accomplishments include spearheading the opening of the COVID-19 unit in the health system's 560-bed hospital, which he launched in just 36 hours. Over the following weeks, he worked up to 14 hours a day, often coming in on his days off to gather input from the nurses, set up new processes, and manage the expectations of staff and the community. He volunteered to publicly receive the first COVID-19 vaccination administered on the University of Miami campus and actively encouraged thousands of UM employees to get vaccinated as well. He has also served as a part-time flight nurse since 2012, flying into dangerous situations to assess patients and manage all aspects of patient care prior to and during the flight, and during ground transportation to local hospitals. The son of a nurse who followed in his mother's footsteps, Falise's achievements and contributions in patient care, nurse management, and overall leadership have made a lasting impact on the nursing profession and healthcare in South Florida.



**Congratulations
to all of the
Healthcare Heroes!**

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www.FloridaPACECenters.org



NURSES

**TAMI THOMAS, PhD, RN,
APRN-CPNP, FAANP, FAAN**

Associate Dean, Research/Director of PhD Nursing Program
and Professor, Florida International University
Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing & Health Sciences



Dr. Tami Thomas is a nationally recognized collaborative and innovative thought leader who spent much of her career developing and implementing community-specific programs in underserved and rural communities. She is a tireless advocate for victims of sexual assault and citizens living in areas with health disparities.

Her leadership, commitment and passion have led to successful programs designed to improve the mental health of victims of sexual assault, domestic violence and opioid abuse as well as families residing in rural areas with no access to primary care. Since graduating with her PhD from the University of Florida in 2006, she has conducted 12 funded studies and served as principal investigator on 10 of them.

These studies included a variety of focuses, such as examining the intersection of health behaviors, culture and acceptance of healthcare innovations like the HPV vaccine in vulnerable populations; identifying and addressing health inequity in rural areas through education of Advanced Practice Nurses (APRNs) and traineeships in rural underserved areas; and the training and development of a network of sexual assault nurse examiners (SANEs) in rural and underserved areas.

As the program director and author of the Regionally Underserved Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (RUSANE) program, she overcame numerous challenges to recruit and train 22 emergency room nurses who now successfully serve as trained SANEs in seven rural Florida counties caring for victims of sexual trauma.

The successful, high-impact SANE program is currently expanding to nine additional rural Florida counties while Dr. Thomas is also establishing a new sexual assault exam center at FIU, which will serve highly diverse students and residents in the surrounding medically underserved communities. Since 2014, Dr. Thomas has also served on the steering committee of the National HPV Vaccine Round Table (NHPVRT), helping to shape national approach to HPV vaccine messaging as well as addressing vaccine hesitancy.

“Raised in rural Florida, Tami Thomas always envisioned a brighter future for healthcare where services were available to everyone and better access to healthcare could improve not only the physical health but also mental well-being of those in need. Through this vision, her emphasis on geography, culture and economic opportunity as well as being a leader and collaborator in research and culturally appropriate academic and clinical training has increased the quality of health and wellness in rural and underserved communities.”

Ora Strickland, PhD, DSc (Hon), RN, FAAN
Dean and Professor, Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing
and Health Sciences, Florida International University

**Congratulations to Our Hero,
Finalist Dr. Ileana Leyva**

For your dedication to hospice and
palliative care, consistent support
for patients and family, and
influence on peers and students,
we at VITAS® Healthcare celebrate you!

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INDIVIDUALS OF MERIT

BRIDGET LISA MCKINNEY

President & CEO

Professionals Sharing with a Purpose
Principal, Scott Lake Elementary



"During Bridget McKinney's 34 years of providing water safety to economically and marginalized children and adults in underserved communities, she has trained over 5,000 children and 500 adults of Hispanic, African American, Haitian, and other descent. Most inspiring is the opportunity Bridget provided to returning learn-to-swim students, who mastered the skills and are now swim instructors and lifeguards in the PSWAP learn-to-swim program held each summer."

Dr. Linda Washington-Brown
President and CEO
Xspurt Provider Services, Inc.

Over the past 28 years, Bridget McKinney has served as principal, assistant principal, district supervisor, activities director, and as a classroom teacher with Miami Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS). She also served as an aquatics specialist, pool manager, and lifeguard for Metro-Dade County Parks and Recreation and is currently an aquatics specialist with the American Red Cross.

Ms. McKinney has been among the most visible activists for educationally marginalized populations, directly involved in revolutionizing education, mobilizing urban communities and leaders, and providing water safety and learn-to-swim programs in Miami Dade County (MDC) to underserved children, aimed at preventing unintentional drowning through her PSWAP-Mentorship and Swim Organization, Inc., founded in 2014. As the principal of Scott Lake Elementary School (SLES), she expanded the learn-to-swim program by bringing in a MDCPS portable pool and water safety instructor, as well as brought in an American Red Cross (ARC) certified Basic Life Support (BLS) instructor to train teachers and students in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first-aid.

As a member of the ARC Scientific Advisory Council, Aquatics, Ms. McKinney has been engaged as the lead in the redesign and update of the ARC water safety instructor program that impacts swimming instruction nationally and globally.

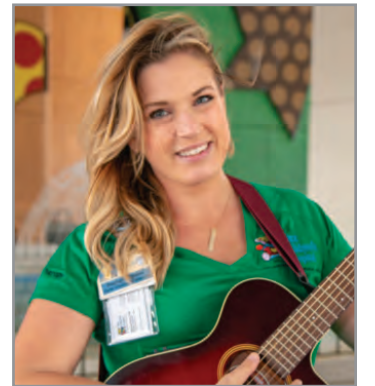
Through her advocacy efforts, she was able to encourage Miami Dade County Public School (MDCPS) board members to implement water safety and swimming education to over 300,000 students in kindergarten through grade 12. Teens successfully completing the learn-to-swim program are eligible to train as water safety instructors and certified lifeguards, providing summer job opportunities and apprenticeship, thus fostering future career opportunities. Significant emphasis has also been placed on safety through her required ARC Water Watcher Safety Program and pledge that must be initiated by trained water watchers whenever children are in or around open water.

Dr. McKinney has also partnered with a community funeral service that provides free burial support to parents facing the death of a child due to unintentional drowning, and mental health counseling connected to bereavement support for parents.

**STEPHANIE EPSTEIN, MM,
MT-BC, NICU-MT**

Music Therapist

Holtz Children's Hospital



"Stephanie Epstein is considered the Mary Poppins of music therapy at Holtz Children's Hospital. As the founder of Holtz Children's music therapy program, she has managed to bring magical moments to hundreds of children and their families dealing with devastating medical diagnoses."

Barry Gelman, MD
Chief Medical Officer
Holtz Children's Hospital

In spring 2014, Stephanie Epstein began her graduate clinical rotation as a music therapist at Holtz Children's Hospital at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Medical Center. While there, she saw that the children would light up and their moods improve when she sang and engaged in group music sessions with them, and she immediately knew that it was her calling to establish a music therapy program. That program has since become an instrumental part of patient care.

During procedures, Ms. Epstein provides individualized music therapy to help reduce patients' pain and/or anxiety until they reach a level of relaxation that can allow doctors and nurses to give treatment with little sedation or none at all. Benefits also expand to the medical team, who say that music therapy helps their young patients stay focused, grounded and calm while they perform a PICC line placement, port access, or dressing changes on burns—all procedures that are typically anxiety-provoking and sometimes painful. Ms. Epstein also expanded music therapy services into the Holtz Children's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and the outpatient BOTOX clinic at Jackson, where children with cerebral palsy and other muscle spasticity disorders receive BOTOX injections.

She is also passionate about bringing healing to patients' families and hospital staff. Every week, she runs a parent and caregiver support group called C.A.M.P Caregivers, and also holds music relaxation sessions with nurses at Holtz Children's at least once a month that encompass music, breathing exercises, muscle relaxation and meditation to help them reflect and decompress.

SUSAN RACHER

Board Chair

NAMI Miami-Dade



"Susan's goals are to educate our community about mental health, to raise awareness of signs of mental unwellness, and to help improve access to care. She believes that if mental health literacy is raised, we can improve recovery outcomes and save lives through early intervention and suicide prevention education."

Susan O. Holtzman
CEO, President
NAMI Miami-Dade

Susan Racher is a passionate advocate for mental health education and suicide prevention. Her mental health volunteer work began following her son's serious mental illness episode in 2011 and his journey toward recovery. Seeing firsthand the unmet need for mental health education, access to care, and peer support, as well as the potential for recovery when these three pillars are present, Ms. Racher committed herself to promoting mental health.

She volunteers as chair of the board of directors of NAMI Miami-Dade (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and as the volunteer board secretary and Strategic Planning Committee chair of Thriving Mind South Florida, the nonprofit that manages the Miami-Dade and Monroe counties' behavioral health provider network. At NAMI Miami, Ms. Racher, whose professional career is in finance and investments, put the floundering nonprofit with a budget of \$7,000 and no full-time staff on solid financial and programmatic ground.

Through 100 percent volunteerism, she reached out to community partners and foundations like the United Way of Miami, the Health Foundation of South Florida, Thriving Mind South Florida, as well as securing corporate sponsorships and matching grants from her employer, the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation. Today, NAMI Miami has grown its English and Spanish programs to 36 support groups a month, classes for families and peers, and hundreds of vital educational and outreach programs annually. Now with a full-time staff of 12 plus more than 50 part-time and volunteer colleagues and an outstanding board, NAMI Miami-Dade addresses the significant need to promote mental health, education, access to resources, support and reduction of stigma. Under Ms. Racher's leadership, NAMI Miami also established the community's first Walk for Mental Health, which takes place in May of each year (May 20, 2023) during Mental Health Awareness Month.



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ORGANIZATIONS/PROGRAMS

FOUNDATION FOR SICKLE CELL DISEASE RESEARCH



South Florida has the nation's highest number of individuals living with sickle cell disease, and the Foundation for Sickle Cell Disease Research is the only medical center in South Florida dedicated solely to the medical treatment, research and advocacy of the disease, which disproportionately impacts African Americans, Hispanics and other people of color.

With seven centers in Florida, FSCDR is impacting thousands of patients each year, providing personalized treatment and care, which allows sickle cell patients to live better quality lives with less pain. By providing these services, FSCDR frees up emergency department beds in hospitals, and has reduced hospital admissions and readmissions by 60 percent. President and Chief Research Officer Dr. Lanetta Bronte-Hall has devoted her career to improving access to care for patients with the disease.

A leading national and international researcher and population health scientist in the field of sickle cell disease, rare blood disorders, community-based participatory research, and chronic disease management, Dr. Bronte-Hall plans to continue FSCDR's work through expansion into multiple locations to help more patients. FSCDR is also impacting thousands of patients each year through its 13 current clinical trials, and annual in-person symposia that draws hundreds of international speakers and attendees to share research studies and best practices, including focuses on new therapies, innovation, cannabis treatment and legislative advocacy.

"The Foundation for Sickle Cell Disease Research (FSCDR), under the leadership of Dr. Lanetta Bronte-Hall, is a true healthcare hero. She works tirelessly to create an environment of trust, sustainability and relevance, which has significantly increased participation in research by all members of the community."

Christie Grays Chambers
Vice President & Lead,
Culture & Inclusion
Blanca Commercial Real Estate

**MIAMI TRANSPLANT INSTITUTE
JACKSON HEALTH SYSTEM/
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI HEALTH SYSTEM**



For more than 50 years, the Miami Transplant Institute (MTI), a unique affiliation between Jackson Health System and University of Miami Health System, has been giving the gift of life to thousands of patients in need of a lifesaving transplant. It began in 1970 when Jackson Memorial Hospital performed its first kidney transplant: the program has since become one of the nation's largest transplant centers, according to the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network/United Network for Organ Sharing (OPTN/UNOS).

The only center in Florida that performs all types of solid transplants on adults and children, MTI is comprised of a full multidisciplinary team of physicians with medical, pediatric, and surgical sub-specialties. Patients also receive care from an internationally revered team of doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals. In the past 52 years, MTI has made international headlines for performing unique and first-of-its-kind transplant surgeries including the first adult heart transplant in South Florida's history; the first adult liver transplant in South Florida; and Florida's first whole pancreas transplantation.

Since 1988, MTI has performed more than 14,900 transplants in adults and children. In 2019, MTI claimed the nation's top position, performing more organ transplants than any other hospital; a history-making 747 transplants, breaking every previous American record for transplants in a year. Currently, MTI ranks as one of the top 10 transplant centers in the nation, and its individual programs, including the kidney, intestine, liver, pancreas and combined kidney/pancreas programs, each rank among the top transplant programs in the country.

"Through the years, Miami Transplant Institute (MTI) has been one of the top centers in the nation to perform solid transplants in adults and children, and currently ranks as the top transplant center in Florida. Each transplant represents a life transformed forever: a father who will walk his daughter down the aisle, a grandmother who will be alive for the birth of her first grandchild, a child who may someday become a surgeon performing transplants of her own."

Carlos A. Migoya
Chief Executive Officer
Jackson Health System

Congratulations to All the 2023 Health Care Heroes Finalists

We celebrate your strength, compassion and dedication to the well-being of our entire South Florida community.



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ORGANIZATIONS/PROGRAMS

NAMI MIAMI-DADE (NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS)

NAMI helped pioneer the peer recovery model. As an affiliate of NAMI National, the largest peer and family led mental health organization in the U.S., NAMI Miami-Dade's free programs meet a critical need for broad community mental health education and support, with one in four adults and one in five youth having a mental health challenge.

It is the preeminent provider of mental health education, building awareness in the community, and filling the gaps between clinical care and the other elements needed for mental health and well-being including education, self-care, social supports, personal and group connections, resources, and assistance to navigate the complex mental health system.

It provides evidenced-based programs to the faith communities, corporations, community organizations, and to thousands of teens, their parents and teachers in the Miami-Dade Public Schools, which significantly improves individuals' and families' willingness to seek help, gain coping and problem-solving skills, and achieve recovery.

Its programs include a Suicide Awareness Initiative with a media campaign; a free suicide awareness conference at the University of Miami; "QPR," an evidenced-based suicide prevention training; 36 support groups per month, including Miami's first Black mental health peer support group; "Ending the Silence," an education and prevention program for youth; a Helpline; NAMI on College Campuses; Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for police officers; and many other programs in English and Spanish. In 2022, 5,124 individuals attended its support groups; 3,589 youth and adults attended its Ending the Silence for Youth or Families presentation; 772 individuals attended a QPR presentation; and office staff responded to 1,225 Helpline calls.

NAMI brought the first mental health Walk to Miami and held the first in-person Miami Mental Health Awareness Walk, gaining widespread media attention to shine a light on the importance of early intervention and treatment. This year's walk will be held Saturday, May 20 at loanDepot park—Home of the Miami Marlins.



"NAMI Miami-Dade is the leader in free mental health education, prevention, awareness and support to youth, adults, and families in Miami-Dade County with reach into The Keys. It's evidence-based programs have been proven to be effective and improve recovery outcomes."

Reverend Walter T. Richardson, PhD
Chairman, Public Health Trust,
Jackson Health System
Board Director, NAMI Miami-Dade County

FIRST RESPONDERS

ROBBIE MEEK, EMT
Chief Operations Officer
CDR Health Care, Inc.

With a comprehensive background in emergency and critical care medicine, Robbie Meek currently serves as the chief operating officer of CDR Health Care, Inc.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Meek served as the incident commander for the State of Florida Infectious Disease Field Hospital System, where he oversaw the operations and management of the nine-facility system. He served in the design process, training of the clinical staff, and day-to-day operations. In May of 2020 when the state began to focus on community-based test sites, Mr. Meek shifted his focus and began overseeing all of CDR's field test site operations. He designed and opened numerous test sites along with overseeing the creation of a digital process that improved testing accuracy and led to faster results.

Mr. Meek has over 20 years of active clinical experience in prehospital and critical care medicine, while simultaneously remaining an active educator for prehospital and critical care transport specialists.

Prior to joining CDR Maguire, he was the founding director of the Center for Disaster Medicine at Florida International University. Prior to that, he served with the United States Air Force on the Air Force's elite Critical Care Air Transport (CCATT) Team and has recently become one of the leading experts in high-fidelity simulation with the USAF.



"Robbie Meek has been one of the most selfless, hardworking, and inspirational healthcare professionals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. He is an amazing leader who has developed a cadre of healthcare professionals under his team."

Liliana Pulido
Operations Manager &
Corporate Secretary
CDR Health Care, Inc.




Congratulations

Susan Racher,
Board Chair of NAMI Miami-Dade
for being named a finalist for the Individual of Merit category. And to NAMI Miami-Dade for being named a finalist for the Organization/Program category.

We salute you and all you do to help the community by offering free, safe and confidential mental health support, education, and advocacy.



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FIRST RESPONDERS

JERRY PARET

Police Officer/Detective
Gang Intelligence Unit
Special Investigation Section
City of Miami Police Department

City of Miami Police Detective Jerry Paret is currently assigned to the Criminal Investigation Divisions, Special Victim Unit (SVU) where he investigates sexual battery, neglect, and abuse incidents. Detective Paret is not the typical SVU detective. He ensures that his tactical vest is equipped in a medical fashion, so that he's available to treat any injury at any time. He also utilizes ShotSpotter—an application used by the department to track shootings—and responds to as many shootings as possible to treat injured victims. Det. Paret has also been known to apprehend the offending person after treating injured persons. Examples of his recent actions include ensuring that a survivor, assaulted at knife point, was transported to the Roxcy Bolton Rape Treatment Center (RTC) for medical treatment before apprehending the offender and recovering the knife used. On another medical emergency, Det. Paret was driving through the back streets of Little Haiti when he noticed a man holding his head and screaming to 911 on the phone. Det. Paret medically assisted the victim, applying pressure to his injuries to minimize the bleeding, until Fire Rescue was able to transport him to the hospital. Det. Paret then identified the offender, who was wanted in other cases, and apprehended him later that day. While responding to investigate a sexual battery incident, Det. Paret received a ShotSpotter report and rushed to the aid of a man who was shot more than 10 times. He applied tourniquets to the victim's limbs and multiple chest seals to his chest and back and began the long process of CPR until Fire Rescue arrived and transported the victim to the hospital.



"Detective Paret goes above and beyond his scope of duty to ensure victims of all crimes are medically treated as expeditiously as possible. He responds to numerous medical calls although it is not required of him, and treats affected people on scene. He thinks outside the box, allowing him to not only treat the injured victims but to also apprehend their offenders."

Ernest Lawrence
Police Sergeant
City of Miami Police Department

WILLIE WILLIAMS

Chief, Health and Safety Division
Miami-Dade Fire Rescue



Chief Willie Williams started his career at the age of 19, working as a firefighter and paramedic for the City of Sunrise Fire Rescue Department. He was promoted to fire lieutenant at age 22, and remained in that position for nine years before being promoted to the rank of fire captain. A person of humility and integrity, he voluntarily tutors students from multiple Emergency Medical Technician programs, which has resulted in his students being highly successful in completing the course as well as passing the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians licensing process. He has taught a large majority of EMT instructors who are currently working within Miami Dade College's Emergency Medical Services program. He has also developed an EMS mentoring program that allows former students to return to his class and assist new students with navigating through the unfamiliar portions of the EMT course. Working with Miami-Dade County political officials and Miami-Dade County Fire Rescue Department's staff, Chief Williams developed and implemented the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Department's Emergency Medical Technician Scholarship Program in 2014, which has been successful in giving young men and women from disenfranchised communities the opportunity to become successful in the allied health professions. He most recently taught a diverse group of mental healthcare professionals how to recognize firefighters exhibiting signs and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Chief Williams rose to the rank of division chief of Emergency Medical Services at the start of the pandemic, and was the medical branch director responsible for overseeing treatment and transport of critically ill and injured patients during the Town of Surfside Champlain Towers building collapse. Through his work, he ensures that all rescue workers have emotional support and medical treatment services available to them whenever emergency situations arise.

"Chief Willie Williams should be considered a hero because he provides healthcare for healthcare providers. He continues to be a positive influence on the emergency response community, fellow firefighters, family, and friends."

Alwyn Leiba, Ph.D., MBA-HCM
Dean, School of Health Sciences
Miami Dade College
Medical Campus



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YOUTH VOLUNTEER RECIPIENT

SHAWN MARTINEZ

Founder, AVUS Connect

Student,

Belen Jesuit Preparatory School



Shawn Martinez '23 is a senior student/athlete at Belen Jesuit Preparatory School in Miami, Florida. When not training or competing as a member of the Belen Water Polo team, he carries a rigorous curriculum and maintains a weighted GPA of 4.91.

However, his most fulfilling activity is AVUS Connect, an intergenerational volunteer platform addressing isolation and loneliness in older adults. He founded AVUS, which means "grandfather" in Latin, to address isolation through a Senior Reassurance Program where youth volunteers contact homebound older adults on a weekly basis and conduct a virtual connectivity bridge between younger and older generations.

He also created the AVUS Connect Program website (www.avusconnect.org) for volunteer recruitment, participant enrollment and activity coordination, and grew the program beyond Belen Jesuit to other area schools, providing students a meaningful community service opportunity to enhance the lives of older adults.

Over a two-year period, the AVUS volunteer platform delivered a total of 15,126 hurricane preparedness meals to 1,725 homebound older adults living in 10 underserved communities in Miami-Dade County in partnership with Florida Memorial University, Thelma Gibson Health Initiative, Sant La Haitian Community Center and YMCA Allapattah. These meals were donated by FPL/Next Era Energy and coordinated for distribution through United HomeCare, the not-for-profit where AVUS volunteers provided more than 3,200 hours of community service hours. Shawn is also a Posse Miami Scholar and plans to attend Pomona College in Claremont, CA to pursue his studies in pre-medicine, sociology and public policy.

"What Shawn started as a community service project in high school during the COVID-19 pandemic has blossomed into a nationally recognized, fully integrated, volunteer program at United HomeCare®. I have the privilege of mentoring Shawn and many youth volunteers from various high schools and colleges, and his dedication to volunteerism has significantly contributed to the growth of the program."

Blanca Ceballos
Community Relations Manager
United HomeCare



Health Care Hero

Saluting our Health Care Hero, Chief Willie Williams, our nominated health care hero.

Chief Williams has been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, working tirelessly to keep our community healthy and safe. From long shifts to complex cases, he has never backed down from a challenge. He is a true inspiration to us all. Join us in saluting Miami Dade College EMS Professor Chief Willie Williams for his dedication, bravery, and selflessness.



Thank you,
Chief Williams, for all that you do!

Congratulations

Dr. Bridget McKinney

Healthcare Hero Finalist



We are so proud of your incredible success in saving the lives of our children through your P-SWAP Water Safety Program.

You have consistently demonstrated expertise in water safety, drowning prevention, water safety research methodology, policy, and practice.

This amazing accomplishment is just one step on your journey.

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SHAWN MARTINEZ
YOUTH VOLUNTEER HONOREE

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Congratulations

To our very own 2023 Healthcare Heroes Award Honorees



DANIEL ARMSTRONG, Ph.D.
Lifetime Achievement Recipient

Professor and Executive Vice Chair, Pediatrics;
Director, Mailman Center for Child Development,
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine



LILIAN ABBO, M.D., M.B.A., FIDSA
Health Care Professionals Finalist

Professor of Clinical Infectious Diseases,
Department of Medicine, University of Miami Miller
School of Medicine; Associate Chief Medical Officer
for Infectious Diseases, Jackson Health System



JOSEPH FALISE, M.S.N., R.N., CCRN, CSC
Nursing Professionals Finalist

Director of Nursing, Critical Care, Progressive Care
and Dialysis, UHealth



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